

COSMICISM IN H.P. LOVECRAFT'S AND THOMAS LIGOTTI'S SHORT FICTION

Zeynep DEMİRKAYA

Master's Thesis

Department of English Language and Literature

Advisor: Prof. Dr. Tatiana GOLBAN

Secondary Advisor: Dr. Tuğçe BIÇAKÇI SYED

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H.P. LOVECRAFT VE THOMAS LİGOTTİ'NİN KISA KURGUSUNDA COSMİCİSM

Zeynep DEMİRKAYA

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

Danışman: Prof. Dr. Tatiana GOLBAN

İkinci Danışman: Dr. Tuğçe BIÇAKÇI SYED

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İKİNCİ DANIŞMAN: DR. TUĞÇE BIÇAKÇI SYED

TEKİRDAĞ-2023

Her hakkı saklıdır.

SCIENTIFIC ETHICS STATEMENT

I vow that in all the stages of preparation of this Master's Thesis, I have been strictly abiding by the academic rules and scientific ethics and that I have provided reference for every citation I have directly or indirectly used and works I have benefitted from are comprised of those I have listed in my references and that I have behaved accordingly to the spelling dictionary the institute specified.

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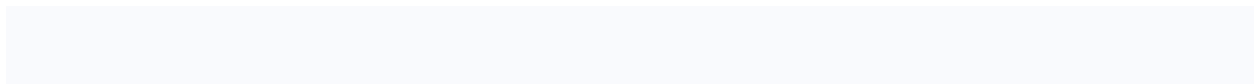
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ÖZET

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Bu çalışma, çoğunlukla kabul edilen ve okuyucuya insanın acizliğini, başka dünyalar ve zihinlerinin kırılmasından dolayı bilmedikleri farklı tip bilgiler olduğunu anlatan cosmicism'e odaklanıyor. Birçok önemli konuyu, farklı felsefeleri, görüşleri ve akımları birleştiren Cosmicism tuhaf kurgunun bir alt türü olarak kabul edilse de, taşıdığı özellikler tamamen özgün olduğundan dolayı kendi başına bir tür olarak kabul edilmelidir.

Bu çalışma, Lovecraft'ın *The Call of Cthulhu* ve *The Shadow Out of Time*, ve Ligotti'nin *The Dream of a Manikin*, *Alice's Last Adventure* ve *The Sect of the Idiot* eserlerini ayrıntılı bir şekilde incelemek ile birlikte, determinizm, nihilizm, the sublime gibi akımları ele alarak cosmicism'in neden kendi başına bir tür olması gerektiğini inceler. Biri cosmicism'in babası olmakla birlikte, iki farklı yazarı inceleyerek dinamik doğasından dolayı nasıl cosmicism'in genişletebileceği kanıtlanmıştır. Bu dinamik doğasından ve diğer türlerden tamamen farklı olmasından dolayı,

cosmicism'in kendi başına bir tür olması gerektiği öne sürülmüştür. Cosmicism'in potansiyelini ortaya koymak için ve iki farklı yüzyıldan, iki farklı yazarın nasıl katkı yaptığı, karşılaştırmalı teknik kullanılarak ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Lovecraftian, cosmicism, HP Lovecraft, Thomas Ligotti, korku, cosmic korku



ABSTRACT

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This study focuses on Howard Phillips Lovecraft's cosmicism, which aims to tackle the widely accepted notion that preaches the superiority of the human being by showing the reader that there are worlds and types of knowledge that they are not made aware of because of the fragility of their minds. While cosmicism is widely regarded as a subgenre of weird fiction, as it tackles so many important topics through a combination of different philosophies, views and movements, it should be regarded as a genre on its own since the characteristics it carries are extremely unique and distinctive.

This paper aims to delve into the notion that is cosmicism in order to prove that it should be a genre of its own and analyzes it thoroughly through examining Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* and *The Shadow Out of Time*, and Ligotti's *The Dream of a Manikin*, *Alice's Last Adventure* and *The Sect of the Idiot*, as well as analyzing movements and notions like determinism, nihilism, the sublime, etc. Through analyzing two different authors, with one of them being the founder of

cosmicism, the way cosmicism can be expanded has been proven as a result of its dynamic nature. And because of this dynamic nature, combined with the fact that it is completely different from any genre that was ever created before, it has been established that cosmicism should be its own distinct genre. A comparative approach was taken in order to convey the true potential of cosmicism and how two different authors, from two different times contributed to it.

Keywords: Lovecraftian, cosmicism, H.P. Lovecraft, Thomas Ligotti, horror, cosmic horror



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Cosmicism in HP Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti's Short Fiction

The strive of humanity for greatness may be one of the only things that has not changed since the dawn of time. Humanity sought ways to expand the world and now seek ways to do the same to the universe; the universe that they do not fully understand, nor capable of understanding as it exceeds even the greatest of human minds with its vastness and complexity.

This unknowability of the vast universe fills those who are unlucky enough to realize it with a new kind of existential dread that sits at the heart of HP Lovecraft's cosmicism, also known as cosmic horror and Lovecraftian horror, as well as those after him who follow the same literary philosophy.

Cosmicism was chosen as the heart of this thesis because of its closely knit connection with science fiction and weird fiction, while not fully fitting into either of them, or any genre, for that matter. Therefore, the statement of this thesis emerged, which is to explain why cosmicism should be a genre.

A comparative approach was taken when writing this paper as a way of portraying how cosmicism changed throughout the years and how it can be expanded. Lovecraft was chosen as the first author as he is the one who introduced cosmicism, therefore his ideas were taken as the basis for cosmicism, while Ligotti was picked because of his contributions to the literary philosophy of cosmicism as a 21st century author who expanded upon it. In doing the analysis, Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* and *The Shadow Out of Time*, and Ligotti's *The Dream of a Manikin*, *Alice's Last Adventure* and *The Sect of the Idiot* were picked as these stories carry anecdotes from cosmicism the most and are regarded as their authors' magnum opuses. While previous research was done on cosmicism regarding its existence as a genre, a lack of analysis

was detected when it comes to how it can exist as a genre on its own, which this thesis aims to scratch the surface of.

The first chapter focused on the essence and theoretical framework of cosmicism through differentiating it from other genres, while explaining its core focus through showing how it is linked to notions like nihilism, determinism, solipsism, and the sublime. A postcolonial approach was also taken as cosmicism resembles the idea that is Othering, which was analyzed through the lenses of the 19th century. Another point made was regarding ethics since, while it does not matter in Lovecraft's universe, it was still an important discussion point as human ethics not mattering is a topic that is considered to be taboo.

After establishing the framework of cosmicism, the second chapter focused on the creator, Lovecraft, and how his life may have influenced his works, as well as cosmicism itself. His *The Fear of the Unknown* technique was thoroughly explained, as well as how he implemented cosmicism into his own works and how The Lovecraftian Cosmos came to be. Lovecraft's protagonists were established as unreliable narrators, while his monsters were discussed in their association with Freud's *Uncanny Valley*.

After discussing the creator of cosmicism, the third chapter focused on one of its most popular followers, Thomas Ligotti, who was greatly influenced by Lovecraft. The Ligottian Cosmos was analyzed through the lenses of cosmicism, and the chapter establishes how Ligotti expanded upon Lovecraft's ideas. Determinism and fatalism were discussed as they play a vital role in both Ligotti's works and the cosmicism that he presents to the reader. Mental illnesses such as derealization and depersonalization were discussed since they are important to mention in understanding Ligotti's message, and in the very last sub chapter, a direct comparative approach was taken regarding Ligotti and Lovecraft and the outcome showed that while Ligotti was

greatly influenced by cosmicism and Lovecraft, he still managed to find his own voice and did not drown in his master's ideas.

The purpose of this study is not to solve anything, but only to shed some light upon the lacking research regarding cosmicism and how it has the potential of being a genre on its own.

Cosmicism

The Core of Cosmicism

HP Lovecraft once said “The world is indeed comic, but the joke is on mankind” (Lovecraft, 2014, 25).

The word “cosmicism” derives from “cosmos”, which was first used by Pythagoras and Heraclitus “to mean the principles behind the entire universe, and this was a new meaning- a challenge to all thinkers to try to explain the universe as a whole” (Primack and Abrams, 2007, p 280) and was first coined by HP Lovecraft to describe his universe that has no care and interest in the existence or possible disappearance of the human being as they matter little to none when the vastness of the cosmos is taken into account. Lovecraft's cosmicism posed a threat to the mainstream belief that put the human being in the center of the universe during the discoveries of the early 1900s.

The 1920s were a turbulent time for the seekers of knowledge. The masses were introduced to how relative knowledge could be as a result of the scientific discoveries made. “By the 1920s, more and more astronomers took the idea of distant galaxies seriously. Finally Edwin Hubble, at the Mount Wilson Observatory in Southern California, provided the deathblow to the one-galaxy universe” (Tom Siegfried, 2017). The limits of the universe were being discovered and its map was being drawn thanks to recent discoveries. But even though these discoveries were extremely

exhilarating for scientists like Hubble, they paved the way for many cosmic issues in the minds of the masses that lead to distrusting the information that they were given.

