

# The Morphology of the Unknown

The Narrative Technique of Howard Philips Lovecraft

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## List of abbreviations used

Lovecraft, H. P. <i>The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature</i>	SHiL
Lovecraft, H. P. “The Call of Cthulhu”	CoC
Lovecraft, H. P. “The Shadow over Innsmouth”	SoI
Lovecraft, H. P. “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”	CDW

## Introduction

The inspiration for devoting this thesis to such an unusual topic as the unknown springs from H.P. Lovecraft himself, specifically from the opening lines of an essay he wrote on *his* genre – weird fiction: “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (H. P. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*: 21). This thesis aims to show that the unknown was not merely a concept Lovecraft was aware of, but also one around which he constructed a narrative technique that became prevalent in most of his later works.

Before outlining my research statement I find it necessary to defend the credibility of this thesis. An investigation into the unknown in a literary text may seem a pointless endeavour to many. However, I feel that such a sense of meaninglessness stems mostly from a lacking clarification of just what the unknown is. A brief definition of what I understand under the term “unknown” will make the purpose of this thesis clearer. An initial understanding of what the unknown is, expressed in literary terms, may sound like this: The unknown in a literary text is primarily made up by information that is denied to a character, narrator or the reader. This does not mean that the unknown includes whatever information is not in the discourse – its existence is always implied by the discourse, however indirect. Depending on the importance of the information that is made inaccessible, the unknown may become a central feature of the text. As I hope to show in the course of this thesis, H. P. Lovecraft created a narrative technique that places the unknown in such a prominent position, that his texts are fundamentally based on the denial of vital information which the characters, the narrator and the reader have to compensate by resolving the unknown.

The following chapters will offer close readings of three texts by Lovecraft. Each text will be subjected to two distinct analyses, both of which will aim at showing how Lovecraft constructed and used unknown actively in the narration of this text. The first analysis will focus on how the unknown presents itself to the characters and narrator of that text. Within this analysis I will first identify how the unknown is constructed through the use of specific narrative devices. In addition this step will examine precisely what kind of content has been eliminated from the text. The final step will be to investigate how unknowns are created, expanded, realized, resolved or ignored by the characters and the narrator in the course of the narrative. It is my hope that this first analysis will show what effect the unknown has on its narrative context and the narrative flow.

The second analysis will focus on how the reader perceives the unknown. This analysis will build upon the first, since the unknown the reader perceives is directly related to how the text presents the unknown. However, I propose that the unknown which the reader perceives will diverge significantly from the unknown perceived by the narrator and protagonist investigator. This means that it will be necessary to re-evaluate what narrative devices create or modify unknowns for the reader. This analysis will necessarily entail a comparison between the reader's unknown and the unknown as seen by the narrator and characters within the text. The aim of this comparison will be to determine the narrative effect the unknown has upon the reader. Both analyses and their individual steps will be explained in greater detail towards the end of this introduction.

### **H.P. Lovecraft, his fiction and his unknown**

Howard Philips Lovecraft, usually abbreviated H. P. Lovecraft, was born in 1890 in Providence, Rhode Island. He lived most of his life in Providence, a fact which is reflected by the choice of setting for most of his fiction. His life proved rather uneventful, and I will defer those who would like to know more about the stations of Lovecraft's life to S. T. Joshi's excellent biography *Lovecraft: A life*, and the thousands of letters he exchanged with fellow writers and friends. However, one aspect of the man Lovecraft is nonetheless relevant to this thesis – his worldview. The most astute examination of Lovecraft's system of beliefs and values was done by S.T. Joshi, who coined the term 'cosmicism' to describe it. In essence, Lovecraft viewed mankind as inconsequential in comparison to the universe, and firmly believed in the human mind's inability to understand many aspects of that universe. These views are expressed and developed in his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature".

