



**FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF PERNAMBUCO (UFPE)  
CENTER FOR ARTS AND COMMUNICATION  
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES**



## **Thalassophobia and the Construction of Evil in the Lovecraftian Lore**

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**Academic Month and Year:  
May - 2024**

## THALASSOPHOBIA AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF EVIL IN THE LOVECRAFTIAN LORE

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### ABSTRACT

Fear is a powerful emotion that may serve as inspiration when developing narratives of Horror Fiction. By acknowledging that, the main objective of the present article is to discuss how thalassophobia — the fear of the sea — may have served as inspiration for H. P. Lovecraft's creation of evil in his narratives. The research was conducted by analyzing two of his most famous tales: *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928) and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936), short stories that used the sea as a background for the plot. Thus, some works from researchers such as J. S. Mackley (2013) and his telling of the Cthulhu Mythos's representation as it is today have been taken into consideration, as well as the ones by John Engle (2014) and Joyce C. Oates (1998). Therefore, it may be assumed that some of his characters, such as the creatures Cthulhu and the Deep Ones, are placed in the story to replicate the feelings of fear brought by thalassophobia. Finally, we discussed how Weird Fiction and Cosmic Horror play an important role in Lovecraft's way of creating fiction. Through these stories, it has been observed that several correlations are present when it comes to the Lovecraftian Lore and the fear of the sea.

**Keywords:** Cosmic Horror; Thalassophobia; H.P. Lovecraft; Horror Fiction; Weird Fiction.

### RESUMO

O medo é uma emoção poderosa que pode servir de inspiração para o desenvolvimento de narrativas de ficção de horror. Reconhecendo isso, o principal objetivo deste artigo é discutir como a talassofobia — o medo do mar — pode ter servido de inspiração para a criação do mal por H. P. Lovecraft em suas narrativas. A pesquisa foi realizada por meio da análise de dois de seus contos mais famosos: *O Chamado de Cthulhu* (1928) e *A Sombra de Innsmouth* (1936), contos que utilizaram o mar como cenário para a trama. Nesse sentido, trabalhamos com pesquisas desenvolvidas por J. S. Mackley (2013) e sua narrativa sobre a representação dos Mitos do Cthulhu como são hoje, bem como os trabalhos de John Engle (2014) e Joyce C. Oates (1998). Portanto, podemos supor que alguns de seus personagens, como as criaturas Cthulhu e Deep Ones, foram colocados na história para replicar os sentimentos de medo trazidos pela talassofobia. Finalmente, discutimos como a Ficção Estranha e o Horror Cósmico são importantes na forma adotada por Lovecraft para desenvolver seus trabalhos. Por meio dessas histórias, observamos várias correlações estabelecidas entre o Lore Lovecraftiano e o medo do mar.

**Palavras-chave:** Horror Cósmico; Talassofobia; H.P. Lovecraft; Literatura de Horror; Ficção Estranha.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Why should we wish to experience fear? What is the mysterious appeal, in the structured coherences of art, of such dissolving emotions as anxiety, dislocation, terror? Is fear a singular, universal experience, or is it ever-shifting, indefinable? We can presume that the aesthetic fear is not an authentic fear but an artful simulation of what is crude, inchoate, nerve-driven and ungovernable in life (Oates, 1998, p.1).

Fear is a natural and prevalent human emotion. It is embedded in most people's lives in a physical, psychological and social manner, as it affects the way people live in society. Suppose a close and medical look is taken at a determined person submitted to a frightening situation. Although knowing that fear is made by the mind, it is common to notice that it affects the nervous system, liberates hormones and causes changes in blood pressure and heart rate. All reactions are designed with a simple objective: to prepare the person to fight or flee (Sikora, 2020).

Therefore, we may say that fear is an emotion that the human bodies create to help defend themselves against any menace. Considering that, why do some people deliberately open a fiction book, or turn on a TV in the safety of their houses only to be exposed to something that the human body was created to run away from? As said by Oates (1998) in the epigraph of this paper, there is a certain appeal that comes while experiencing this aesthetic fear, especially when it is produced by some Literary Masterpieces. Maybe what drives people to enjoy horror as a literary genre, and all its subgenres, is being exposed to horror, but not actually putting themselves in dangerous situations, regardless the effects it has on the mind and the person's psychological state.