In a world filled with an ideology that puts the human being at the center of everything, the masses needed an ideology that challenged the notion that preached blindly trusting the information that they were given, no matter how everchanging that information can be.

This is where cosmicism came into play as it focused on revealing how insignificant, small and purposeless human beings are in the grand scheme of things, or in other words, when compared to the vastness of the cosmos, which made the information that they gathered throughout the years practically useless as it became a speck of dust when compared to the information that resides in the universe.

Having been the pioneer of the literary philosophy, cosmicism reflects most, if not all of HP Lovecraft's visions regarding the cosmos and our place (or misplacement) in it. There is no reason other than humanity's own pride that can accurately pinpoint the assumption that defends why humans are the only conscious and intelligent species to have ever existed.

The existence of other beings in the universe cannot be proven, but it seems extremely egotistical and irrational to think that a being that is incapable of taking care of themselves until a certain age is the most intelligent of it all, or to ever exist. Lovecraft himself also thought so, as he said:

How do we know that that form of atomic and molecular motion called 'life' is the highest of all forms? Perhaps the dominant creature—the most rational and God-like of all beings—is an invisible gas! Or perhaps it is a flaming and effulgent mass of molten star-dust. Who can say that men have souls while rocks have none? (Lovecraft, 2022, p 55).

Through his ideas regarding the human being not existing as the most intelligent creature in the universe, Lovecraft posed a revolt against the masses, as well as the media that preached the singularity of truth. This is extremely important in understanding his writing as well as the philosophies and movements he was a pioneer of and followed, because in all of his works, he preached one thing and one thing only: Humans are not the focal point of the universe.

The idea of the decentering of the human being did not start with Lovecraft though. Abraham P. Bos, in his article named Aristotle on the Differences Between Plants, Animals, and Human Beings and On the Elements as Instruments of the Soul (*De Anima*), mentions Aristotle's ideas and how he valued the beings living on planet earth in regards to the knowledge that they possessed:

For Aristotle, there is a difference in 'value and lack of value' between these levels of life, For plants produce nothing but seed for the continuation of their own kind. Animals, however, all have a certain level of "knowledge" though for some kinds this is restricted to the lowest level of perception. This worthiness of only a form of perception may seem minimal in comparison with the human mind, but compared with the condition of a plant or a stone, it is something astonishing" (Bos, 2010, p 822)

In this regard, it is safe to say that Aristotle thought that each species was its own cosmos and should be regarded and valued according to what they accomplish both in regards to other members of the species, and other species themselves. He decentered the human being through defending that each species is important on its own and the knowledge that they possess is "astonishing" when compared to other species.

As a result of humans thinking that they are the most intelligent beings on earth, they kill other beings because they assume that, for example, animals or insects do not have the same type of

intelligence or awareness they do, which, like Aristotle, Lovecraft also opposes. This brutality against non-human beings shows how egotistic humans are, as they think they have more of a right to live than other species. The brutality does not end with non-human beings either as countries who established their empires on colonization think that they have more of a right to live than people of different colored skins. In this instance, it can be said that the human being created a hierarchy that focuses on the “strongest race” and decenters other races who are not of that race. In postcolonial studies, this notion is called “Othering”.

1.2 The Notion of Othering

Othering occurs as a result of marginalizing a group of people on purpose and is

(...) a reference to the colonized others who are "marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the center and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial 'ego' ((Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 168)). In other words, the inferiority that is attributed to the East by the West helps to construct its superiority, and by creating an ‘other’, it is easier to make the distinction between what is from West and what is from East by simplifying it to terms such as ‘us’ and the ‘others’ (Gebara, 2021, p 11) .

In the case of the cosmos and humans’ place in it, they become the other. Since humans have never encountered beings that are equally as intelligent (or more) as them, they do not know what it means to truly be othered. In the case of the cosmos, humanity becomes the East. And when it comes to the way the West views the East as being less civilized, perhaps the beings that are much more intelligent and aware than them think the same way about them. Humans have created a patriarchal world that functions on made up morals and ethics that they expect the rest

of the universe to abide by, and if they do not, they are deemed as being a threat, not realizing that they themselves are a threat to the universe in the first place.

In Lovecraft's cosmic creation, the human being is not hated by the universe or other entities. Cthulhu or other beings are not misanthropical beings, but they merely do not care for the existence of the human beings as a whole, which comes off as dangerous and threatening as humans have always been at the center of the universe according to themselves: Cosmicism removes the human being from this center, and makes them "the other". This othering occurs as a result of the mentioned carelessness of the entities that exist in the universe and entails a sort of cosmic danger to humanity as the idea of not being the center of the universe and other beings who know a lot more about the universe than them existing outside their reach poses a sort of threat. In this instance, since they are so divided among themselves already, humans cannot pose a threat to the other entities mentioned.

Humans are not the hunters anymore, but the prey, and no science, religion or philosophy can stop them from being hunted because they simply cannot comprehend the beings that are hunting and haunting them. In Lovecraft's philosophy of cosmicism, human beings are the animals, the othered, the marginalized. Other beings do not care about them or their lives, nor do they care if they die: Humans get the same treatment that they show to the beings that they share the planet with, and perhaps the universe which just goes to show how clever and nuanced of a way that Lovecraft followed in order to convey his message. The Elder Gods in Lovecraft's stories are the West, while human beings are the East as they keep getting terrorized and their rights to live gets compromised as a result of the will of the Elder Gods. The decentering of the human being occurs as a result of the existence of the Elder Gods. This core of cosmicism that replaces the center of the universe with other beings is perhaps what makes it a more of a literary philosophy

rather than a subgenre, though many critics list it as a subgenre of weird fiction or science fiction. Cosmicism is a notion that should be more widely known and discussed as it analyzes topics that challenge our everyday lives in more than one way.

For the sake of the continuity of the discussion, and before establishing it as a genre, one first needs to know under what genre cosmicism resides in.

Oxford Learner's Dictionaries defines fiction as "a type of literature that describes imaginary people and events, not real ones" and "a thing that is invented or imagined and is not true". Fiction revolves around events that may or may not be plausible, but these notions do not stop fictional works from carrying philosophical ideas that may seem far-fetched, but are not. Fiction gives us a glimpse into the lives of people who have never nor will ever exist, but who carry anecdotes and ideas from our own lives, as well as those around us, no matter how far-fetched the core of the material may be. Fiction opens a door for the reader to find characters and incidents that may correlate to their own life, which helps in eliminating any sort of loneliness that they may have previously felt regarding the situationships. It also serves as a means of catharsis through the act of reading and writing about worlds that are different. Fiction gives the reader a sort of escape from the calamities and hardships of reality; especially during and after the outbreak of the Coronavirus in March 2020. Surveys show that 1 in 3 (31%) people read more during lockdown, with this number being higher among younger readers (45%) (Readingagency.org.uk, 2020), who are more prone to reading fiction than nonfiction as their brains have not yet developed enough to understand the intricacies of it.

Fiction makes ideas that do not have a place in our current world accessible to the reader through imaginary scenarios, which makes it as important as nonfiction. As a result of this, fantastical works that carry anecdotes and elements from cosmicism fall under the category of fiction.

One of the biggest reasons why cosmicism was needed was the fact that, especially through the scientific discoveries of the 20th century, humans may not be alone in the universe because of its sheer vastness. Lisa Zyga, in her article named *Physicists Calculate Number of Parallel Universes*, says: “In a new study, Stanford physicists Andrei Linde and Vitaly Vanchurin have calculated the number of all possible universes, coming up with an answer of $10^{10^{16}}$ ” (phys.org, 2009). Even though it may seem scary to some people, cosmicism fleshed out the ideas that entertained philosophies that advocated for multiverses, as well as the existence of other beings that live in our, as well as different universes. Because of this, it is closely knit with sciences like physics and mathematics. Cosmicism dives into the proposition of the human being not existing as the most intelligent being in the universe, as well as the possibility of the malevolence of the other entities that live in the universe(s), which Lovecraft tried to express through his multiverse. The idea of the Milky Way not being the only universe was also around in the 20th century, when cosmicism was established by Lovecraft: “In the early 1920s many astronomers believed that objects then known as nebulae were nearby gas clouds in our own galaxy, and that the Milky Way was the entire universe, while others thought the nebulae were actually more distant ‘island universes’ separate from our own galaxy” (aps.org, 2008). Other than including multiverse beings that may or may not be malevolent, Lovecraft’s cosmicism also includes The Elder Gods that are described as being evil as a result of their uncaring natures towards human beings.

Even though cosmicism includes beings that seem to be malevolent, it is not explained why they are. One would assume that they have a right to live as much as humans but not in Lovecraft’s universe(s). The Elder Gods in this case can be associated with animals: humans do not blame animals for eating each other so there is no purpose in blaming the Elder Gods for doing what

they think is right. This topic, while showing how egotistic humans are, also opens up a discussion about ethics and how what humans think is right may not matter when the vastness of the universe is taken into account.