The importance of these views in Lovecraft's personal life is not for this thesis to discuss. Their relevance to his fiction, however, is. An active author of what he termed 'weird fiction', Lovecraft wrote a number of short stories, novellas and poems between 1919 and until his death in 1937. He did not meet with great success during his rather short life, never seeing his works published outside of pulp magazines such as *Weird Fiction*. However, we need to clarify just what kind of fiction Lovecraft wrote, as the term 'weird fiction' is idiosyncratic to Lovecraft and means little to those unfamiliar with the author. While Lovecraft attempted to define this genre in his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature", that definition is ambiguous. This ambiguity is aptly summed up by Joshi, who notes that Lovecraft did little more than try to place his genre in relation to Gothic literature, without ever arriving at an answer just how Weird Fiction related to the Gothic (Joshi, *The Weird*

*Tale: 6*). I would suggest that the problem of defining ‘weird fiction’ actually arises from the fact that it is closely related to two genres that were as yet undefined in the 1920s, horror and science fiction (Joshi, *The Weird Tale: 179*). In this way, “Supernatural Horror in Literature” is today actually seen as one of the first attempts at defining modern horror fiction.

Much more important than defining the genre of Lovecraft’s fiction, however, is the significance of “The Supernatural Horror in Literature” regarding Lovecraft’s philosophy of writing. Lovecraft’s fiction can actually be divided into two distinct phases. His earlier works, in his stated opinion, bore tribute to a tradition of writers ranging from the earliest Gothic fiction to the writers of early ‘weird fiction’, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Lord Dunsany, Algernon Blackwood and Ambrose Bierce. However, these early works met Lovecraft’s disapproval after he had laid out his philosophy of writing in his essay, as a famous lamentation to a friend reveals: “...here are my Poe pieces, there are my Dunsany pieces, but where are my Lovecraft pieces?” (Lovecraft, *Selected Letters II: 315*). However, this changed at the time he wrote “The Supernatural Horror in Literature”. It stands to reason that his thoughts about what constituted weird fiction are reflected in the short story “The Call of Cthulhu”, published in 1926. This text, now regarded as his most important work, marks the emergence of Lovecraft’s growing stylistic and thematic independence from his literary peers (Burluson, *On Lovecraft’s Themes: 140*). More importantly, it is the first text in which Lovecraft systematically employed concepts laid out in “The Supernatural Horror in Literature”, the most central of which, I contend, was the unknown. This work marks a watershed in Lovecraft’s fiction, as most of his subsequent works follow the demands he expressed in “Supernatural Horror in Literature” and further develop the narrative style laid out by “The Call of Cthulhu”.

Far from being only relevant to the evolution of Lovecraft’s fiction, “The Supernatural Horror in Fiction” also describes the unknown we will encounter in these texts, greatly enhancing the simple definition I have given initially. In fact, the entire concept of ‘weird fiction’ relies on the creation of unknowns in the text. The unknown Lovecraft envisages as the centre of ‘weird fiction’ is defined by its cosmic nature. It deals not with “secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains”, but with the seemingly inexplicable causes and effects of phenomena of a universal scale (Lovecraft, *SHiL: 23*). In addition, he revealed in a letter, it is the very nature of such phenomena that would make them unknown, as they should be entirely alien to the human mind (Lovecraft, *Selected Letters II: 150*). The concept of cosmicism, as outlined in his essay, also firmly links the unknown to the sensation of horror, since it is by definition unpredictable and therefore potentially dangerous (Lovecraft,

*SHiL*: 21-23). The cosmos, that is the universe excluding Earth, was also identified by Lovecraft as the sole remaining source of the unknown in our modern age, leading to the suggestion that Lovecraft sought to create unknowns that relate to that source in particular (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 22).

Crucially, this essay also provides a link between the unknown in Lovecraft's texts and the reader. The quote with which I chose to inaugurate this thesis already emphasizes that the unknown is a very potent source of the horror which weird fiction is supposed to instil in the reader. However, "The Supernatural Horror in Literature" remains very vague about *how* the text is supposed to narrate the unknown to the reader. The solution of this problem will therefore form the core of my thesis.

While "The Supernatural Horror in Literature" does not contain a complete model for the narration of the unknown, several statements in the essay nevertheless suggest what reactions Lovecraft sought to create in the reader. As mentioned already, the unknown in the weird tale, is primarily responsible for conveying the sensation of horror in that it causes uncertainty which in turn implies danger: "[A]ny kind of unknown world [would be] a world of peril and evil possibilities" (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 22). On the other hand, "the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded" to this fear of the cosmic (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 22). Lovecraft later reiterated the importance of the enticing nature of the unknown:

I refer to the aesthetic crystallisation of that burning & inextinguishable feeling of mixed wonder & oppression which the sensitive imagination experiences upon scaling itself & its restrictions against the vast & provocative abyss of the unknown. This has always been the chief emotion in my psychology; & whilst it obviously figures less in the psychology of the majority, it is clearly a well-defined & permanent factor from which very few sensitive persons are wholly free. (Lovecraft, *Selected Letters III*: 294-296)

But who is to experience the fear, wonder and curiosity of the unknown, if not the reader?