Readers often connect intimately to works of literature and the horror genre allows this sort of connection in a way that few genres can. The immersion, as previously mentioned, as well as the sensation one feels after being scared, is not something that only characters inside the stories feel. Instead, the public also experiences the scare and the fear as it is something of their own. Thus, when the influence of fear over a story is acknowledged, it becomes easy to understand how a horror story can be compelling and even entertaining to some people.

This might be what happens in the Horror universe created by Howard Phillips Lovecraft, more commonly known as H. P. Lovecraft (born in 1890, and deceased in 1937). He was a writer from New England, United States, and is responsible for developing some well-known peculiar subjects within horror fiction, as well as the subgenre Weird Fiction and the whole concept of Cosmic Horror. These subgenres work with the representation of fear

and some phobias that often appear in the Lovecraftian Lore, possibly inspiring the way evil is built within his tales.

Taking into consideration the influential capacity that fear can have in the creation of a story, the following question is brought to light: How thalassophobia — a “phobic response to the sea and deep, open water” (Harrington, 2018, p. 27) — might have been a source of inspiration for the author’s construction of evil, as well as the whole horror atmosphere? For analyzing the depiction of fear in Lovecraftian Lore, the methodology chosen was textual analysis as described by Belsey (2013) where different interpretations that come from a text are provided, primarily, by the text itself instead of only external sources. While examining the role fear has in stories written by Lovecraft through the lenses of textual analysis and the description presented by Harrington (2018), we may discuss the possible relations between some monsters of the Lovecraftian Lore and the very common, yet mysterious fear of the unknown; and in this situation, the scary feelings that come when dealing with the unexplored great oceans:

Because the deep parts of our seas and oceans have proved to be much more difficult to explore than remote areas of land, they have remained a reservoir of possibilities. Stories that set out to stretch our imagination by pushing at the boundary between the known and unknown have speculated about their hidden depths, and the creatures that might inhabit them (Harrington, 2018, p. 42).

As a theme in the works of Lovecraft, the sea and the profound fear of it appear often; in Lovecraft’s most famous stories, the sea is the background or even an inherent part of the plot. One example to be analyzed is *The Call of Cthulhu* (Lovecraft, 2016a), a tale originally published in 1928<sup>2</sup> that tells the story of Francis Wayland Thurston, a common man who finds himself on a “dangerous” path after researching the past of his recently deceased great-uncle, a professor called George Gammell Angell. The professor had discovered the existence of a powerful being called Cthulhu, a creature older than humanity itself. By finding and reading the records of Cthulhu’s contacts with humankind, as well as the cults that worship the creature, Angell meets a mysterious and scary end: the same end that his grandnephew expects for knowing too much.

Another story that carries the theme of thalassophobia is *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (Lovecraft, 2016b), published for the first time in 1936<sup>3</sup>: a tale about a young man who decides to take a seaside tour to learn about the obscure port city of Innsmouth. His travel is

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<sup>2</sup> For this analysis it was used an online edition published in 2016.

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accompanied by many mysterious situations and an increasingly bigger sense of danger the more he finds out about the unusual nature of the city, marked by its dubious relations to an undersea civilization that shows up as mysterious as it is evil. The story ends with the character seemingly fleeing from the city and destroying the menace that tainted it, but finding out that one cannot easily escape from their own nature.

The two stories mentioned above are examples of how the sea was used to illustrate the uneasiness brought by the fear of the unknown, both having the sea as the background and relevant part of the plot. *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a) and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (2016b), although sharing the ocean as a constant element, differ on the way in which the evil affects the course of the story as well as the destiny of the characters. Taking into consideration the mentioned characteristics, the two tales become relevant sources to be studied regarding the topic of fear of the sea.