1.3 The Ethical Principles Reflected in Cosmicism

The mundane everyday actions of a 21st century person would be found unacceptable thousands of years ago. The made up sense of morality that humans possess and how everchanging it is as a result of cultural norms, personal wants and the society they live in shows how insignificant ethics are in the grand scheme of things as they come and go. What is acceptable to do and what is punishable changes as humans continue their evolutions.

When the vastness of the universe is considered, it is extremely egotistical to want other beings from different galaxies and dimensions to heed by the rules that humans made up that are ever changing themselves. In regards to this, Lovecraft's Elder Gods cannot and should not be called malevolent for abiding by the rules they curated, and they should not be blamed for not caring for the existence of humans when the vastness of the universe is taken into account. When this vastness is considered, the human being becomes an ant in a field and their presence or absence does not matter.

Cosmicism, as a fictional genre, tackles the issue of ethics masterfully by making the Elder Gods' intentions extremely ambiguous as what is right and what is wrong changes constantly. They pose a threat to human beings, but their intention is not to harm them. They are only after what each creature is; Living.

Lovecraft's cosmicism tackles the question of ethics masterfully through showing how nuanced it is and how much it changes. It also combines places and people who otherwise would not be in the same setting or in that particular situation, as well as various sciences with fantastical elements, which brings the discussion to one of the most prominent and widespread subgenres of fiction.

Science fiction is described by the Dictionary of Cambridge as "a type of writing about imagined developments in science and their effect on life esp. in the future" (Dictionary of Cambridge, 2023) The literary philosophy of cosmicism is, by many, considered to be a subgenre of science fiction as Lovecraft included science and scientific elements numerous times while curating his cosmos. In his work *The Shadow Out of Time*, Lovecraft talks vastly about archeology, psychology and science, as his protagonist is interested in these areas:

They noticed that my chief efforts were to master certain points in history, science, art, language, and folklore—some of them tremendously abstruse, and some childishly simple—which remained, very oddly in many cases, outside my consciousness (Lovecraft, 1936, 168).

While cosmicism has anecdotes from science fiction, and many scholars consider it to be a subgenre of it, it also fits into the genre that is weird fiction: "Weird fiction is a subgenre of fiction that utilizes aspects of fantasy, horror, and supernatural fiction, while often featuring nontraditional alien monsters" (Jared Neuharth, 2019). Lovecraft's entities are original creations of his and may resemble animals, as Cthulhu himself is described as having tentacles and wings, he is still a unique being that is recognized as being the magnum opus of Lovecraft.

Cthulhu or none of the other creations of Lovecraft fit the regular description of a monster in popular culture horror novels: Mainstream monsters include vampires, zombies, fairies, etc.

while Cthulhu and other Elder Gods are special and unique to Lovecraft. This is mainly because they have identities of their own: They have distinguishing features that set them apart from other beings. This is not the case with vampires and zombies (which have been overdone to death in horror). For example, even though Dracula has his own identity, the vampires that came after him are more widely recognized in terms of attributes. The audience or the reader needs distinguishing character elements to pinpoint characters, which is why Cthulhu and Lovecraft's cosmicism fits into weird fiction rather than science fiction.. Even though Lovecraft included scientific terms and language in his works, the main theme of his revolve around horror and the element of fear which arises from the unknowability of what humans are or are not seeing. Through a combination of various sciences, Lovecraft masterfully crafted a multiverse that not only does not revolve around the human being, but has no care for their existence either: The universe is indifferent against the human being. In the light of this, cosmicism can also be called kafkaesque as it has anecdotes from Kafka's works.

1.4 The Kafkaesque Effect

Similar to Lovecraft's cosmicism, Kafka's writing also promoted a hellish universe that included "(...) strange things that cannot be called animal, human, or anything at all" (Geier, 2016, p 1). which goes to show how kafkaesque cosmicism really is as it includes elements and beings from Lovecraft's own imagination that cannot be called anything other than Lovecraftian because of their sheer uniqueness.

Like Kafka, cosmicism and Lovecraft often dealt with dream themes that were extremely important in understanding the mindset of the protagonist. An example can be Kafka's A Dream in which he discussed the inside battles of an individual. Kafka starts his work by stating that

“Josef K. was dreaming” (Kafka, 1916, p 1). This one sentence is extremely important in distinguishing the dream elements of Kafka and the dream elements included in cosmicism by Lovecraft: While reading Lovecraft’s works, the reader is not always aware whether what they are witnessing is a dream or not as the cosmic nature of his writing makes Lovecraft’s stories extremely ambiguous and hard to understand. The reader does not know whether what they are reading about is a mad man’s dream or the reality.

Cosmicism can be called kafkaesque as Kafka also refrained from giving too much information: Just like Lovecraft, Kafka also actively chose not to give too much away in order to awake the reader’s own imagination. Through withholding vital information, both Lovecraft and Kafka created stories that pushed the reader to think for themselves.

When withholding information and the ambiguity of cosmicism that is very much on purpose is discussed more, one sees that in some cases, Lovecraft’s beings from different dimensions need humans to survive, as it is the case with Cthulhu, which makes Lovecraft’s writing and cosmicism extremely ambiguous as he contradicts himself through creating gods that need humans in order to keep living. “Some day he would call, when the stars were ready, and the secret cult would always be waiting to liberate him” and “That cult would never die till the stars came right again, and the secret priests would take great Cthulhu from His tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth ” (Call of Cthulhu, 1928, pp. 5-6). Cthulhu himself needs human beings to wake him up so he can continue his reign, which shows the reader that the Elder Gods are not all powerful. In this instance, they resemble ancient Greek gods rather than the God in Christianity or other current day religions as they include a god that is all powerful, while Greek gods and the Elder gods are not.

In a world where the human being is made aware of other entities that they cannot comprehend, or even look at because of this incomprehensible nature, the possibility of the duality of existence is completely removed, as well as binary oppositions as a result of the incomprehensible nature of good, bad, evil, etc.

In this regard, cosmicism may seem extremely similar to nihilism.

1.5 Nihilism Reflected in Cosmicism

Nihilism associates itself with the idea that life is meaningless, and also rejects any and every religion. Cosmicism also adds to what nihilism brings to the table through creating the Elder Gods, expanding the universe(s) and making the human being even more insignificant than he already was.

It is crucial to remember that Lovecraft's stance on the matters that he talked about in his works was indifferent, while cosmicism as a genre is extremely nihilistic and dark. The future humans are presented with in cosmicism is not promising in the slightest, and even though it has been established that Lovecraft's cosmos is not hostile but indifferent towards human beings, that is not always the case; humans are constantly threatened by the Elder Gods because they use sensitive humans' dreams to communicate with them. This results in the sensitive mind slowly starting to fracture and completely collapse in the end. This point shows another instance where the inconsistency with the Elder Gods is visible to the reader; they are reliant on human beings to survive and are also not all powerful.

This is where the indifference of cosmicism comes into play: The elder gods do not care about the dreamer as one person is as big as an ant in the vastness of the universe. Another, perhaps

more intriguing point can also be made, which Lovecraft actually supports; maybe the Elder Gods are doing only what is in their nature, since they are so unknown to us.

The Elder Gods determine the fate of the human beings that they possess the bodies and invade the dreams of; this is where cosmicism's relation to determinism should be discussed.

1.6 Determinism Portrayed in Cosmicism

Human beings cannot do anything to stop the Elder Gods since they possess so much more knowledge than them, but the biggest reason as to why humans are unable to stop The Elder Gods is because they are incomprehensible, and their sole existence goes to show that the fate of the human beings that they will encounter was predetermined.

Human minds were not designed to understand or even see what the Elder Gods are or present humans with. This results in humans being determined by them and their mercy as there is nothing humans can possibly do in front of Gods.

Through including the Elder Gods in his cosmicism, Lovecraft defended the deterministic nature of the cosmos; "Every event in the cosmos, says Lovecraft, is caused by the action of antecedent and circumjacent-type forces, so that whatever we do is unconsciously the inevitable product of Nature rather than of our own volition" (Letter of June 1, 1921; p. 132), (Kutrie, p. 6).

Determinism also exists in Abrahamic religions, as the human being is determined by the will of God. Lovecraft challenged this by creating his Elder gods that could not be perceived by humans as they were above the understanding of the human brain. Through combining religion (as there are people who worship Cthulhu in Lovecraft's works) with the supernatural, Lovecraft blurred the lines between the natural and the supernatural.

To wrap up this part of the discussion, one needs to understand that again, Lovecraft's entities are not all powerful, nor are they bad because they should not be blamed for doing what is in their nature. Humans do not blame animals for eating each other to survive, so the Elder Gods should not be blamed for doing what is in their nature.

Lovecraft's entities may be indifferent towards human beings, but they are also extremely intriguing because of their unknowability. But this is where it all becomes dangerous: Humans cannot even look at Cthulhu or any of the Elder Gods as their minds refuse to accept what they are seeing and collapse while trying to make sense of the scene in front of us. But still, Cthulhu shows Lovecraft's protagonists all sorts of visions. When it comes to these visions, one can bring forth solipsism.