Lovecraft also recognized two fundamental problems that complicate a narration of the unknown, which this thesis will also explore. First, how does one communicate something which is unknown without making it known in the process? Lovecraft suggested that the solution should lie in the creation of an atmosphere in the text, which would allow the sensation that something is there without explicitly saying that it is (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 23). And second, he touches upon the central problem of the unknown's duration. In particular, he notes that the "genuine cosmic fear" the unknown instils must not be explained away by the tale, but sustained (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 23). However, we can extend his point to state that any



unknown must have at least some duration, since it can only be unknown if it cannot be revealed at the time of its creation.

In summarizing all the aspects of ‘weird fiction’, including the unknown, Lovecraft clearly states that all they primarily relate to the *reader’s* reaction to the unknown: “The one test of the really weird is simply this – whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers” (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 23). It is the emergence of this version of the unknown that prompted my decision to subject each text to two analyses, with the aim of contrasting the unknown that emerges within the text with the unknown the reader realizes.

### **Lovecraft criticism**

Surprisingly, the topic of the unknown has found little resonance with Lovecraft’s critics, even though he and his texts have been studied by successive generations of critics. The reason for this might well be that Lovecraft attracted a wide variety of criticism, most of which polarizes at the poles of admiration or rejection. The amount of academic critical works on Lovecraft remains limited. Among his most prolific critics are names such as S.T. Joshi, Donald Burleson and David Cannon. Outside this limited circle, Lovecraft criticism remains largely restricted to magazines solely devoted to his fiction or the genres of weird, horror and science fiction, such as *Lovecraft Studies*. A survey of this material inevitably reveals that, to this date, there has been no comprehensive survey of the unknown in Lovecraft’s fiction. At most, it has been discussed obliquely in a handful of critical essays. One example of criticism that treats the unknown as part of the thematic make-up of Lovecraft’s fiction is Burleson’s survey of central themes in Lovecraft’s fiction entitled “Touching the Glass”. More recently, Kálmán Matolcsy’s comparison of Lovecraft’s fiction with models of paradigm shifts also touches upon the unknown, but only with regards to the very specific problem of scientific knowledge and the seemingly supernatural. The only work of criticism focused on the unknown in Lovecraft’s fiction is Deborah D’Agati’s “The Problem with Solving”. This essay compares the attempts of Lovecraft’s narrators to resolve unknowns with the resolution of mysteries in Sherlock Holmes’ stories. However, the scope of D’Agati’s discussion is too restricted to provide a truly useful basis for my thesis, as it solely focuses on the narrator, leaving the reader entirely unconsidered. I also dissent from her claims that Lovecraft’s narrators are able to solve the unknown they face (D’Agati, *The Problem with Solving*: 55). As I aim to show in the following analyses, it is the narrators’ *inability* to resolve the unknown that is the hallmark of Lovecraft’s fiction.

We find a similar situation regarding narrative analyses of Lovecraft's works. While Lovecraft criticism expanded considerably during the late 1980s and 1990s to include several modern literary theories, narrative theory has been virtually excluded from this growth. This dearth has not escaped Dan Clore, author of one of the very few articles offering a narrative perspective of Lovecraft's works (Clore, *Some Aspects of Narration in Lovecraft: 2*). However, as its title suggests, it does little more than offering an outline of Lovecraft's narratives, thus reducing its usefulness for this thesis.

As a consequence of this lack of criticism relevant to the topic of this thesis, my analyses will mainly consist of close readings of Lovecraft's texts, from which I will attempt to synthesize a common narrative model involving the unknown.

