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THE ASCENDANCY OF NYARLATHOTEP

Abstract. Lovecraft's posthumous eruption of fame brought about a series of transformative processes in the writer's once wholesome vision. Such a development essentially led to the fragmentation of the initial assortment of ideas provided by the creator of the mythos, but it also spawned a handful of original interpretations of the classic material. This paper examines the specific nature of Lovecraftian horror (as well as literary horror in general) and the difficulty of its cross-media implementation. The analysis focuses mainly on cinematographic attempts, dissecting some of the more peculiar film adaptations of *the Cthulhu mythos* and examining their faithfulness to the source material, fear-inducing potential, and prominent posthuman aspects. The essay concludes by utilizing the above information to determine the contemporary state of *weird fiction* and pondering upon the future prospects of the genre.

Key words: cosmicism; film adaptations; H.P. Lovecraft; posthumanism; pulps; weird fiction.

It is difficult to name a sci-fi author who would be more at odds with contemporary posthuman sensibilities than Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Although the Recluse of Providence died destitute at the age of forty-six, he has had a highly proliferative writing career. His spontaneous bursts of creativity gave birth not only to an impressive body of fictional work but also to the literary philosophy known as cosmicism. Motivated to take action by the man's premature passing, the circle of his friends and followers decided to keep the unusual legacy alive, and, as decades went by, it changed and grew. Today, there are very few fiction enthusiasts who have not at least heard of the name H.P. Lovecraft. The Cthulhu Mythos has fastened its grip on popular culture, infecting millions of minds around the world and leaving a noticeable mark on the current media scape. But is this situation really as beneficial to the writer's brainchild as it appears? Mood, theme, and skill-wise,

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are the new creations even remotely comparable to the original ones? Can the posthuman depictions they contain hold a candle to the trends that presently dominate the genre? Focusing mainly (but not exclusively) on the relations between Lovecraft's literary pieces and their film adaptations, this paper makes an attempt to enumerate, examine, and compare the most prominent examples of transcending the human condition featured in these works. By contrasting these reinvigorated and freshly emergent themes against the technological and informational ones, it aims to show that there is still room for creative dissent in a field that has become oversaturated by cybernetic limbs, hyperspace voyages, and endless permutations of the concept of digital consciousness. Since the mythos-based elements can exert a substantial impact on the recipient's sense of self, worldview, and emotional balance, the specifics of these changes will also be taken into consideration. However, to carry out all of the above properly, it is first necessary to establish what narrative qualities make a work Lovecraftian.

ON HORROR, VISUALIZATION, AND PULPS

One of the main issues with film adaptations is that the story's transition onto the screen is never a perfect process. It is a laborious and imprecise one, closer to a loose association of concepts embedded in different media than to any sort of translation; the result, even when reached with the utmost dedication of a true devotee, tends to disappoint. That's not to say that book-based pictures are all irredeemably flawed and not worth one's time. Such a statement would be both haughty and untrue. It is just that some communication channels are better suited for exploring certain ideas than others. On that note, the relationship of Lovecraft's literary pieces with their film adaptations is rather turbulent, showcasing stark differences in exploratory aptitudes between the two. Despite his rich creative output, the works written by the Recluse of Providence have a tendency to struggle on the silver screen. Interestingly enough, this unfortunate trait is also shared by contemporary horror writers like Stephen King and Dean Koontz, both of whom have been exposed to and fascinated by the pioneer of weird fiction at some point in their lives. How is it possible for the oeuvres of four people with distinct writing techniques to suffer from the same malady? Certainly, some random factors might be at work here, but part of the cause can be identified as the ever-present gap between seeing and visualizing. This peculiar rift ex-

ists in all book-film relations, but it is especially noticeable when examining writings containing an abundance of sensual and psychological elements. Complex literary constructs are of ten difficult to transfer without trivializing them, but even when carried over flawlessly, they tend to leave one with a subtle sense of dissatisfaction. Why? Because everything has been codified; the *proper* version of the story has been captured on film, effectively calling the reader's own imagining into question and undermining its relevance. The mind starts melding our initial character interpretations with the actors who portrayed them, and the vivid interactions created by reading the passages take on a new appearance to match the filming angles. One may very well try to fight off the ensnaring process, but it is an uphill struggle requiring constant self-regulation. This visual hijacking forms only one-third of the problem, however.