1.7 Solipsism in Cosmicism

It is not known if Cthulhu is real or not, and it is not known if the events that the protagonists talk about actually happened since they are so mentally broken that they become unreliable. In this case, one can say that the self is the only thing that is known to exist in Lovecraft's stories, which solipsism promotes: If his protagonists were not so mentally broken even before the events of the stories, one could rule out solipsism entirely but since their minds are extremely fractured already, it needs to be taken into consideration as the things that they claim to see or know surpass the current human knowledge, as well as humans' capacity to understand.

If I fear for the future, it is because life threatens me with future perils. That is easy to understand: but if I created this world, would there be future perils? If I dreamt this dream without the evil influences of fears left from day time experience, without the

influence of physiological malfunctionings, there could be no reason why that dream should be less than the best I could imagine it. A nightmare caused by external factors is one thing: a nightmare produced wholly by my own volition and imagination is quite another (Lafleur, 1952, pp. 524).

It is not clear and cannot be known if what Lovecraft's protagonists are going through is real or not but when their broken minds are taken into account, it is safe to assume that they are living in a solipsistic dream that their fractured minds made up.

Perhaps human beings are the disruptors of peace in a universe that functions just fine without them. In Lovecraft's cosmic universe, the human being seems to not be in harmony with the cosmos that surrounds him as his perception is so limited. Philosopher Philip J. Kain disagrees with this idea, saying that

(...) We live in a benign cosmos. It is as if it were purposely planned for us and we for it. We fit, we belong, we are at home in this cosmos. We are confirmed and reinforced by it. Our natural response is a desire to know it and thus appreciate our fit into it. Let us call this the designed cosmos. Roughly speaking, this is the traditional view held by most philosophers from Plato and Aristotle through the medievals (Kain, 2007, p 50).

Another philosophy, and perhaps the most important one when it comes to discussing cosmicism and Lovecraft, would be the philosophy that is the sublime, which has its roots in the 17th century.

1.8 The Sublime and The Vastness of the Universe

The vastness of the universe and the greatness of Cthulhu is emphasized almost always in Lovecraft's works. The way that Lovecraft used language can be used as a way to understand what the sublime is since he uses it almost with every single sentence curated.

The sublime is a philosophy that was and is widely used in art and literature: It advocates for the greatness and the vastness of things, the ungraspability. Lovecraft, while using the sublime with his cosmos, used words exclusively that provoked the type of horror that the philosophy promotes. For example in his work *The Call of Cthulhu*, Lovecraft says: "(...) the nightmare corpse-city of R'lyeh, that was built in measureless aeons behind history by the vast, loathsome shapes that seeped down from the dark stars" (Lovecraft, 2009, p 531). and the deliberately chosen words like 'aeons' and 'dark stars' that awaken a deep sense of mysticism, vastness and unknowability show just how masterfully written the short story is.

A tangible shape or description is not used while describing the nightmare city that is R'lyeh, but clues are given regarding what feelings it should evoke in the reader, which just goes to show that telling rather than showing is sometimes best in horror in order to leave the scene open ended and to evoke the reader's imagination, which is what cosmicism aims to do through withholding information.

When this sentence is analyzed further, one sees that while saying so much and giving a general feeling as to what the city of R'lyeh may look like, Lovecraft also gives no tangible description about it: This is unlike him as even though he refrains from describing his creatures as much as possible, he is perhaps one of the most descriptive authors when it comes to narrating structures and areas but in order to evoke the fear of the unknown, he refrained from being too descriptive regarding R'lyeh.

Lovecraft's masterful "fear of the unknown" technique, in which he withholds vital information to evoke the reader's imagination, is also visible here as the words "loathsome shapes that seeped down from the dark stars." say so much but also nothing at all, paving the way for the reader's imagination to fill in the blanks about what the ancient city of R'lyeh may look like.

Now that the essence of cosmicism has been established, as well as the philosophies and movements associated with it, one can finally talk about its creation and the relation of the literary philosophy with his own ideas.

Lovecraft

To analyze more of Lovecraft's stories along with his prose, further examination of his life should be made in order to accurately pinpoint where the creator's ideas may have come from.

One of the perhaps lesser known pieces of information about Lovecraft's life is that his whole family suffered from mental illness as his father was "acutely psychotic in a Chicago hotel room while on a business trip" (Lovecraft, 2009, p 15) and stayed in a hospital until the day he died. Even though at the time, mental illness was extremely looked down upon and was not given the attention that it needed, one can, through modern rationality, figure out that "it is now almost certain that the actual cause was general paresis of the insane" (Lovecraft, 2009, p 15).

Even though Lovecraft's dad suffered from syphilis, during his era, mental illness was not treated as it was still an enigma and scared people because of its unknowable nature. When Lovecraft's dad was alive, syphilis which is a "(...) bacterial infection usually spread by sexual contact. The

disease starts as a painless sore — typically on the genitals, rectum or mouth. Syphilis spreads from person to person via skin or mucous membrane contact with these sores” (Mayo Clinic, 2021) was not recognized as an illness as it was discovered in around 1905, which is after Winfield Scott Lovecraft (1853-1898) passed away.

Lovecraft’s mother also suffered from mental illness as “In 1919, after suffering from hysteria and depression for a long period of time, Lovecraft's mother was committed to Butler Hospital just like her husband before her” (Lovecraft, 2009, p 17). It is unknown if the younger Lovecraft suffered from hysteria though it should not be ruled out as “Familial and genetic factors are of undoubted relevance in hysteria. An increased prevalence of hysteria has been found in the 1st-degree relatives of patients with hysteria” (Biology Online, 2007).

Lovecraft was sick a lot as a kid and suffered from night terrors which undoubtedly inspired his later works as Cthulhu himself resembles a being straight from the dark nights of an individual.

Lovecraft’s sickness was not cared for as during the 20th century, mental illness was almost always thought to be associated with physical causes, which is now known to not be true as individuals who are bodily as healthy as one can be can also suffer from various mental health issues like depression and anxiety.

Mental illness ran in Lovecraft’s family and affected his life and works massively as he inserted aspects of his own mental health and life in general into his works.

Lovecraft was suicidal at one point in his life; “(...) he contemplated suicide for a time. In 1908, prior to his high school graduation, he himself claimed to have suffered what he later described as a nervous breakdown (...)” (Lovecraft, 2009, p 16) which goes to show that his protagonists may have been self inserts as almost every single one of them suffers from one or multiple mental illnesses and were, at times, suicidal themselves. The traces of Lovecraft’s own mental

illness can be found in his works like the Call of Cthulhu, where the protagonist outright admits that he has become suicidal as a result of the things that he may witness; he wants to live in ignorance as it sometimes is bliss, as human brains are fragile organs and are prone to fracturing or shattering altogether at the sight of the unknown and the unfathomable; “When I think of the extent of all that may be brooding down there I almost wish to kill myself forthwith” (Lovecraft, 2009, p 531).

Another aspect of his personality that Lovecraft implemented in his works is his racial beliefs about minorities as he saw them as being lesser. He included these beliefs by creating different races in his works, such as the Innsmouthers that have, what Lovecraft calls, ‘the Innsmouth look’: “Some of ’em have queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, starry eyes that never seem to shut, and their skin ain’t quite right. Rough and scabby, and the sides of the necks are all shriveled or creased up” (Lovecraft, 2009, p 1237). Lovecraft deems any race other than white to be evil in his works as the cults he describes are from all around the world.

Even though Lovecraft was extremely harsh about his racial beliefs regarding minorities, he was especially racially prejudiced against black people, which he portrayed in his works:

(...) this was a fear picked up from blackfellow folklore—the natives having woven a curious fabric of malignant myth about the high winds which at long intervals sweep across the sands under a clear sky (Lovecraft, 2009, p 1580).

He associated black people with evil and superstitions which goes to show how harsh and adamant he was about his racism. So much so that his works may feel like racist propaganda to some readers, which would not be far-fetched because of how often he talks about minorities in his works in ways that portray them as being lesser than light skinned folk.

This racist outlook of Lovecraft that he implemented in his works was most likely a result of having been a white man living in New York (which was and is one of the most diverse places on earth) and struggling to find a job: “In the first decade of the last century, the city’s population increased 39 percent, reaching 4.8 million in 1910” (nyc.gov, 2013) and since the idea of ‘immigrants are taking our jobs’ has been an ongoing prejudice since the very first immigrants, it is not far fetched to say that Lovecraft attributed him not being able to find a job to the crowded immigrant population and inserted this idea into his stories through deeming people of color as being weird or uncanny.

Through curating a cosmos that not only is intangible because of its vastness, but also uncaring regarding the existence of the human being, Lovecraft created his own mythical universe which is why his universe is sometimes referred to by scholars as the Cthulhu Mythos; Because Lovecraft created a mythology on his own, with his own unique beings and a universe that just functions.

Now that the life of the Great Old One has been discussed, his works and how he inserted Cosmicism into them can be more accurately discussed and pinpointed.