### **Theoretical background**

My attempts to extract a model of Lovecraft's narrative technique will mainly rely on the application of narrative theory. Before presenting the narrative concepts that form the basis for my analyses, I wish to clarify a few narrative terms that will be used in this thesis. The discourse, according to Jakob Lothe, "is the spoken or written presentation of events", or simply "what we read, the text" (Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film: 6*). Related to discourse are the concepts of story and plot. The story is a presentation of the "narrated events [...] abstracted from their disposition in their discourse [...] and arranged chronologically" (Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film: 6*). The plot, in turn, is the presentation of the sequence of events in the text, most commonly their causal relationships (Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film: 7*). I have already introduced the term narrator earlier, but omitted a definition thus far. While there are many possible ways to define the narrator, the one suggested by Jakob Lothe is the one that coincides with my understanding of the term: "The narrator is a narrative instrument that the author uses to present and develop the text". However, as Lothe hastens to add, the narrator is also part of the discourse (Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film: 20-21*). The narrator may have further attributes which clarify his role further, which I will introduce as necessary. Next, I have stated that the first analysis will also focus on the unknown perceived by the characters. Since Lovecraft's texts invariably feature one character whose experiences with the unknown form the centre of the plot, this part of the analysis will focus on how this particular character perceives and reacts to the unknown. In order to distinguish him from other characters, I will refer to this central character as the *protagonist investigator* from now on. Finally, I will frequently refer to 'Lovecraft' in my analyses of the selected texts. This 'Lovecraft' I refer to is the implied author, "the embodied consciousness of the

work”; the *fictional* representation of the *historical* Lovecraft (Rimmo-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 87; Genette, qtd. in Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film*: 19). The implied author also describes the value system of the work, and emerges particularly in relation to irony (another concept which I will introduce shortly).

Let us turn to the more specific narrative concepts on which I base this thesis. First of all, we need to express the unknown in narrative terms in order to analyze how it is narrated. According to Wolfgang Iser, any given text contains *Leerstellen* or gaps. These are points of “suspended connectability in the text” (Iser, *The Act of Reading*: 198). In general, I will therefore treat unknowns as gaps, since the elision of information from the text has an identical effect. In addition, I will use Tzvetan Todorov’s categories of the *fantastic*, the *uncanny* and the *marvellous* to further expand the definition of the unknown. The *fantastic*, according to Todorov, is that which cannot be explained with certainty. More importantly, the fantastic remains only fantastic as long as it is uncertain (Todorov, *The Fantastic*: 25). Since the unknown, in common with the *fantastic*, relies on uncertainty, we can postulate that the unknown needs to be unexplainable at the time it is noticed and remain so for some time afterwards. It may be resolved at a later point in the narrative. Todorov also notes that this uncertainty may be common to reader and character alike (Todorov, *The Fantastic*: 41). Another aspect of Todorov’s theory which can be adapted for the unknown is the problem of its resolution. The fantastic, according to Todorov, can be resolved by either providing uncanny or marvellous explanations for it (Todorov, *The Fantastic*: 41). Appropriating Todorov’s definitions of these terms, I suggest that *uncanny* explanations of the unknown would be ones that leave little room for doubt, equating them with *explanations*. *Marvellous* explanations of the unknown, on the other hand, entail a great degree of uncertainty or inaccuracy, equating them to *hypothesis*. In addition to these two ways of resolving the unknown, I suggest that the unknown in Lovecraft’s text can also *endure*. Indeed, Lovecraft’s intentions of linking the unknown and horror imply that his texts must retain the unknown in a potent form.

Second, I wish to introduce another set of key concepts that I will use to determine how the unknown is presented in the narrative. I have pointed out that it will be necessary to subject each text to two analyses. The purpose of this is to determine how the unknown manifests itself at different narrative *levels*. The first analysis will thus cover three narrative levels: How the unknown presents itself to the narrator (the extradiegetic level), to the protagonist investigator (the diegetic level) and how it is represented in reports and statements presented to the protagonist investigator (the hypodiegetic level) (Lothe: *Narrative in Fiction*

*and Film*: 32-33). Precisely how the manifestation of the unknown at each level is related will form a major part of the first analysis. Theoretically, however, these levels are hierarchical, meaning that for example a character within a hypodiegetic narrative may not know what is unknown to the protagonist investigator, who in turn cannot know what is unknown to the narrator. However, the narrator and protagonist investigator, in addition to any unknowns they realize themselves, may be aware of unknowns introduced at a lower level.