The second part holds a strong connection to the crux of the horror genre, which is, of course, fear. Ketchup-soaked poultry bits are hardly horrifying, and the novelty of rubber innards wears off pretty quickly. Continuous jump scares do not generate *real* dread; they simply cause the viewer to experience a defensive reaction in response to an unexpected stimulus. When it comes to inducing true fear, one of the methods of doing so is of special interest to this work because it can be applied both to literature and cinematography. This mechanism was perhaps best explained by Edmund Burke in his famous treatise on the beautiful and the sublime. The Anglo-Irish philosopher made it clear that obscurity is an indispensable factor when instilling fright into someone's mind; the inability to assess the complete extent of the danger creates a sense of uneasiness in the medium's recipient. Yet the uncertainty is also fleeting, and it can be stripped away almost instantly if the author decides to fully reveal the nature of the obscured menace (132).

The final factor of import is a mixture of familiarity and believability; its strength is the easiest to measure accurately upon the antagonist's potential identification. How much does the introduced character differ from a standard representative of our species? Is he an aberrant humanoid? A disembodied consciousness? A physical manifestation of an abstract concept? The permutation potential is great, but the results are still quantifiable and largely dependent on one's suspension of disbelief. This specific state of mind is far from being easily-attainable- it can only be achieved and maintained with a great deal of effort on the author's part. Stranger does not always mean better either. After all, every subgenre of fiction holds potentially intriguing concepts that were ruined by flimsy execution. Obviously, there is no uni-

versal formula that would result in a masterpiece every single time, although the more bizarre the introduced notion, the greater care is needed to prevent it from folding in on itself and becoming ludicrous. It is often best to focus on an innocuous object and to keep twisting it until its connection to the original form becomes noticeably distorted. By weaving together the familiar and the unknown, the author can intensify the cognitive dissonance of the uncanny first instilled by the process of obfuscation. A good example of this mechanism can be located in *The Hell bound Heart*, Clive Barker's 1986 novella. Known as the Cenobites, the book's secondary antagonists form a group of extra dimensional beings with wholly alien concepts of pain, pleasure, and everything in between. The ashen frames they possess carry an untold number of ritualistic scars and grotesque body modifications, and their minds are as warped as their flesh. The realization that these entities might have been human at some point appears suddenly, raising the uneasiness caused by nebulous presentation and otherness to the state of genuine dread. It insidiously makes the reader wonder just what unspeakable atrocities distanced the wretches so greatly from their original template. This, in turn, leads to a burst of speculative visualization and, naturally, an increase in immersion.

Lovecraft's own theories about the concepts of horror and alienness followed a similar logic to the one presented above. As an avid aficionado of fiction, he chose his subgenre based on the conviction that fear is the "deepest and strongest emotion, and the one which best lends itself to the creation of nature-defying illusions" ("Notes" 175). Being aware of the interconnections between uncanniness and dread, he pointed out how difficult it is to "create a convincing picture of shattered natural law or cosmic alienage or 'outsideness' without laying stress on the emotion of fear" ("Notes" 175). Numerous writers have contributed to the formation of his thematic and narrative preferences, including such names as Edgar Allan Poe and Lord Dunsany.¹ He also expressed a great deal of admiration for the literary workshops of two other weird fiction writers, William Hope Hodgson and Algernon Blackwood, going as far as to describe the latter one's novella *The Willows* as an ideally crafted work of horror ("Supernatural" 1049–51). Praise of this sort was reserved for the select few, however. In fact, Lovecraft was at his most insightful when pointing out the flaws of those who shared his medium

¹ Lovecraft actually saw the degree of this influence as a problem. In his letter to Elizabeth Toldridge he stated: "There are my 'Poe' pieces and my 'Dunsany pieces'—but alas—where are any Lovecraft pieces?" (315).

of choice. While discussing the issue of believability in weird tales, he stated that a writer “cannot, except in immature pulp charlatan–fiction, present an account of impossible, improbable, or inconceivable phenomena as a commonplace narrative of objective acts and conventional emotions” (“Notes” 178). This observation might be rather obvious by today’s standards, but it certainly was not apparent in the *Argosy* era. The quality of most horror and sci-fi works published in pulp magazines matched the one of the printing paper. Devoid of proper pacing and exposition, these writings embraced sensationalism instead of otherness and mistook revulsion for fear. Overusing the humanocentric travellers-as-deities cliché was also commonplace. For Lovecraft, these shortcomings were a sign literary shallowness. In his fiction, there is no place for muscle-bound professors, monster wrestling, or Martian princesses. Sensationalism and wish fulfillment are replaced by ambiguity and man’s insignificance in the face of the vast and uncaring cosmos. As noted by the philosopher Graham Harman, disregarding the Recluse of Providence as a mere pulp writer is a decision brought about by social factors, not critical ones (vi). Expectedly enough, some of them just happen to be rooted in simple snobbery.