2.2 The Lovecraftian Cosmos

The 20th century paved the way for many sciences to flourish in its wake and it is essential to recognize and analyze them in order to get into the mindset of the creator of Cosmicism and how he used Cosmicism in his own works.

In the late 1800s and early 1900, the universe as humans know it was changing rapidly as a result of scientific exploration and the greed of mankind to seek more knowledge in order to understand the world, and that brought the unknown with it. No matter how exhilarating and

ground breaking these discoveries were, the information that was previously widely preached having been incorrect was extremely jarring as it brought everything that the common man knew into question. And it also made them question the information that was given to them afterwards; What if what they are being taught currently is also wrong? The universe as they knew it was expanding and it was expanding rapidly.

Even though the discoveries about our universe were extremely fascinating and ground breaking, the ancient fear that they awoke in us was unmistakable: As most of the things humans knew about the universe were proven to be wrong, it was a concern as to when scientists should stop seeking information. The amount of knowledge the human being can process is limited and that limit was and is still not known.

Lovecraft, one of the common 20th century men, surely found this notion extremely dangerous as he was one of the few people who tried to warn others to not strive for too much knowledge as it could be dangerous: He did this by displaying what happens when people venture too far into the unknown: The mind starts to unravel, to fracture. Because there just may be some things that the human mind cannot comprehend, which is a notion that especially scientists ignore as a result of humanity's belief that humans are the most intelligent beings in the universe.

Humans try to master and conquer everything they see and discover, not even stopping to think that maybe, just maybe, some things are better left alone. Maybe there are forces that far exceed what they can imagine or dream about.

Lovecraft's protagonist from one of his most famous works *the Shadow Out of Time*, seems to realize that humans may not be the masters of the universe, as he starts the narrative by warning the reader:

(...) man must be prepared to accept notions of the cosmos, and of his own place in the seething vortex of time, whose merest mention is paralyzing. He must, too, be placed on guard against a specific, lurking peril which, though it will never engulf the whole race, may impose monstrous and unguessable horrors upon certain venturesome members of it (Lovecraft, 2009, p 1540).

Through his very first sentence, the reader realizes that they may not be the center of the universe like the media and science preaches. The human mind has its limits and if those limits are pushed even slightly, it starts to unravel which is exactly what the protagonist is warning the reader about with the words “(...) whose merest mention is paralyzing” (Lovecraft, 2009, p 1540). Humans must accept their own place in the universe, and the role they play which is not big at all in the grand scheme of things, though they pretend it is because of their egos. Perhaps this is the reason why the universe is such a horrific and paralyzing place to humans: Because they struggle to accept their misplacement in it.

The traces of Lovecraft’s fear regarding the expanding universe is extremely clear in the opening lines of *The Call of Cthulhu* as they almost seem frantic, mad. As if they are being uttered by someone who knows too much, which was what Lovecraft himself was afraid of: Humans going too far.

Even though the story focuses on the protagonist’s slow descent into madness, it also focuses a lot on Cthulhu as a being and most importantly, its appearance. Perhaps the reason why Lovecraft made Cthulhu have the physicalities of an octopus and a reptile, was to show the reader that some attributes, though familiar individually, are extremely frightening when combined, which he did through inserting the uncanny into his works.

It should also be remembered that humans had not even gone to space (1961) nor had they reached the deepest part of the ocean (1951) when Lovecraft was alive, so it can be presumed that through giving Cthulhu attributes that are familiar to us through combining the sea and the unknowability of space, Lovecraft aimed to awaken an ancient fear of the unknown in his readers, as well as imposing the paralyzing truth of the uncanny but through this, he also allowed the willing suspension of disbelief to occur.

Through portraying Cthulhu and the likes of him in his works that include attributes that are familiar to the reader, Lovecraft made the familiar seem unfamiliar. He put different attributes of animals together which allowed the willing suspension of disbelief to occur. This idea is linked to why Lovecraft's monsters are particularly scary: Because the protagonists do not know what they are even though they are seeing them and even though they are carrying characteristics that are recognized individually, but not as a whole, which makes them unsettling. This, in modern times, is strikingly similar to what is classified as the "uncanny" or the "uncanny valley".

2.3 The Uncanny Valley Notion

The name "uncanny valley" was made popular by Sigmund Freud in his work *The Uncanny*, in which he explained:

The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning "familiar," "native," "belonging to the home"; and we are tempted to conclude that what is "uncanny" is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation cannot be inverted. We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny;

some new things are frightening but not by any means all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar to make it uncanny (Freud, 1919, p 2).

The uncanny is what should be familiar to humans but feels extremely unfamiliar and sometimes becomes unnerving and even frightening. An example that can be given can be humanoid robots: They sometimes look exactly like humans but humans' senses can detect that something is not right. Not quite there. This is what Cthulhu is: He is supposed to be familiar, he has features that the protagonists recognize but when these features are combined, Cthulhu becomes the uncanny.

Humans are almost always unnerved by the uncanny because they sense that something is not right, that something is either amiss or misplaced: It does not have a soul, if you will, which humans somehow recognize. This may be one of the many reasons as to why the protagonists go mad when they look at Cthulhu or other Elder Gods: Because their minds cannot make sense of what they are seeing, because what they are seeing is the uncanny, the wrong, the misplaced.

The uncanny is not always perceived as being negative in Lovecraft's works though: As it was mentioned before, there are many cults who worship Cthulhu and the Elder gods, which brings into question whether these cultists actually faced Cthulhu or the uncanny, ever. To answer this, no they have not as again, one cannot look at Cthulhu or other Elder gods and live to tell the tale. In this case, as it is the case with almost all of Lovecraft's works, ignorance is bliss: "I felt that the mocking curvilinear hieroglyphs on the walls would blast my soul with their message were I not guarded by a merciful ignorance" (Lovecraft, 2009, p 1551).

2.4 The Fear of the Unknown Technique

As mentioned in the previous made, Lovecraft has a tendency to withhold vital information from the reader in order to evoke feelings of dread and agony, as well as evoking the reader's imagination as humans are scared of what they cannot see and perceive. But it is important to note that Lovecraft almost always withheld information only when it comes to his Elder Gods. Refraining from describing an area is a foreign concept to Lovecraft, as in other instances, when he gets the chance to be descriptive, he does it masterfully:

There were, almost endless leagues of giant buildings, each in its garden, and ranged along paved roads fully 200 feet wide. They differed greatly in aspect, but few were less than 500 feet square or a thousand feet high. Many seemed so limitless that they must have had a frontage of several thousand feet, while some shot up to mountainous altitudes in the grey, steamy heavens. They seemed to be mainly of stone or concrete (Lovecraft, 2009, pp 1551-1552).

which brings into question his true intentions in why he chooses to be descriptive when it comes to landscapes and areas but not creatures. Lovecraft eliminates the fear of the unknown he masterfully created through being so descriptive regarding his hellish landscapes. One can either call this a stylistic choice, or through picking up the clues left by the author, can assume that through setting the scene, Lovecraft gives us clues as to what creatures the protagonist may be facing indirectly, without interfering with the horror of our imagination. He pushes us towards the idea that he had in mind regarding his Elder gods, but does not outright say much about the gods themselves to not interfere with our objective imaginations, which makes him an extremely skilled and clever horror author that gives the reader the freedom of imagination. The reader fills in the blanks with his own imagination when it matters, and when Lovecraft allows it.

Even though he chose to leave things open ended, Lovecraft still chose to support his ideas with real historical places, people, etc. in order to push the reader's imagination in the right direction.. In his work *The Shadow Out of Time*, Lovecraft wrote: "In whatever time or place the scene might be, the principle of the arch was known as fully and used as extensively as by the Romans" (Lovecraft, 2009, p 1550). In this instance, name dropping the Romans made his work seem more believable, no matter how unbelievable it all sounded. The unbelievability of the story that the reader is presented with, combined with the fact that almost all of Lovecraft's protagonists suffered from one or multiple mental health disorders helps in this case as mentally ill people have been known to be closer to the beings that humans do not know of. But again, since Lovecraft's protagonists suffered from one or multiple mental illnesses, this aspect brings into question their reliability.

2.5 The Unreliable Narrator Reflected in Lovecraft's Works

The Shadow Out of Time's protagonist is not classified as being mad. At least he does not consider himself to be so: "Of the nature of the dreams and impressions which were growing so clamorous I still almost fear to speak. They seemed to savor of madness, and at times I believed I was indeed going mad" (Lovecraft, 2009, p 1549) but the fact that he is witnessing such horrific and cosmic events makes him an unreliable narrator as him not classifying himself as mad does not mean much in the grand scheme of things.

In this case, it can be said that the unreliability of Lovecraft's narrators interferes with the suspension of disbelief that the reader automatically uses in order to enjoy the works.

The reader is already analyzing the work as if it is non fiction, but when the author combines this stance of the reader with his unreliable narrator, a paradox starts to appear where the reader is faced with a dilemma and does not know how to interpret what they are reading. The unreliable narrator breaks the illusion that the suspension of disbelief grants to the reader and the reader, assuming that the narrator is mad, interprets the story without the suspension of disbelief and may regard it all as just ramblings of a mad man.