On the other side, we have the second analysis of each text, aimed at exploring how the unknown in the text presents itself to the reader. At this point, a brief definition of how I use the term reader in this thesis is therefore in order. Since it is my aim to identify the narrative technique used by Lovecraft, and particular how that narrative technique is designed to affect the reader, it is evident that I am not referring to any *historical*, or real, reader. Instead, I am speaking of the *implied reader*. The *implied reader*, as defined by Iser, “designates a network of response-inviting structures” found in the text that offer the reader “a particular role to play” (Iser, *The Act of Reading*: 34).

Naturally, in reading the text, this reader sees primarily the discourse, which essentially presents how the unknown is perceived by the narrator, the protagonist investigator and others inside the text. As Menakhem Perry notes, the text can control the reader’s comprehension by the way it presents something (Perry, qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 121). In this way it is clear that the reader is influenced by the way the narrator and protagonist investigator, the two most central agents of Lovecraft’s texts, perceive and describe the unknown.

The reader’s perception of the unknown is more complex than that, however. It is certainly true that the way in which the narrator presents the text affects the reader’s perception of that text. It is also true that what the characters in a text perceive is important to the reader. However, their importance to the reader depends on the circumstances of the text. As we shall see in the following analyses, in Lovecraft’s texts, the influence of the narrator is actually diminished by their characteristics, such as reliability, perceptibility and participation in the story (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 96-101). The protagonist investigator’s influence on the reader is similarly limited by the text. Still, the text may influence the reader by other means. If the narrator and protagonist investigator are subverted, as I suggest they are, we need to determine what role *irony* plays in allowing the reader to recognize unknowns that elude the textual agents. Wayne C. Booth introduces three variants on the concept of irony: *stable*, *unstable* and *dramatic* (Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*: 5-6; 63; 240-241). In each instance, the implied author establishes a communication with the implied reader, bypassing

the narrator and protagonist investigator, and can thereby allow the reader to recognize an unknown that either of the textual agents has missed.

Descriptions of the dynamics of the reading process are also important in realizing just how the reader can realize unknowns independently of the narrator and protagonist investigator. While narrating is a linear process, reading is not (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 120). The reader can directly access other parts of the text he or she has already read at any time, or he or she can ‘leap’ into the future by guessing what is going to happen (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 122-123). In doing so, the reader may identify unknowns that the narrator and protagonist investigator have not recognized. In addition, theories about the reading process also suggest that the unknown may well endure at the end of the text, even for the reader. As Rimmon-Kenan, quoting J. Hillis Miller, suggests, some texts “seem designed so as to prevent the formation of any ‘finalized hypothesis’” (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 122).

In addition to describing the narrative processes by which the reader comes to recognize the unknown, this second analysis will also examine how the reader *responds* to it. As Iser defines the implied reader, he or she is made up of *response-inviting* structures, meaning that the text invites the reader to respond to the unknown. Seymour Chatman claims that this response is *inevitable*:

Whether the narrative is experienced through a performance or through a text, the members of the audience must respond with an interpretation: they cannot avoid participating in the transaction. They must fill in gaps with essential or likely events, traits and objects which for various reasons have gone unmentioned. (Chatman, *Story and Discourse*: 28)

Chatman also identifies *how* the reader is to respond – by attempting to *resolve* the unknown. In our discussion of Lovecraft’s concept of the unknown we have already noted that he was aware of the fact that it excited fear and wonder at the same time. It is my hypothesis that Lovecraft was not merely aware of this effect of the unknown on the reader. I wish to show that his narrative technique actually incorporated it, by allowing the reader to reveal certain unknowns while maintaining others.

Can the text also control how the reader ‘resolves’ the unknown? Jonathan Cullers suggests that this is possible. In *Structuralist Poetics*, he convincingly argues that, when faced with textual inconsistencies, the reader feels the urge to *naturalize* these (Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*: 134-160). That the unknown represents just such inconsistencies is apparent. What is important is Culler’s suggestion that the reader will turn to the most logical, or natural,

strategy to overcome these inconsistencies. It is my theory that Lovecraft's texts attempt to guide the reader by providing him or her with natural strategies with which he or she can attempt to resolve the unknown.

I have already suggested that irony may allow the reader to recognize unknowns that are not realized by the textual agents. However, the power of irony to subvert may also extend as far as suggesting certain solutions for unknowns to the reader, especially if the unknown continues to exist as a result of the narrator's or protagonist investigator's failure to reveal it. I posit that Lovecraft made conscious use of irony by allowing the reader to reveal some unknowns while blocking the use of irony to keep others intact.