Lovecraft's compelling fearsome creatures might provoke fear and interpretations that go beyond what the reader's minds might be able to define, and a careful look at those creatures brings out some questions: are there any parallels that can be traced between phobias and the monsters that terrorized some Lovecraft's stories? In what ways does the sea serve as an inspiration for the construction of evil? In this sense, this research analyzed possible similarities between monsters such as Lovecraft's Cthulhu or the Deep Ones and the fear of the sea (thalassophobia), or other examples like the space entity of *The Color Out of Space* (1927) and the cosmophobia. In this sense, the fear of the sea as a theme for the construction of background in the stories, like R'lyeh from *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a) and Innsmouth from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (2016b), started to be discussed. It was also observed how the thalassophobia might have been important to the composition of the unique appearances of some of Lovecraft's monsters, as well as the lore that circles them.

Therefore, the mystery and the unknown that naturally accompany the unexplored oceans, and the lack of human knowledge over what creatures inhabit the deep sections of the Earth's waters might serve as a source of inspiration when creating the sea monsters in Lovecraft's stories. A being such as Lovecraft's Cthulhu can be compared to the sea itself: great, powerful and scary, but not only that, scary because humans are still not able to fully understand it. Two big themes are recurrent in the Lovecraftian Lore: the sea and the universe, both spaces that science has tried to explore but remain mainly a conundrum.

## 2 LOVECRAFT AND THE POPULAR IMAGERY

Lovecraft was an American writer born in the city of Providence, State of Rhode Island, located in a region called New England, comprising six states, with great historical importance. The region in which the author was born, as well as his upbringing, were defining aspects and great influences on Lovecraft's writing. Lovecraft wrote about what he knew, and that could be observed in the fact that many of the fictional places in which the stories take place are located in the region of New England: the fictional city of Innsmouth, a seaside town in Essex County, Massachusetts. Said influence can also be noted in *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a), as the story mainly centers around Providence, Rhode Island, another city inside New England.

The so-called Lovecraftian lore comprises a huge assortment of fiction stories that often connect among themselves. Monsters with otherworldly appearances that although being immensely described, are difficult to visualize. Lastly, Lovecraft's tales are composed of a world construction that invites the reader to share the character's feelings of unease, discomfort, thriller, and, as previously mentioned, fear.

Lovecraft's way of writing could be considered an inheritance of a type of fiction which came before the author: *Gothic Fiction*. Although the gothic genre can be traced back to the 1700s, the twentieth century was marked by the expansion of the Gothic genre in literature, as well as theater, cinema, television, among other artistic representations (Hogle, 2002, p.33). The horror stories created by Lovecraft have strong influence of the somber and haunting aesthetic that many authors of the Gothic developed before him. Names such as Horace Walpole (2014), Edgar Allan Poe (2014), Mary Shelley (2018), amongst others, have been responsible for building the gothic genre that influenced the Lovecraftian way of creating horror.

Lovecraft's creations were also very relevant to the Horror genre when it came to the establishment of important subgenres of horror fiction that are still inspiring horror literary and audiovisual productions nowadays:

His stories have served as inspiration to dozens of subsequent writers, with his idiosyncratic style and rich world building functioning as the starting point and setting for a vast expanded universe of fiction. Lovecraft's fiction and the broader Mythos it inspired have become synonymous with the genre of weird and cosmic horror fiction. His pantheon of deities and the mythology interlinking them has

become a rich tapestry for a myriad of successive authors, as well as a powerful influence on the style of horror fiction (Engle, 2014, p.1).

Lovecraft created many fiction works that vary among novels, short stories and collaborations with other authors, and inside them, there are a great number of monsters and evil creatures, which built a horror universe that was and still is broadly consumed. The Lovecraftian Lore has inspired many authors in his close circle of collaborators, but also many creators that years after Lovecraft's passing still absorb some of the author's way of constructing horror. Hence, Lovecraft's pantheon of monsters proved to endure the passage of time and remain relevant still today.

Due to Lovecraft's literary influence, many writers and literary critics have started studying the Lovecraftian Lore. The common interest in the stories created by Lovecraft has been responsible for making the Lovecraftian Lore bigger and more popular (Mackley, 2013). One example of an author who expanded the Lore was August William Derleth and a description of his efforts can be seen in the article: *The Shadow over Derleth: Disseminating the Mythos in The Trail of Cthulhu*, written by J. S. Mackley, published in the book *New Critical Essays on H. P. Lovecraft* (2013).