ON DIVERGENT PATHS

Regrettably, not all of the contemporary artists who explore the mythos can be commended in the above fashion. Just like any other genre, weird fiction contains a wide array of works, from hastily released duds to pieces that attempt to truly embrace the previously discussed qualities of Lovecraft’s works. Although the writer’s legacy spans many different mediums, this section will focus mainly on providing the reader with cinematography-focused examples because these ventures into the mythos portray the current trends relatively vividly and have a great fondness for posthuman motifs.

Undeterred by many other pretenders to the title, the Spanish *La mansión de los Cthulhu* is arguably the greatest movie-based insult to Lovecraft’s ideas. Being a generic demonic possession story with a jumble of disjointed terms borrowed from the mythos, it has an extremely limited understanding of the themes it fumbles with and shows utter narrative incompetence. Fortunately enough, Simón’s horror gem is as forgettable as it is insulting.

On the other hand, poor execution of great ideas can also lead to disappointment, as is the case with HPLHS’ 2011 release, *The Whisperer in*

Darkness. Squandered potential is the film's prime failing. At first, everything seems fine. The feature paces itself properly, maintains a good balance between folkloristic superstition and educated distrust, and features a protagonist who is easy to project onto. Regrettably, this delicately crafted ambience does not last; near the conclusion of the third act, the picture completely jumps the shark. In an effort to make his final escape, the lead character commandeers an old biplane, appoints a little girl as the machine's pilot, and engages in a grand aerial battle against a swarm of spaghetti-headed aliens, who just cannot get enough of the spotlight. This unexpected flood of pulpiness effortlessly breaks through the viewer's immersion, negating all the previous world-building endeavors as well as the ones that follow. Classifying these movies as Lovecraft-inspired is a good choice, but categorizing them as Lovecraftian might be going too far. The first one is contemptible; the second one cripples itself and wobbles hopelessly on the border between pulp and artistic worth, unable to wholly embrace either. Yet there are directors out there whose creations fully deserve to be called Lovecraftian. *Nyarlahotep*, an independent short directed by Christian Matzke, delivers the pure essence of a weird fiction tale. Admittedly, it is just a few steps above an audiobook narration of the original story, but that works in its favor; the minimalistic, sepia-filtered visuals actually convey the subtle enmity of the world, and most of the depicted events maintain their interpretational ambiguity.

The movie *Dagon*, whose contents are actually far closer to the novella *Shadow Over Innsmouth* than to its namesake, deserves a more detailed analysis. While both of the storylines follow a similar structure and stay true to the spirit of weird fiction, the conclusions they offer are visibly at variance. *Innsmouth*'s final paragraphs are a slow descent into madness that results in the narrator shedding the last vestiges of humanity. His progressing physical alterations, condescending opinions about the surface people, and eagerness to dwell amongst the undying all inform the reader that the person penning the words has become something utterly alien and is not to be trusted. The only connection they now share is language, and even that final link becomes undone once the fanatical chanting in the native tongue of the Deep Ones starts. This shift is slow but merciless, like an existential cancer slowly devouring the mind. As for the previously mentioned novella-movie discrepancy, it is not so much caused by what happens as by how certain events transpire; the cause of the divergence lies chiefly in the presentation. In contrast to the book, the film's conclusion offers a lot more ambiguity and room

for interpretation. Granted, it can hardly be seen as a happy one, but it does provide a hefty amount of positive undertones. Saved from fear and ignorance by his mate, the lead character is reborn underneath the waves; he takes in some of the splendor of the newly-discovered world and becomes enlightened by it. Finally, the posthuman couple crosses the threshold of their deity's underwater kingdom, where they can be together for all eternity. The exact nature of this sequence is accentuated even further by the decision to take a paragraph from the original work and use it as the final image before the closing credits. Noticing its similarity to a scripture quote is only natural, since the whole ending sequence is an apparent reversal of man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. If it was not for the occurrences that make up the rest of the film, the ambience of these images would be overwhelmingly blissful, leaving absolutely no doubt in the viewer's mind as to their positive nature. As it is, the picture proves to be a rich fount of posthuman themes and a fine example of Lovecraftian film making. Both of these qualities shall be examined below.