Similarly, the distribution and prevalence of unknowns in the text may also control the reader's response to them. If the unknowns are placed so that they obscure central events of the plot, also called kernels, the reader may have no choice but to explain them, for these events advance the action (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 16). Cedric Watts even suggests that an author may construct a text in such a way that he or she conceals an entire plot within the text which the reader has to reveal, a plot that exists in parallel or in conflict with the overt plot (Watts, *The Deceptive Text*: 1-3). I propose that such a strategic placement of unknowns also formed part of Lovecraft's narrative technique, thereby forcing the reader to deal with the unknown.

This theoretical outline gives a general overview of the narrative concepts that I will use to discuss Lovecraft's narrative technique. In the close readings of the individual texts that will constitute the following chapters, I will examine in greater detail how particular narrative devices are used to create specific instances of the unknown.

### **Investigating the unknown**

In this section I will offer more detailed overview of the analyses which I intend to carry out, as well as present the texts which I will investigate. The initial analysis will, as already mentioned, mainly present the unknowns that are realized, or recognized, by the protagonist investigator and narrator. This means that I will examine how the protagonist investigator realizes or misses unknowns that are introduced at the hypodiegetic levels or which he encounters at his own level. My presentation of the unknown as it is realized by the narrator will be more complex. This discussion will include examining if the narrator realizes unknowns that the protagonist investigator missed, if he modifies the unknowns realized by protagonist investigator and what significance the unknown has in relation to his narrative activity. In the following I will suggest a list of narrative devices that can create unknowns for

the protagonist investigator and the narrator. Additionally, I will suggest specifically how and what information the narrative device may elide to create the unknown. Or in Watts' words, I will attempt to identify Lovecraft's *concealment-strategies* (Watts, *The Deceptive Text*: 2).

One narrative device which we can identify as indispensable is the narrator's knowledge. If something is supposed to be unknown to the narrator, the narrator must have "limited knowledge of or insight into what he is narrating", and be restricted to "[gain knowledge by] strictly natural means" as well as a "realistic vision and inference" (Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film*, 26; Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: 160). More specifically, the narrator must be unable to gain access to the minds of others in the fictional world. Also, he must narrate from a point within the story's timeframe where the unknown is still intact. A narrator that exhibits these limitations will be subject to the same kind of narrative devices that may create unknowns for the protagonist investigator.

Limited access also yields the first distinct category of the unknown – the *communicative unknown*. Since both the protagonist investigator and narrator have no means to access the mind of a person, they must rely on what that character tells them. If the person refuses to relay any information, it creates an unknown.

Focalization is perhaps the most important narrative device which is capable of forming unknowns for both protagonist investigator and narrator. Focalization, Rimmon-Kenan reminds us, is a conglomerate of several facets of a given narrative (Rimmon-Kenan: *Narrative Fiction*: 78-83). The first facet we need to consider is perception. If both protagonist investigator and narrator primarily investigate the unknown through their senses, their ability to perceive the unknown is subject to the organic limitations of their sensory system. Unknowns may in this way be caused by simply blocking the agent's senses. In this way, the subject can be limited to observations through some or only one sensory channel. The protagonist investigator may for example only be able to hear or smell, but not see something. This is what I term a *sensory unknown*. Even if all his sensory channels are blocked, the protagonist investigator may still be able to get a vague impression of something. In such cases we are dealing with what I would term *atmospheric unknowns*.

Focalization is also important for the objects that are focused and particularly the ones that are left *unfocused* (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 78). It is therefore also essential to consider the way something is looked at as a source of unknowns. For example, the focus on one thing may reduce or eliminate the possibility of focusing on something else, and thereby cause an unknown.

Other important facets of focalization which we need to consider are psychological and ideological (Rimmon-Kenan: *Narrative Fiction*: 80-83). These are a direct result of the personal characteristics of the protagonist investigator and narrator. The psychological facet includes cognitive aspects such as knowledge, conjecture, belief and memory. Limited knowledge and unwillingness to form conjectures or to believe in some explanation would naturally result in the creation of unknowns, as would the inability to recall something. It is also conceivable that emotions may cause subjects to be unable to consider something, either because they are too affected by it or because they consider it unimportant. The narrator or protagonist investigator can also simply reject an explanation of something on ideological grounds, leaving it unexplained.