August Derleth was a relevant fiction writer, known particularly for his proximity to Lovecraft. Derleth was part of the Lovecraft Circle: a group of Lovecraft's correspondents, fiction writers who wrote stories that aligned with the Lovecraftian Lore, and did that with Lovecraft's permission. The Lovecraft Circle included several other authors, as Mackley states (2013, p.119): "In addition to Derleth, other writers who were part of the 'Lovecraft Circle' included Fritz Leiber, Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert Bloch". After Lovecraft's passing in 1937, Derleth published short stories inspired by unpublished texts written by Lovecraft. However, they could not be considered one of Lovecraft's works due to the limited amount of content from Lovecraft himself. That would be the beginning of many controversies regarding Derleth's "collaborations" with Lovecraft as well as his additions to the Lovecraftian Lore.

As explained by Mackley's article (2013), Derleth made many attempts to create an organized universe inside the Lovecraftian Lore that fitted his vision. The Cthulhu Mythos, a term later established to describe the mythology behind creatures like the Cthulhu, however, distanced from what Derleth originally envisioned. One of Derleth's efforts in categorizing Lovecraft's monsters was through the idea of separating the pantheon of monsters into two circles, the Ancient Ones (forces of Cosmic good), and the Great Old Ones (alien deities such

as the Cthulhu, which used to rule but are now hibernating in R'lyeh and will one day bring chaos and destruction to world as we know it).

In what was probably Derleth's biggest addition to the Cthulhu Mythos comes *The Trail of the Cthulhu* (1962): five stories published by Arkham House telling the chronicles of a character named Laban Shrewsbury and his encounters with the evil creatures known as the Great Old Ones.

The critics aimed at *The Trail of the Cthulhu* (1962) came from the fact that the original additions that Derleth made to the Lore were not approved by Lovecraft, and in other cases, his excessive approximation to the original content would be considered as being merely repetitions of Lovecraft's writing. Moreover, Derleth's organization of the ancient beings was never something Lovecraft instated, as originally the presence of the Great Ones and their influence over the narratives was not and did not need to be organized. Chaos and lack of explanation have always been a characteristic of Lovecraft's creation of evil.

In conclusion, even though Derleth's additions to the Lovecraftian Lore were very criticized, his work was greatly relevant to establish how the Cthulhu Mythos is known nowadays. August Derleth took Lovecraft's stories to a bigger public than the original author had ever reached, and providing the reader with a carefully organized background helped to consolidate the whole structure of the universe inside the stories created by Lovecraft.

Another part of Lovecraftian Lore that deserves to be highlighted — maybe the one Lovecraft is most known for — is that of Weird Fiction. The term represents horror, which seeks to explain the unexplainable: fantasy that goes beyond the common ghost story, or popular urban legends. Weird Fiction is, as the name says, something that is strange as in uncommon. It describes creatures navigating the unfamiliar, nearly impossible to define, and bringing out in the reader sensations of disgust, discomfort, aversion, and angst that last after the final page. As defined by Lovecraft himself in the *Supernatural Horror in Literature*: "A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; (...) a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space" (Lovecraft, 2014, p. 3). Incidentally, the works of Lovecraft have heavily influenced many authors of the horror genre nowadays. One example is Stephen King, a fiction writer who delves into Weird Fiction and is responsible for creating many fear-inducing, unusual creatures such as the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* (1977), and Pennywise in the novel *It* (1986), the last one being an intriguing creature because it is a materialization of the human fear.



Alongside Weird Fiction, another relevant subgenre made popular through the Lovecraftian Lore is Cosmic Horror. Also referred to as Lovecraftian Horror this concept is built around one of humanity's biggest fears: the fear of the unknown. "The oldest and strongest emotion in mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is the fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft, 2014, p. 1). In this sense, Cosmic Horror represents human insignificance over the greatness of the Universe. The creatures brought by the Lovecraftian Lore are described as dangerous, unpredictable and incomprehensible, as simply their existence defies human nature. The Great Ones from *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a) illustrate the idea of otherworldly forces impossible to defeat or control as their mere existence poses a threat to human life as it is. Such dread brought by Cosmic Horror might have inspired many works of fiction even nowadays, such as subgenres of horror such as Existential Horror and Psychological Horror. Authors such as Caitlín R. Kiernan, and works such as *The Drowning Girl* (2012) bring out a style of writing that is similar to Lovecraft's way of developing fantastic fictional creatures.