The narrow, convoluted streets of Imboca bear witness to a clash of conflicting ideologies that all revolve around transcending the human condition. Although perhaps the term *subhuman* might be slightly more appropriate in the case of the locals. From an organizational standpoint, the incompetence and disarray of the cult are stupefying. The protagonist slips out of its grasp multiple times, leaving the audience to wonder just how this congregation survived for so long in the first place. But while this ineptitude is clearly the screenwriter's intentional attempt at comedy, it does not, in any way, detract from the other faults these creatures possess. For beings who constantly obsess over the possibilities offered by immortality, they are not any more immune to injury than ordinary humans. The dangers of being stabbed to death or incapacitated by a blow to the head are as real to the townspeople as to anyone else. Furthermore, the changes undergone by the devotees cannot be classified as anything close to a unified, stable transformation. Some of them take on the physical qualities of cephalopods like octopi and squids. Others, with their bulbous eyes and webbed limbs, are more akin to frogs. While the Order's modus operandi makes it feasible to assume that its members all have different fathers, even the cultists who share a certain theme manifest their inhuman traits with little to no consistency, regardless of things like age and gender. Instead of showing the way to evolutionary ascendancy, this gives the impression of a volatile, degenerative mutation. *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* presented the process slightly better, depicting the metamorphosis

in a more uniform manner. An air of revulsive mystery was also present around those changes, but they were ruled by bodily homogeneity and largely age-dependent.

Having covered the most disturbing hindrances, it is time to move on to the benefits of Dagon's patronage. Still, one should not make the mistake of assuming that the murderous dedication of the fishermen stems solely from an attractive reward system. For those who were children during the upheaval, the Dantean arrangement made by their parents soon became the natural order of things. Assuming that the basics of morality and ethics were passed to them in the first place, these kids abandoned such notions quickly—at least as far as outsiders were concerned. Yet it was likely the emergence of the next generation that completely severed Imboca's ties with the rest of the human race. The freshly-spawned hybrids simply did not know any other way of life than the one that had been passed down to them. This phenomenon is illustrated well by the interaction between Paul and the little boy whom he encounters in one of the houses. Not only does the child actively help in revealing the runaway's position to the hunting party, but he also cheers on the tentacle-armed, razor-toothed father figure who attempts to choke the life out of Marsh. Upon the conclusion of the scuffle, the bambino kneels next to his caregiver's bloated form, sobbing and begging papa to get up. He does not see the inherent grotesqueness of the locals as something to be feared, associating it with familiarity and stability instead. According to his perception of the world, the real source of danger is the suspiciously unblemished intruder—an obvious interloper from the outside whose unchecked presence signifies a threat to the community's safety and wholesomeness. With such a peculiar type of upbringing, the intensity of the cultists' commitment to the cause is hardly surprising, however, the accolades offered by the sea deity also factor into it. Semi-miraculous manifestations of food and gold form the basis of the pact; they are what initially wins the half-starved folk over. By appropriating one of the most famous feats of the competition, Dagon calls the Christian God's power into question and brandishes his own. After all, a higher being that actually listens to the pleas of its flock is infinitely more convincing than even the most charismatic sermon. Imboca's supplication to the Great Old One gives birth to a highly unusual dynamic; in the new system, all of the social and economic variables undergo subjugation to the freshly-adopted religious constant. As long as the fishermen maintain a steady flow of prayers and sacrifices, they do not have to worry about their material wellbeing or engage in commercial endeavors.

Providing sustenance for the whole settlement is no longer an issue. Certainly, this model of existence might seem cruel, primitive, and unethical by human standards. Then again, the Order's members no longer feel inclined to make use of the *homo sapiens* label, and regulations laid down by the representatives of an inferior species are of little interest to them. Overall, the Dagonian approach is not much worse than the lifestyle proposed by real-life corporate society—in some aspects, it might even be better. At least the dreamt-up critters from Imbocado not try to deceive themselves as to what they have become. They embrace their monstrosity wholeheartedly and look the prey in the eye when delivering the killing blow.