Focalization, because of the broad spectrum of all its facets, may create a variety of unknowns. Both a lack of knowledge and unwillingness to conjecture may result in a failure to understand the nature of an object or phenomenon, yielding what I would term a *physical unknown*. Furthermore, aspects of focalization can yield communicative unknowns as well. Examples include situations in which the protagonist investigator or narrator are unable to recognize what someone or something tries to communicate to them because they do not understand the language or the message, dismiss the communication or simply are not listening. Many aspects of focalization can also result in a *functional unknown*. In this case, the narrator or protagonist investigator may understand all intrinsic features of an unknown he encounters, but he may not be able to fathom its purpose or function. In such instances, the unknown implies the existence of some kind of relationship, but the kind of relationship and/or to whom the unknown relates is not recognizable.

Another narrative device which may cause unknowns is the setting. It can deny the focalizer access to something that is situated in another place or in another time. Something within a certain location, or the location itself, may thus become unknown if the location cannot be entered or if its exterior does not allow an observation of its interior. Likewise, something situated in a different timeframe than that of the protagonist investigator or narrator may become equally inaccessible or unobservable.

In the next step, which deals with the effects the unknown has on the narrative, it is necessary to distinguish two separate problems. The first involves another hypothesis I wish to test: That the occurrences of the unknown in a story can be categorized into *minor* and *major unknowns*. This distinction is based on their importance for the story, their frequency and their placement within the narrative. Turning to the second problem, we also need to monitor how the unknown affects the actions, attitudes and emotions of both protagonist



investigator and narrator. In this way, we can describe how the unknown affects the flow of the discourse, or narrative.

The minor unknowns will appear marginal to the protagonist investigator and narrator. They may see them as curious occurrences. As a consequence, such unknowns are either treated as unimportant and ignored by them or they may offer a hypothesis for them and then move on. In the view of the protagonist investigator and narrator, they appear to have no or very little effect on the story. The major unknown, on the other hand, may also be called the central unknown in the story. It is resistant to being ignored and cannot be explained easily since it is usually a complex and omnipresent phenomenon throughout the narrative. Thus, neither protagonist investigator nor narrator is able to explain this unknown straight away. It forms the central aspect of the story in two regards: To the narrator, it is the focus of his narrative, representing the *raison d'être* for him to narrate (It is also a phenomenon that he is unable to explain at the moment of narration.); to the protagonist investigator, it forms the elusive aim of his investigation. To begin with, it is only an atmospheric unknown to him, and his efforts are therefore first directed at identifying it, and later at explaining it. His eventual revelation of the major unknown usually ends the narrative as it incapacitates him.

What narrative function do these two levels of the unknown fulfil, then? To answer this question, I reiterate what I stated earlier about the importance of how unknowns are placed within the plot. In this way, we can identify the minor unknowns as catalysts, which are events that “amplify, maintain or delay the action” (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 16). Minor unknowns clearly represent catalysts, in that they do not appear central to the plot of the narrator. How precisely they affect the plot, meaning the resolution of the major unknown – whether they amplify the major unknown, delay its revelation or maintain it, will be considered in the following chapters. Kernels, on the other hand, are events that are central to the plot, in that they offer a distinct choice which would take the plot in different directions. The major unknown therefore arguably represents the most important kernel in the narrative, since it is of prime importance to both narrator and protagonist investigator, as mentioned above.

To explain how these unknowns affect the progress of the narrative, we now need to consider my appropriation of Todorov's categories. I postulated that the unknown is marked by duration and that it can transition to three equivalent states: it may be explained, a hypothesis may be offered for it, or it remains unknown. Judging from the definitions I have given of the major and minor unknowns, it should be clear that the major unknown is necessarily featuring a longer duration compared to the minor unknown. In fact, it spans the

entire narrative, since it is the *raison d'être* for the narration. The narrative chronicles the protagonist investigator's struggle to realize, hypothesize about and finally explain the major unknown. Furthermore, it is important to note that even the narrator must be unable to explain it, as an explanation would defeat the purpose of narrating the unknown to the reader. By contrast, the minor unknowns have much less duration. This is not to say that they necessarily are explained, but that they may simply be lost out of sight. However, it is worth noting that the protagonist investigator, if he does not ignore them, at least attempts to form hypotheses about them.