Another relevant fiction work influenced by Lovecraft is the novel *Lovecraft Country* (2016), later being adapted into a TV Series of the same name by the HBO channel (Lovecraft, 2020); a dark fantasy and drama novel which brings out topics influenced by Lovecraft while talking about relevant discussion themes like racism in the United States.

Additionally, one common topic in Lovecraft's tales which is the main focus of the present research is thalassophobia. An author who described the dread brought by the sea was Harrington: "The deep sea offers us an oppressive and foreboding context – a space unexplored, unknowable and overwhelming. In the farthest reaches of this abyss there is only darkness" (Harrington, 2018, p. 27). The sea represents mystery because of men's inability to explore the greatness of the ocean. Humans possess an intriguing relationship with things that cannot be explained: they can either cause curiosity and/or uneasiness. Such ideas compose the main aim of this research: observing how fear can be a fruitful source of inspiration and analyzing the influence that fear might have when placed as an important aspect of a narrative. That is, exploring the fear of the sea and its contradictory compelling and scary state.

Fear is commonly taken as a negative sensation, a system of defense. However, Horror Fiction e, and in this case, stories like *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a) by Lovecraft, create horror by embracing fear. Lovecraft's stories became emblematic by accommodating fears and, at the same time, frightening readers; fearing the sea may appear as one of the sensations

invoked in the different tales. In this context, a question arises why seeking for fear? What is the appeal of negative emotions in literature?

### 3 THALASSOPHOBIA IN THE LOVECRAFTIAN LORE: THE SEA AS AN ENTITY

Horror is directly related to the things society fears. The 21st century began highlighting terrorism, crime and violence: the fear of the “invisible threat” stood firm in popular imagery (Jets, 2018). Similarly, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) expressed the fear of the vampire as well as the fear of the unknown, a theme that appeared in the 19th century (McLean, 2013, p. 332).

What can be argued is that it is customary for the horror genre to replicate the fears shared by society in literary productions. Therefore, we noticed that Lovecraft brings out the thalassophobia as inspiration for the construction of evil in the Lovecraftian Lore, but not just the fear of the sea itself as the fear of the ocean’s mysteries and its unreachability. This can be seen through Lovecraft’s quote in the *Supernatural Horror in Literature*: “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (Lovecraft, 2014).

The oceans and the universe show up as different aspects of Lovecraft’s themes but share similar characteristics: replicating humanity’s constant habit of repelling everything and anything that cannot be explained or has not yet been explored. Horror fiction is keen on using the fears of the reader because the things that one fears are often fascinating things. It is known that only a small parcel of the Earth’s oceans has been explored, which means that 95% of the waters remain a complete conundrum (Harrington, 2018). Such mystery is one of the things on which the fear of the sea is based, as no one knows what is there and whether it is dangerous, but it also becomes a source of great curiosity. Such conflicting aspects of the oceans are present in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (2016) and marked by being the only tale published as a book during his lifetime (Joshi, 2013), with its first Brazilian Edition only in 2010 (Lovecraft, 2010). When observing one of the main character’s final remarks, we can see that although the character lived the horror, he was not devoid of fascination for it: “The tense extremes of horror are lessening, and I feel queerly drawn toward the unknown sea-deeps instead of fearing them. I hear and do strange things in sleep, and awake with a kind of exaltation instead of terror” (Lovecraft, 2016b, p. 50).

As it was previously mentioned, Lovecraft's contradictory view of the sea can be seen in his writings. He recognizes the fear of the unknown but chooses to remain as a layman and even refuses scientific discovery.

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, 2016a, p.1).

This excerpt shows up at the beginning of *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a) and openly expresses the idea that certain knowledge of the world can become dangerous. Therefore, the sea is and should keep its status as a topic of ignorance and mystery to the general public. The sea is mysterious, most definitely dangerous and the people's awareness of its depths should remain as a topic of imagination and creativity rather than a subject of scientific study. Thus, the implication is that humanity is better off without knowing: rather than exploring, one should only conjecture over what inhabits the deep seas.