The ultimate prize obtainable by a cultist is the ability to live forever in the sea god's domain. Yet what guarantee is there that any of these devotees will receive the gift they so desire? As far as the picture goes, there can be no absolute certainty; all that the viewer is left with is the exceedingly idyllic scene at the very end, which almost seems to be provoking some gruesome twist to occur. That being noted, the original story takes a more explicit route. It mentions transformed beings coming back from the depths to visit their distant descendants and employs dream sequences as a (surprisingly stable) method of communication with those who unwilling to leave the underwater gardens. Naturally, Lovecraft would not settle for a blatant application of sensationalism, so the reader is exposed to these dark truths by the town drunkard and the mentally-warped narrator. Due to this, the intensity of the claims is balanced by dubious credibility and vagueness of delivery. But regardless of their authenticity, the specifics of Dagon's final reward are too firmly rooted in materiality to be classified as a spiritual variation of afterlife. Indeed, various concepts of technological transcendence established by science-fiction authors during the past few decades would have a far easier time handling such a label. Gibson, Asimov, Ellison, Pynchon—by leaving the meat space behind and transferring the human consciousness into the digital beyond, these writers, as well as many of the lesser known ones, have intentionally blurred the line between cyberspace and the matters of spirit. Still, the fact that Lovecraft's novella and its adaptation brandish a somewhat materialistic attitude towards worship and salvation does not make their religion-rooted elements any less intricate or unsettling.

No attempt will be made to portray the Esoteric Order of Dagon as being indisputably correct in regards to its ideology. It is just that, out of the three factions presented in the film, Imboca's residents form the only party with a somewhat functional approach to the posthuman. Unlike the slaughtered

followers of Christ, these beings can produce tangible proof of their deity's power—or its existence, for that matter. Be it ritualistically-generated storms, whole schools of fish simply allowing themselves to get caught, or the Kraken-like Deep One himself, the town has no shortage of dark miracles that deny understanding and, by extent, explanation. Despite all of its scientific acumen, the world of man cannot find a place for these creatures in its paradigm. According to Lovecraft's original story, it cannot hope to effectively fight against them either. The race of man has grown so complacent and self-absorbed because of its previous accomplishments that it is no longer able to accept the notion that the world does not revolve around it. When exposed to the vagaries of cosmic horror, the third group's representatives are horrified to realize that their bank accounts and social acumen do not grant them any sort of reprieve. Patterns, theories, and research methods crumble; illusions of grandeur and immortality are drowned out amidst the screams. And while this is true for nearly every scenario that portrays the downfall of human civilization, the sanity-shattering interactions with timeless beings whose thought processes are too complex and alien to comprehend deliver something more than the standard dose of cathartic nihilism. Because of their inclusion, the short-sighted, egocentric paradigm is razed to the ground, and a different one, vaster and more intrinsic, gets erected in its place. The new construct does not bother with trivialities like sociopolitical stratagems, ethnical coexistence or respect for Mother Nature since these problems are inherently tied to the limited perceptions of the human condition. Instead, it hints at the workings of the cosmos-at-large and acknowledges the presence of unbounded entities to whom humanity is but a speck of dust. The protagonists of Lovecraft's stories might lose their sanity from direct exposure to such revelations, but the reader is left with an awareness-expanding, philosophically-charged feeling of awe that is difficult to find in any other genre of fiction.

Henry Saine's *The Last Lovecraft*, released in 2009, chooses a route that stands in diametric opposition to the contents of the previous paragraph. The film can best be described as a buddy picture with a skinraft of Lovecraftian themes. Extremely humanocentric and campy, it takes various mythos elements and intentionally mishandles their implementation to create comedy. Inhuman horrors from beyond are stripped of their insidious presence, and the chief antagonist's tactics are akin to those of a Saturday morning cartoon villain. Even the ending holds very strong pulp overtones, with the gloating evildoer getting blown to bits and the group embarking on another quirky

adventure. Saine introduces the viewer to a world where a trio of physically-unfit, reference-spewing dimwits is able to thwart every element of Cthulhu mythology it comes across. It is this directorial stunt that marks the picture as both whimsical and tragically insightful at the same time. The Frankensteinian patchwork of moods and themes might be difficult to accept at first, but the effectiveness of its subversive qualities cannot be denied. The approach to this reenvisioning signifies Saine's understanding of weird fiction and its contemporary problems—what he does for parodic effect has become a genuine, ignorance-rooted trend in today's Lovecraft-related works.