The unreliable narrator is also present in Lovecraft's magnum opus, *The Call of Cthulhu*, as the reader witnesses what happens when a mind is overloaded with information that it cannot comprehend: "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. But I do not think my life will be long. As my uncle went, as poor Johansen went, so I shall go. I know too much (...)" (Lovecraft, 2009, p 535) which is extremely interesting as the protagonist does not seem to be mad, he is still making perfect sense, but he is forever changed by the horrors he witnessed, which makes him unreliable. He unlocked forbidden knowledge. He ate the forbidden fruit and there is no going back.

Lovecraft created a mythos to warn people not to go too far with their drive to learn and find out about the universe. Moreover it seems wrong to classify it only as such: The Cthulhu Mythos may have started out as Lovecraft's warning but it became much more than that. It became an ideology, a cosmos of its own.

The Ligottian Cosmos

Lovecraft gained the admiration of the masses as the founder and promoter of cosmicism. While some of his followers traced his footsteps, others paved their own way in his light. One of

these followers was Thomas Ligotti, who, some may say, expanded the literary philosophy that is cosmicism.

Ligotti got interested in the horror genre when he was just a kid, “Since I was a child I have had a morbid and melodramatic imagination. I went to see every horror movie at the local theaters and stayed up late to watch midnight horror movies on TV” (Schweitzer, 2003, p 53). And just like Lovecraft, he also suffered from mental illness which he found solace from through drinking. Ligotti was diagnosed with an anxiety-panic disorder and afterwards, “(...) discovered the works of H.P. Lovecraft” (Schweitzer, 2003, p 53) and as many people did and still do, found solace and comfort in the fact that he could relate to Lovecraft’s idea as he found that “(...) the meaningless and menacing universe described in Lovecraft’s stories corresponded very closely to the place I was living at that time, and ever since for that matter” (Schweitzer, 2003, p 53). Literature, especially writing horror, served as a sort of cathartic mechanism for Ligotti where he found comfort in putting anecdotes from his own life into his stories.

Ligotti used his own life as inspiration while curating his hellish stories:

In my first horror story to see publication, ‘The Chymist,’ I tried to express my fascination with this world of ruins. This also applies to a lesser extent to my short novel ‘My Work Is Not Yet Done’, which is set in an unnamed city patterned after Detroit. The wallpaper on my computer is a photograph of an abandoned house on Detroit’s east side. In many of my stories, I’ve tried to articulate an aesthetic of decay in both small towns and cities. I equate decline and decrepitude with a kind of serenity, a tranquil abandonment of the illusions of the future (Ayad, 2004, p 4).

While his settings were influenced mostly by his own life, his narrators were created as a result of the influence of Nabokov and Bernhard. “ The work of both of these authors frequently

features mentally deranged narrators who write highly stylized prose. In this sense they are part of a tradition that also includes Poe and Lovecraft. Those are the footsteps in which I often slavishly followed” (Schweitzer, 2003, p 54).

Ligotti used cosmicism as a way of showing the reader his own point of view regarding the world, which was extremely deterministic and fatalist.

3.2 Determinism and Fatalism Portrayed by Ligotti

Ligotti once said: “Any attempt to change our destiny is futile because we are all marionettes of a superior dark power” (Schweitzer, 2003, p 64) which basically gives a definition to the notion that is determinism as well as fatalism. Ligotti’s works almost always have a higher evil being that inflicts pain upon the protagonist and those around him and the reader is left to watch the torture that they have to endure. An example can be his short story *The Dream of a Manikin* in which the speaker, who is a psychologist, is dealing with a mentally ill patient who is plagued by nightmares and night terrors. “This silence somehow “electrifies” the dream with strange currents of force betokening an unseen demonic presence” (Ligotti, 2011, 55) The “unseen demonic presence” that the patient talks about is not explained thoroughly in the story but it is hinted at that the patient is being controlled by the psychologist’s wife, and later revealed that the protagonist himself is being controlled by her as well. The “unseen demonic presence” in the story, or the wife, is never shown to the reader, though the reader is witnessing the consequences of their manipulations on the psychologist. These manipulations get so bad that the protagonist begins to question whether he himself is a product of a dream or not, which is a point that will be discussed in the later analyses made.

The whole story that is *The Dream of a Manikin* can be regarded as an allegory for the state of the world in the 21st century: Humans are being determined by forces that are stronger and richer than they can even begin to fathom, whether these forces are god or the unseen people who are really in charge of governments. This is also where fatalism comes in: Just like the protagonist of *The Dream of a Manikin*, the events that happen in the world are predetermined by outer forces and cannot be avoided as the human being themselves and the knowledge they possess is a speck of dust when the grand cosmos is taken into consideration.

The way that the protagonist of *The Dream of a Manikin* is manipulated into believing something that is practically impossible also correlates to the state of the world in the 21st century as consumers believe whatever the media spits out, no matter how impossible it may be. The media works in favor of the deterministic and fatalist forces that exist in the world and also works against the masses.

Ligotti's story can also be regarded as a religious allegory, with the wife, the unseen, being the determining presence in other people's lives: Religious determinism is especially an important theme in Ligotti's works, as for example, in *The Sect of the Idiot*, the main character encounters cultish beings that are clearly an inspiration from Lovecraft's Elder Gods, who changes forever for the worse as a result of the deterministic and fatalist presence of the beings he encounters: "I was the victim of the unknown. And I succumbed to an ecstatic horror at this insight" (Ligotti, 2011, 209). This deterministic nature of the beings he is facing is also noticed by the reader, as the mere realization of the Elder Gods' existence is too much for him, but he realizes that he is not the one in charge of his own destiny:

Life is a nightmare that leaves its mark upon you in order to prove that it is, in fact, real.
And to suffer a solitary madness seems the joy of paradise when compared to the

extraordinary condition in which one's own madness merely emulates that of the world. I have been lured away by dreams; all is nonsense now (Ligotti, 2011, 213).

The way Ligotti uses determinism and fatalism is an extremely important analysis point as it shows the reader that the forces that are determining the protagonists, as well as the minor characters are, though not all powerful, possess a kind of authority over them in an extremely sinister way. These beings that Ligotti created hold the power to completely destroy the human brain, but they choose to toy with them which goes to show how sinister they really are.

The protagonists that encounter Ligotti's Lovecraftian beings face the consequences of knowing that there are beings in the universe that they cannot even begin to fathom, and for every single one of them, this knowledge is too much, and fractures their brains in more than one way: "At first sight of these gruesome gestures I felt myself about to awaken, to carry back into the world a sense of terrible enlightenment without sure meaning or possibility of expression in any language except the whispered vows of this eerie sect" (Ligotti, 2011, 209).

One of the many effects of Ligotti's Elder Gods is the mental downfall of his protagonists: Specifically, how they become a stranger to themselves and the world that they live in as a result of the forbidden knowledge that changed them forever. This is where derealization and depersonalization should be brought into discussion.

3.3 Derealization and Depersonalization Reflected in Ligotti's Stories

Derealization and depersonalization are mental illnesses that alter the way the sufferer perceives the world, and

(...) consist of altered perceptions about the self and the environment. Both of these phenomena may be symptoms of a wide variety of psychiatric disorders with exceedingly

diverse etiologies. Both depersonalization and derealization without depersonalization are listed as dissociative disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition ((DSMIV)) ((American Psychiatric Association, 1994)) (Coons, 1996, p 1).

While many of the protagonists of Ligotti suffer from one or many mental illnesses as a result of facing forbidden truths, it is undeniable that all of them suffer from either depersonalization, derealization, or both. These mental illnesses are most likely chosen deliberately by Ligotti in order to blur the line between natural and supernatural. Through using these mental illnesses, he makes the reader question what they are reading: The audience starts to not trust the protagonist as they are so detached from reality and themselves. In this case, depersonalization and derealization help further push the agenda of the notion that is the unreliable narrator and create further mistrust in the reader. The suspension of disbelief disappears as the narrator becomes even more unreliable, and the reader cannot make sense of what they are reading about as they cannot understand whether what they are reading is worthwhile, or just the ramblings of a mad man.

An example of depersonalization and derealization can be given from Ligotti's work *Alice's Last Adventure*, in which the reader witnesses the downfall of an old lady as she faces her own mortality. The protagonist, Alice, repeatedly mentions her alter ego, which she calls the Other Alice. The Other Alice seems to be a result of the derealization and depersonalization of Alice as she completely loses touch with reality and her own identity: "But this was something that the other Alice would have done—the one who wrote those creepy books" (Ligotti, 2011, 44). The

fact that the protagonist has an alter ego makes her extremely unreliable as she is also revealed to be an alcoholic and has the tendency to withhold vital information from the reader.

An example that could be given is how the reader does not know about the identity of the protagonist. This is not the case in Ligotti's other works, and makes the reader question his intentions in creating such an unreliable narrator who continuously keeps secrets from the reader. This practice of Ligotti's reveals how easily manipulated the reader can be through withholding very ordinary information: This notion pushes the reader to assume, for example, Alice's life before the facts are revealed. But it also subverts expectations and reminds the reader that the person they are reading about is completely delirious as a result of being detached from their surroundings and themselves.