Another aspect that could be highlighted when raising the matter of the presence of thalassophobia in the two Lovecraftian tales studied in this paper — *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a) and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (2016b) — is how the ocean is presented. The Cthulhu monster from *The Call of Cthulhu* and the Deep Ones from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (2016b), as well as the cults that dabble with such dangerous entities, are the main representations of evil in the short stories. In this sense comes the metaphor of the sea as an *entity*. The source from which the fear comes, therefore, is that the sea poses as a character, being not only the background, but also the originator of all troubles.

In *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a), the most substantial depiction of the sea terror might be the underwater city of R'lyeh:

He talked of his dreams in a strangely poetic fashion; making me see with terrible vividness the damp Cyclopean city of slimy green stone—whose geometry, he oddly said, was all wrong—and hear with frightened expectancy the ceaseless, half-mental calling from underground: “Cthulhu fhtagn”, “Cthulhu fhtagn”. These words had formed part of that dread ritual which told of dead Cthulhu's dream-vigil in his stone vault at R'lyeh, and I felt deeply moved despite my rational beliefs (Lovecraft, 2016a, p.15).

R'lyeh is portrayed as disgusting, abnormal, a source of nightmares; a place no human should ever be or know about. The worst of all: it seems to be a place habited by not only the Cthulhu but also those known as the Great Old Ones, beings that although currently in a state

of hibernation, were even stronger and more dangerous than the Cthulhu and the responsible for the inevitable destruction of the human race that would happen once they woke up. In this sense, R'lyeh could represent the ocean itself: not for the disgusting aspect of it, but rather for the great incognito that it happens to be. The sunken city is an enigma, the descriptions of it are few which only increases the mystery behind the place described as “cyclopean” or in later accounts “non-Euclidean”. These are peculiar and complicated concepts, also difficult to describe and picture. R'lyeh, just like the Earth's oceans, is mysterious, unexplored, misunderstood and home to many dangerous creatures that the human race does not perceive or comprehend. As the author would suggest: humanity is better off without knowing.

The existence of places like R'lyeh is a strong endorsement of what constitutes the *Lovecraftian Horror*. The shallow description of the sunken city only adds to the mystery behind it. R'lyeh is unreachable, dangerous and unexplainable, not unlike the concepts that bring out the fear of the unknown. Besides, the ocean is not merely a background, as it is presented superficially. The ocean is an important part of the plot of *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a), as the home of the creatures that compose the evil in the story.

Likewise, in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (2016b), the sea is the element that ties normal human life to the pressing dangers lived by the main character. The fact that the city was surrounded by the sea is what condemns it, for it was susceptible to the deception of the sea creatures. That led to the townsfolk being fooled by the illusion of prosperity brought by the Deep Ones.

#### **4 THE EFFECT OF FEAR AND THE MAIN CHARACTERS**

The characters in many of Lovecraft's tales are presented with many similarities, such as being well educated, curious and smart in their ways of uncovering mysteries. However, some aspects differ between Francis Wayland Thurston, the main character from *The Call of Cthulhu* (2016a), and Robert Olmstead from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (2016b). In the latter, the name of the character is not mentioned in the short story, but it was disclosed in Lovecraft's notes (Joshi and Schultz, 2001), and between the two characters, one contrast is their relation to evil and how they met danger.

Francis Wayland Thurston appears in the story as a normal person with a common but relevant position, as being such a banal character might be what makes him so relatable; the common man inserted into a dangerous and supernatural scenario merely in an accidental way.

But it is not from them that there came the single glimpse of forbidden aeons which chills me when I think of it and maddens me when I dream of it. That glimpse, like all dread glimpses of truth, flashed out from an accidental piecing together of separated things in this case an old newspaper item and the notes of a dead professor (Lovecraft, 2016a, p.1).