That is because Cthulhu sells. From novelty bedroom slippers to pepper mints, the most unexpected of products have been made more marketable by using the Great Old One's likeness. Companies dealing in collectible card-and board games virtually flood their respective markets with images of burly, octopus-headed humanoids, steadily familiarizing the medium's recipient with these reductionist depictions and, in effect, removing all of the awe and wonder from his mind. Lovecraft's brainchild becomes just another imaginary hurdle, a boring monster to be defeated. With no need for ambiguity or active interpretation, the once-impressive pantheon of horrid entities gets hollowed out and turned into a glorified assembly line. Since it mass-produces simplistic wares that try to imitate real depth, this kitsch industry differs little from the ones pumping out rosy-cheeked cherubs and infinite variations of green meadows. Most of the people who get introduced to Lovecraft through this trivial portrayal never really move past it and continue to lab or under the false impression that the author's body of work constitutes of nothing more than pulp drivel. Worse still, some of the willingly ignorant individuals actually set out to leave their own mark on the oversaturated market, escalating the problem even further. When dealing with Lovecraftian literature in particular, the chief issue is different. It revolves around preference and exposure. With hard and naturalistic variants dominating the science-fiction of today, it would be difficult for a retro-focused hybrid of soft sci-fi, horror, and fantasy to carve out a respectable niche for itself. Moreover, an author who openly tries to channel the style, themes, or story elements of another needs a fairly impressive workshop and a reasonable amount of experience to stand a chance of succeeding. In contrast to this, many attempt to emulate the Cthulhu mythos while being relatively new to the profession, quickly concluding that the results are not worth the effort. On an equally depressing note, Lovecraftian anthologies like Joshi's *Black Wings* are published fairly frequently, but the texts within them rarely get any

additional exposure. Such tomes have a limited audience and swiftly fade into obscurity. Resultantly, these writers are as plagued by lack of recognition as their predecessor, with the added handicap of being branded imitators. As of 2011, Arkham House, the self-appointed preserver of Lovecraft's memory and literary legacy, cannot be of any help to them either; being a small press publisher, it had an undersized readership to begin with, but the reader base is sure to have decreased even further after the death of April Derleth, the co-founder's daughter and inheritor. Following the woman's passing, the company has effectively ceased all work on future publishing projects. Despite the optimistic announcements made by the editor George Vanderburgh, none of the titles listed in the revealed lineup have seen print to date. With such a stacking of negative odds, it is hardly a surprise that the more ambitious side of Lovecraftian mythology is slowly being devoured by a cancerous mass of kitsch. Various lesser known authors are doing their best to stave off the spread of the disease, but it seems that they are fighting a losing battle.

In contrast with the early 20th century mindset, Lovecraft's stories often focused on the dangers posed by science instead of the vast possibilities it offered. Portraying alternatives to dominant paradigms and pointing out their limitations was also common for him. Considering all of the dubious conveniences brought about by the steadily increasing pull of information technology, some of the writer's concerns might have been warranted. Scenarios where machines manage every aspect of people's lives are no longer the domain of fiction; one of them forms a core element of our everyday reality. Based on the gathered data, computer systems tell people how to dress, where to eat, and what to like. The concepts of independent thought, self-sufficiency, and social interaction are slowly being buried under a heap of unnecessary gadgetry, and the combined sum of human knowledge from different walks of life has outgrown the learning capacity of an average individual at least a few centuries ago. Pansophism is little more than a pipe dream now, unlike the ubiquitous hyper specializations. Without wishing to apply prophetic undertones to Lovecraft's fiction, Nyarlathotep's malign presence can be firmly felt in the 21st century. It is possible to interpret the enigmatic, antagonistic figure in a myriad different ways, but the ones most relevant to the current state of the world have been listed by Fritz Leiber in his critical essay entitled "A Literary Copernicus". The author proposes that the wandering pharaoh might be seen as "the mockery of a universe man can never understand or master", "a blatantly commercial, self-advertising, acquisitive world that Lovecraft hated", or "man's self-destructive intellectu-

ality” (54-55). It is worth noting, however, that none of these readings are mutually exclusive. In fact, the three of them complement each other disturbingly well, creating an image that might seem all-too-familiar to the contemporary reader. The only thing that remains to be seen is whether or not the technological wonder sconjured up by our own miracle workers will lead to the same grisly finale as the one featured in the story.