Another example of depersonalization and derealization in the characters of Ligotti can be from *The Dream of a Manikin* in which Ligotti wrote: "However, some "new sense of unreality" undermined her complete emotional assurance in this matter" (Ligotti, 2011, 58). The "new sense of unreality" is awfully similar to the notion that is derealization as the protagonist of *The Dream of a Manikin* is forced to detach from his identified self in order to see that he is actually a product of a dream and a dreamer.

Ligotti implemented the mental illnesses that are depersonalization and derealization into his stories masterfully in order to create mistrust and unease in the reader. Using mental illness as a plot device in order to further the story is an important technique used by the founder of cosmicism, Lovecraft, and goes to show how much Ligotti was inspired and influenced by him.

3.4 Influences of Lovecraft

While many people were and are still influenced by Lovecraft, only a select few succeed in displaying the vision he had when creating his cosmicism. Ligotti was one of these select few who, through expanding on his master's ideas, became perhaps one of the biggest and most popular horror writers of all time.

Almost all great writers put anecdotes from their own lives into the stories that they write, while also sometimes using literature as an escape from their everyday struggles. Ligotti and Lovecraft both did exactly this: They found solace from mental illness through literature and writing. “ I wanted to be a writer in the fashion of Lovecraft, and until I attained some recognition for my horror stories I could barely stand to live with myself. It was something that I really needed to get out of my system” (Schweitzer, 2003, p 55). These words of Ligotti show the reader how important literature is as an escape (through reading) into a different world, while also having a cathartic effect on the author themselves.

Ligotti found solace in reading Lovecraft's hellish stories and was greatly influenced by him when it came to writing horror: “(...) many Lovecraft fans have felt that, in a way, Ligotti ‘takes up’ where Lovecraft left off- that is, that Ligotti is saying what Lovecraft might have said if he were alive today” (Schweitzer, 2003, p 16). Ligotti even used Lovecraftian entities in his story *The Sect of the Idiot*, in which he describes the beings the protagonist faces as: “These cloaked masters, in turn, partook in some measure of godhood, passively presiding as enlightened zombies over the multitudes of the entranced, that frenetic domain of the human” (Ligotti, 2011, 209). The protagonist of *The Sect of the Idiot* cannot look at these cloaked beings at first as the mere sight of them is enough to drive him to insanity, which his mind and body try to protect him from. But morbid curiosity strikes him, and he takes a peek:

(...) their arms were like blades and each had four semicircular grooves cut into them that were spaced evenly across their length; and below were six jointed legs jutting outwards, a feature which transformed each piece into some crablike thing with the apparent ability to scuttle across the floor (Ligotti, 2011, 211).

The tentacled beings that Ligotti describes seem awfully similar to Lovecraft's Cthulhu when it comes to their tentacled appearances, as well as the effect they have on the protagonist as the knowledge that their existence consists is too much for him. This brings the discussion to Ligotti's protagonists and how similar they are to Lovecraft's.

Perhaps the most striking influence of Lovecraft on Ligotti that is extremely blatant upon reading his works is the way he wrote his characters: Like Lovecraft, Ligotti also dealt with mentally deranged protagonists who were also highly intelligent, which in both authors' cases, makes their protagonists unreliable. Even though both authors dealt with the same themes, Ligotti expanded upon the mentally ill but smart protagonist trope curated by Lovecraft by making almost all of his protagonists the villains of the story, and forced the reader to witness the story through their fractured eyes and mind. Ligotti's protagonists are forced into being villains as they face truths that are not meant for them.

While in Lovecraft's works the reader witnesses the downfall of a great mind, Ligotti deals with characters who perhaps already had their downfalls, or were always deranged. This is the main point that separates Ligotti and Lovecraft: While Ligotti was influenced by the mentally ill protagonist trope of Lovecraft's, he also built upon it and put his own perspective into creating his stories. His evil characters face beings that are even more evil than them and "(...) end up suffering at the hands of forces more powerful and sinister than they can ever hope to be" (Schweitzer, 2003, p 58).

The cosmic world (s) that Ligotti presents the reader with are extremely Lovecraftian, but also not at the same time. Lovecraft did not drown Ligotti, but only influenced him. The nightmarish landscapes that Lovecraft created do not exist in Ligotti's works, but he still, through expert writing and his usage of words, conveyed a sense of dread and made the reader know that the world that they are reading about is anything but sunshine and flowers: "(...) I wanted to convey my sense of the universe as something thin and unstable, something that barely has the quivering and illusory quality of a mirage and yet, alas, refuses to dissolve completely into nothingness" (Schweitzer, 2003, p 56).

The universe or the cosmos that Ligotti curated can be described as being more merciless than Lovecraft's. The reason for this is because while Lovecraft's cosmos is uncaring towards the human being, Ligotti's is actively hostile. The human being is a mistake in the Ligottian cosmos and the beings in it try to eliminate them at all costs. An example that can be given is from his work *The Sect of the Idiot*, in which the protagonist is faced with beings that are actively threatening his sanity merely by existing, which reminds him how irrelevant he is when compared to the cosmos. "I was no more than an irrelevant parcel of living tissue caught in a place I should not be, threatened with being snared in some great dredging net of doom, an incidental shred of flesh pulled out of its element of light and into an icy blackness" (Ligotti, 2011, p 401).

When it comes to discussing ethics, one sees that Ligotti was influenced by Lovecraft greatly as ethics matter little to none in either of their stories. In this instance, Lovecraft's cosmicism, combined with Ligotti's input, can be applied to an individual: One person's morals and ethics do not matter in the grand scheme of things, what matters is what the order wants and thinks, just like Lovecraft's Elder Gods. Lovecraft's meaningless universe that has no care or need for the

human being corresponds to the world that is right now: What individuals do does not matter, the world still revolves around the sun, the sun still rises. The world has no care for individuals, but only the masses. This idea is apparent in both Lovecraft and Ligotti's works as they thought alike, though Lovecraft's ideas mostly stay as being very surface level next to Ligotti's.

Ligotti admits that, like Lovecraft, he is "(...) not interested in people and their relationships" (Schweitzer, 2003, p 59) , which would make his stories extremely impersonal, but this is not the case. While Lovecraft mostly used a third person perspective while writing his stories, Ligotti used a first person point of view that sometimes worked against him as it sort of personalized his works and made it harder for the reader to distinguish whether they are reading Ligotti's own ideas, or those of the protagonist.

Another way in which Lovecraft and Ligotti differ is how Lovecraft was mostly influenced by famous people like Poe and Hawthorne, while Ligotti was mostly inspired by movements like symbolism and surrealism.

The usage of symbolism is apparent in Ligotti's works as he is not a straightforward author and uses symbolism to his advantage in order to convey a meaning. An example can be from his story *The Chymist*, in which the reader witnesses the protagonist drug someone to do experiments on them. Ligotti uses the words "rose" and "red" many times in his work in order to make the reader understand the obsessive nature of the protagonist with his prey. He especially uses "rose" while mentioning his kidnaped: In this instance, Ligotti used "rose" in order to signify the sexual nature of his protagonist's intentions. In Greek mythology, roses were associated with goddess Aphrodite, and through masking his protagonist's real intentions by not explicitly mentioning anything sexual, Ligotti used symbolism to his advantage.

The usage of surrealism is especially extremely important in Ligotti's works as he curated his stories as if they are sequences of a dream. Nothing seems to make sense, but everything is extremely well thought through and has a deeper meaning. An example that could be given is from the Dream of a Manikin, as the protagonist denies the fact that he is the product of a dream and is a separate "self" of the dreamer:

Forget other selves. Forget the third (fourth, nth) person view of life in which some god or demon has individuated itself into bits and pieces of all that is. Only first and second persons matter (I and thou). And by all means forget dreams. I, for one, know I'm not a dream. I am real (...) (Ligotti, 2011, 66)

The way Ligotti puts dream-like sequences together is extremely surreal as the reader is not sure if they are reading about a dream or reality. In this instance, Ligotti is extremely similar to Lovecraft as both authors blur the lines between fiction and non-fiction, dream and reality.

Conclusion

Cosmicism can be a notion that is extremely hard to grasp because of its unknowable nature, but should be regarded as a genre on its own because of its impactfulness and the surreal themes it tackles that, combined with other philosophies, make the reader question the reality and unreality of things. Cosmicism makes the reader understand their insignificance while also showing them the deterministic truth of the universe: A universe that is uncaring, merciless and without any aim other than survival.

As the creator of cosmicism, Lovecraft's immense contribution to literature cannot be undermined. He used different techniques such as The Fear of the Unknown in order to spread an ancient fear in the reader. He also dealt with themes such as nihilism and determinism which

added a lot of depth to his cosmicism. The way Lovecraft used language makes the reader realize that they are in a universe that is uncaring towards them, and can threaten their authority. As a result of the 19th century's uncertainty when it came to science and information, Lovecraft posed an opposition against the norm that accepted any information that was given to him. His cosmicism decentered the human being and made them "the other" in a universe that has no care for their existence. His cosmicism relied on the unreliable narrator to awoke paranoia in the audience or the reader.