Thurston's whole journey, told in first person, happens through the lens of a viewer rather than playing an active role in the turn of events. The character's position in the story comes from analyzing what others have done: his Great-Uncle George Gammell Angell, who conducted a study to analyze the influence of Cthulhu in people's minds through dreams; Inspector John Raymond Legrasse, while leading a search party to investigate the disappearance of several people, finds himself having to deal with an evil cult who worshipped the Cthulhu, and finally, Gustaf Johansen, the Norwegian sailor who is responsible for fighting the Cthulhu and directly sending him back to his period of dormancy. Although Francis Thurston's knowledge of the truth about Cthulhu and the Great Ones puts him in a supposed position of danger, in reality, his influence on the developments is closer to none. However, that does not hurt the immersion as this non-influential position makes the character relatable while he shares the position of the viewer along with the reader.

On the other hand, Robert Olmsted, the main character in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (2016b) has a completely different position concerning the events as well as his way of dealing with fear and imminent danger. The character begins as an alien element to the Innsmouth atmosphere and the city is treated as a mere stop in his route rather than his initially planned destination: "I was celebrating my coming of age by a tour of New England—sightseeing, antiquarian, and genealogical—and had planned to go directly from ancient Newburyport to Arkham, whence my mother's family was derived" (Lovecraft, 2016b, p. 2).

Differently from the Thurston character, Robert Olmsted plays an active role in the story. As he meets the townsfolk, he talks to the well-informed habitants of the town and when his knowledge of the evil things happening in Innsmouth becomes too big, he is chased through town by the Deep Ones and is responsible for the later destruction of the port city. However, what might be the most relevant aspect of this character is how he is connected to the evil that has befallen the city and how he handles his so-found fate.

One night I had a frightful dream in which I met my grandmother under the sea. She lived in a phosphorescent palace of many terraces, with gardens of strange leprous corals and grotesque brachiate efflorescences, and welcomed me with a warmth that

may have been sardonic. She had changed—as those who take to the water change—and told me she had never died. Instead, she had gone to a spot her dead son had learned about, and had leaped to a realm whose wonders—destined for him as well—he had spurned with a smoking pistol. This was to be my realm, too—I could not escape it. I would never die, but would live with those who had lived since before man ever walked the earth (Lovecraft, 2016b, p. 50).

As it is later discovered, the townsfolk had not only business connections with the Sea Creatures, but they also had close relationships with them, which led to the birth of people like Robert Olmstead: a hybrid between human and fish creature who would at some point complete his transformation and become one of the creatures. His unavoidable fate and gloomy perspectives for the future leave him despaired. However, he chooses to embrace the fear and his destiny and finds closure in accepting his outcome. “I feel queerly drawn toward the unknown sea-deeps instead of fearing them (...) awake with a kind of exaltation instead of terror” (Lovecraft, 2016b, p. 50).

## 6 CONCLUSION

There is a reason why the ocean is such a common source of inspiration in Literature: The idea that only a small portion of the Earth’s Waters has been explored causes unease, as humanity is known to repel unknown things. The Ocean and the Universe, in all their greatness, stand as fuel to the fear of the unknown simply for humanity’s inability to fully comprehend them. Therefore, the relation between thalassophobia and Lovecraftian Lore can be explained by the fact that the huge gap that exists in the human knowledge of the oceans opens space for creativity and makes one wonder about what inhabits the deep waters of the Earth. Places like R’lyeh and Innsmouth, as well as creatures such as the Cthulhu and the Deep Ones, are brought to life when taking thalassophobia as a source of inspiration in the creation of evil. The same sea that evokes feelings of fear and unease also brings out the curiosity to create the monsters that live inside of it.

By studying the presence of thalassophobia in some of Lovecraft’s tales, it is possible to see that the fear of the sea is a recurring theme, however, it is not merely the sea that poses a threat, it is the whole idea of what exists inside the lack of human knowledge over the ocean. Not only that, but the idea is that anything unknown bears a great danger. In Lovecraft’s stories, the sea poses as the protagonist of this ancient threat, but everything else can bear a danger as big: darkness, nature, undiscovered species and even other humans. Much of the Cthulhu threat is fueled by the great array of doubts and lack of knowledge over

what the creature is, what are its intentions and most of all, what kind of dangers it brings to humanity. The great scientific advances of this century still have not been able to overcome human ignorance on this topic, which opens space for literary creation. As long as the major part of the sea remains a conundrum, conjectures will be made through literature to fill what science has yet to discover.

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