As the previous parts of this paper illustrate, Lovecraft’s voyages into the posthuman are as far removed from the current trends as they were from the pulp rigmarole. To understand his approach better, it should be noted that depending on the contemporary work being analyzed, changes of this sort possess different degrees of desirability. Even if the character in question abhors the alterations he had to undergo, their unexplored qualities usually still pose a point of consumer-like interest to the reader. It is not so in Lovecraft’s case. Leaving behind their species-based limitations is not something that his protagonists desire, at least not initially. More often than not, they are given little choice in the matter, with the metamorphosis being the result of a person’s ancestry, black arts and/or some otherworldly agents. Presented as grotesque and excruciating, these processes suggest that their effects should be feared and avoided, not longed for. Expansions of consciousness also form a vital ingredient of Lovecraft’s formula, but they are nothing to look forward to either. Being unable to reconcile the cosmic truths with the beliefs that have been spoon-fed to them for so long, characters who get subjected to the vagaries of the mythos seek mental refuge—first in denial, then in madness. Generally, this anguish is cut short by the subject’s suicide or an intervention of outside forces. Unlike some fiction authors, the Recluse of Providence knew that he should apply a proper scope to something as major as an awareness expansion. In Lovecraft’s works, the broadening of one’s faculties is not a step that should be taken lightly and neither are its dangers. It does not so much remove the limits of the human condition as the condition itself, transforming the subject into something else entirely. There are no partial solutions and no excuses. There is only the cosmic pressure that bursts through the feeble defenses of a person’s mind and transfigures everything they believe to be true along with their notion of self. But since in Cthulhu’s universe humanity amounts to little more than a failed experiment, its inability to face the world at large and eventual eradication are only to be expected. As a matter of fact, that is the kind of scenario that unfolds in *The Shadow Out of Time*, one of Recluse’s best known pieces.

CONCLUSION

It is reasonable to assume that Lovecraft would be sincerely disappointed by the present-day state of his legacy. The literary elements, while undeniably exemplary, have been flooded by a constant stream of pop cultural paraphernalia and cinematic mishandlings that warp and limit the recipient's understanding of the original author's intentions. Few and far between, the adaptations that contain worthwhile depictions of his posthuman and cosmic themes lack the magnitude to become noticed in the bloated mediascape of today. The same can be said about the aspiring writers who would like to follow in their role model's footsteps and bolster the mythos. As it is well-structured, intricate and engaging, Lovecraft's body of work theoretically holds the potential to unseat the technological and informational paradigms that dominate fiction. In practice, however, the sheer amount of negative factors that actively work against it makes a feat of this kind highly improbable. These dubious odds are decreased even further by the intensely nihilistic overtones that saturate the literary philosophy of cosmicism, making it clash not only with the other fictional envisionings of the posthuman but also with the ideologies that define the real world. Because contemporary society reacts antagonistically to anything that attempts to burst the bubble of self-gratification that it has created for itself, most non-humanocentric notions tend to be disregarded as inconsequential, no matter the amount of awareness-expanding potential they actually hold. In an unexpected twist of irony, Nyarlathotep's curse has claimed yet another victim—the man who wrote it down.

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PANOWANIE NYARLATHOTEP

Streszczenie

Pośmiertna erupcja sławy H.P. Lovecrafta wywołała szereg procesów transformacyjnych w jednolitej niegdyś wizji pisarza. Ów rozwój sytuacji doprowadził do fragmentacji wstępnego asortymentu koncepcji przedstawionych przez twórcę mitologii, ale stworzył także garstkę oryginalnych interpretacji klasycznego materiału. Niniejsza praca bada specyficzną naturę lovecraftiańskiego horroru (jak również naturę ogólnie rozumianego horroru w literaturze) oraz trudności powstające przy jej implementacji pomiędzy mediami. Analiza ta skupia się głównie na próbach z dziedziny kinematografii, zgłębiając niektóre z bardziej osobliwych adaptacji filmowych *mitologii Cthulhu*, rozpatrując ich wierność względem materiału źródłowego, potencjał wywoływania strachu oraz znaczące aspekty posthumanistyczne. Esej kończy się zastosowaniem powyższych informacji celem określenia obecnego stanu *dziwnej fikcji*.

Streścił Oskar Zasada

Słowa kluczowe: kosmicyzm; adaptacje filmowe; H.P. Lovecraft; posthumanizm; magazyny pulpowe; dziwna fikcja.