As a result of combining many sub genres, philosophies and movements, Lovecraft's cosmicism paved the way for minds alike to curate their own stories in a way that was never seen before: Dreamy, surreal, scientific and cosmic. It brought different scientific fields together and needs a great understanding of different movements, philosophies and subgenres to fully be fully understood and analyzed.

Following in Lovecraft's footsteps, Ligotti expanded upon the cosmicism that was built before him. Ligotti's cosmicism differs from Lovecraft's though, as he included a lot of personal anecdotes from his life into his works, while Lovecraft wrote mostly objectively. Lovecraft was also inspired by the happenings of his era and implemented these happenings into his stories through using them as an element of fear, while Ligotti was mostly objective when it came to writing about the world. As a representative of 21st century cosmicism, Ligotti's works stand as perhaps even being greater than those of Lovecraft, who was stuck in his old ways. While Ligotti was not scared of experimenting with different styles of writing through constantly switching up his characters and the protagonists he curated, Lovecraft's works and protagonists pale next to his as a result of constantly writing and thinking the same, despite posing an opposition to the norms of his century.

Ligotti's works show the reader how much potential cosmicism really has, and how vast of a genre it can be if given the chance. He is perhaps one of the few followers of cosmicism who did not get lost in the source material, or the unwritten rules of cosmicism. Instead, Ligotti paved his own path as a mere follower of Lovecraft, not an imitator. And through showing the reader the potential cosmicism has if given the chance, Ligotti's works helped in trying to establish cosmicism as a genre.

Through all the analyses made, as well as explaining the intricacies and details of it and giving examples from two different authors, it is recommended that cosmicism is established as its own genre.

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TÜRKÇE GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Bu tezin amacı, HP Lovecraft tarafından kullanılan tuhaf kurgunun alt dalı olarak kabul edilen cosmicism'in kendi başına bir tür olarak kabul edilmesinin gerektiğini öne sürmek ve bu amaca ulaşmak için iki farklı zamanın yazarları olan HP Lovecraft ve Thomas Ligotti'nin cosmicism'e olan katkısını göstererek, cosmicism'in potansiyelini ortaya koyup neden kendi başına bir tür olması gerektiğini kanıtlamaktır.

İnsanların kendilerini dünyanın ve evrenin en güçlü, en akıllı ve en kapasitesi yüksek varlıklar olduklarını düşündükleri, toplumca bilinen ve kabul edilen bir fikirdir. Bu herkesçe kabul edilen fikre meydan okuyan cosmicism, insanı hikayenin kalbinden kaldırıp ne kadar aciz ve kırılgan olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlar. Postcolonial Studies'in bir parçası olan Othering, cosmicism'in büyük bir parçasıdır. Othering, Batı devletlerinin Doğu devletlerini bilgisiz, aciz ve dinsiz olarak ilan etmesiyle birlikte dışlamasıdır. Aynı konu cosmicism'i anlamak için de önemlidir: Cosmicism, insanı Doğu'nun yerine koyar. Lovecraft'ın Elder Gods'ları insanların hükmünü ve hürriyetini tehdit eder ve ellerinde tuttıkları bilgi, insanları çılgına çevirir.

Cosmicism, ayrıca bir sürü felsefeyi ve akımı bir araya getirerek okuyucuyu düşünmeye teşvik eder. Bu felsefe ve akımların bazıları nihilizm, determinizm ve solipsizmdir. Lovecraft, özellikle nihilizm ve solipsizmden oldukça yararlanmışır: Yarattığı cosmicism, adeta nihilistik bir cennettir, fakat insanlara karşı belli bir tutumu yoktur. Lovecraft'ın dünyası ve yaratıkları, insanları umursamaz çünkü dünya ve evren o kadar büyüktür ki, insanın varlığı onlar için hiçbir şey ifade etmez. Onlar için, insanoğlu bir karıncadan farksızdır ve bu nedenle, Lovecraft'ın yaratıkları insanların varlığını umursamaz. Fakat bu da demek oluyor ki, insanların ahlaki

değerleri de onlar için geçerli değildir. Bu yüzden okuyucunun Elder Gods'ların insanlara karşı düşmanı bir tavır takındığını düşünmesi normaldir fakat Elder Gods'lar sadece umursamazlardır.

Lovecraft'ın hayatı özellikle eserlerini etkilemiştir çünkü hayatı boyunca ailesinden gelen mental sağlık sorunları ile boğuşmuştur ve bu sorunlarla hikayelerini yazarak başa çıkmaya çalışmıştır. Lovecraft'ın yarattığı her ana karakterin bir yada birden fazla mental sorunu vardır ve bu mental sorunlar, onları güvenilir birer anlatıcı yapar. Fakat bir yandan da The Fear of the Unknown tekniğine katkıda bulunurlar. Lovecraft'ın The Fear of the Unknown tekniği, ondan sonra gelen takipçilerinin taklit ettiği önemli bir noktadır: Lovecraft, yarattığı Elder Gods'lar hakkında çoğu detayı (özellikle görünüşleri hakkındaki) okuyucudan saklar. Bu nedenle okuyucu, bu boşlukları kendi hayal gücü ile doldurmaya çalışır ve ortaya, Lovecraft'ın yaratabileceğinden çok daha korkunç bir senaryo çıkar çünkü her okur, boşlukları kendini en çok korkutan şey ile doldurmuş olur.

Lovecraft'ın ana karakterleri, mental sağlık sorunlarından dolayı güvenilir olmazken, yarattığı karakterler Freud'un the Uncanny Valley adlı fenomenasına benzer. Yaratıklarının tam olarak neye benzediğini okuyucuya anlatmayan Lovecraft, okuyucuyu kendi istediği yöne doğru itmek için Elder Gods'lar hakkında küçük ipuçları bırakır. Cthulhu'nun bir ahtapota benzediği ve uzun bir kuyruğu olduğu, bu ipuçlarından sadece birkaçıdır. Fakat, tamamiyle bir ahtapot değildir, bu nedenle Uncanny Valley oluşur. Uncanny Valley, insanın tanıdığı özelliklerin ona uymayan bir varlıkta toplanıp, ortaya ruhsuz, gerçeğe benzeyen fakat aynı zamanda gerçeklikten çok uzak bir yaratık ortaya çıkarmasıdır ve Lovecraft, Elder Gods'ları ile Uncanny Valley'i muazzam bir şekilde ortaya koyar.

Lovecraft'ın takipçilerinden biri olan Thomas Ligotti, 21. Yüzyılın Lovecraft'ı olarak bilinir çünkü hikayelerinde, aynı Lovecraft gibi, cosmicism öğelerini barındırır. Özellikle Lovecraft gibi çoğu bilgiyi okuyucudan saklaması fakat aynı zamanda onun hayal gücünü doğru yönde itecek ipuçları bırakması, Lovecraft'ın yazım tarzını andırır. Aynı zamanda mental sağlık sorunları yaşayan Ligotti, kendi hayatından ve gerileyen mental sağlığından anekdotları hikayelerine serpiştirir ve Lovecraft'ın eserlerinden daha kişisel bir hikaye ortaya çıkarmış olur. Asıl amacının bu olmadığını anlatan Ligotti, yine de kişisel hikayeler ve derin karakterler yaratır. Bu konuda Lovecraft'tan ayrılır çünkü Lovecraft, genelde olaylara, Ligotti ise kişilere odaklanır.

Ligotti ve Lovecraft'ın ana karakterleri, ileri derecede mental sağlık sorunlarıyla bilinir ve bu sorunlar, onları güvenilmez yapar. Bu karakterler, meraklarından dolayı kendi düşüşlerine sebep olurlar ve en sonunda, neredeyse her hikayede, çılgına dönüp akıllarını kaybederler. Bu sebeple, hem Lovecraft hem de Ligotti, okuyucuya bilginin bir sınırı olduğunu ve insanoğlunun bazı bilmemesi gerektiği şeyler olduğunu gösterir. Bu sebeple, hikayeleri birer uyarı olarak ele alınabilir.

Lovecraft'ten farklı olarak Ligotti'nin yarattığı evren, insanoğluna karşı düşmanı bir tavır takınır. Ligotti'nin yaratıkları, ana karakterlerin peşini bırakmaz ve gerileyen mental sağlıkları ile birlikte, düşüşlerine sebep olur.

Yine Lovecraft'ten farklı olarak Ligotti, sembolizmden yararlanır: Ligotti'nin anlattığı hiçbir şey, görüldüğü gibi değildir fakat Lovecraft, genelde her şeyi olduğu gibi okuyucuya aktarır.

Sonuç olarak, Lovecraft'ın yarattığı cosmicismın sınırlarının Ligotti'nin usta klemi ile nasıl genişletilip yayılabileceđi görölmüştür ve bu nedenle, cosmicismın kendi başına bir tür olabileceđi öne sürölmüştür.