Completing the analysis of the unknown as it presents itself within the text brings us to the second analysis, that of the unknown as it presents itself to the reader. In theory, I have shown that the reader can access the text in vastly different ways than the narrator and protagonist investigator can. This means that we initially have to compare how the reader's view of the unknown diverges from the presentation of the unknown inside the discourse. In order to achieve that, I will re-evaluate if the narrative devices identified in the first analysis are also valid for the reader. This will include assessing *how* they affect the reader. Do they create, maintain or resolve unknowns in the same way they do in the discourse? Then, I will attempt to identify additional narrative devices which may only affect the reader, determining how they modify the unknown for him or her. This comparison will allow us to see if and how the unknown as it is perceived by the reader differs from the unknown presented in the discourse.

Since the narrator affects how the text – and with it the unknown – is presented to the reader, his characteristics modify his presentation and thus the unknown that the reader sees in the text. Particularly relevant will be the narrator's perceptibility and participation in the text (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 96-101). If the narrator engages actively in the text, chances are that he is aware of the unknowns in it and consciously modifies them in his narration. A perceptible narrator may offer notable *descriptions* of unknowns at the diegetic and hypodiegetic levels, or he may *comment* on unknowns that are realized by the protagonist investigators and other characters (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 98-10). Comments can present the reader with the narrator's efforts to interpret the unknown, or they show how he judges either how it is realized within the story or how it may be relevant to the narrative.

The mode of the narrator's presentation can also fundamentally affect how the unknowns at the diegetic and hypodiegetic levels are presented to the reader. If he summarises what occurs at the diegetic and hypodiegetic level, the narrator heavily modifies any unknowns that are manifested at these levels. However, a representation of diegetic and

hypodiegetic content through scenes and descriptive pauses allows the reader direct access to unknowns present at these levels.

In addition, how the reader is affected by the narrator's and protagonist investigator's unknown is determined by their reliability. If the text marks either as unreliable to the reader, he or she may question if their perception and presentation of the unknown can be trusted.

I have also proposed that irony is capable of modifying the unknown the reader sees in the text. The question is then *how* the implied reader's subverts of the narrator's and protagonist investigator's perception of the unknown. Here we need to review Booth's distinction of irony into three categories. Stable irony allows the reader to reconstruct a stable meaning, one that is not undermined by the text (Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*: 6). I propose, therefore, that stable irony communicates information to the reader that allows him or her to dispel an unknown realized by a textual agent. Accordingly, dramatic irony allows the reader to realize an unknown that is not at all recognized by either protagonist investigator or narrator (Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*: 63). Unstable irony would then introduce an unknown to the reader without giving him or her the means to dispel that unknown (Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*: 240).

Step two of this second analysis will then determine the effect of the unknown upon the reading process – that is, how the reader responds to the unknown he or she reads. Here, I will apply Perry's and Todorov's theories of the reading process. Thus, I will consider whether the unknown achieves any sort of *primacy* and/or *recency* effect on the reader (Perry, qtd. In Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 121). If it creates a *primacy* effect, it may affect the reader to read the text following it with the aim of discovering information about this unknown. If an unknown has a recency effect on the reader, he or she may attempt to relate information gained from earlier parts of the text to an unknown that he or she has just read. Todorov's conceptualization of reading as figuration or superpositioning suggests similar effects of the unknown upon the reader (Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*: 242-243). If he or she recognizes an unknown as a central figure in the text, his or her interpretation of the following text will be linked to this figure. Alternatively, the reader may superimpose one part of the text over another and thereby either realize or reveal an unknown.

Another way of describing the unknown's effect on the reading process is suggested by Wayne C. Booth, who reminds us that a reader typically responds to a text in two ways: he may display intellectual interest or qualitative interest (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: 125). Thus, the reader may wish to correct factual errors in the text, such as false, incomplete or

incoherent explanations given for a particular unknown, or he or she may wish to conduct an investigation that seeks to improve on that of the protagonist investigator.

This step will also include comparisons between the reader's response to the unknown and the narrative effects of the unknown in the discourse. In this way, I hope to answer several questions: Does the reader recognize minor and major unknowns? If so, are they the same as the ones inside the discourse? Since both the unknown inside the discourse and the reader's unknown are subjected to investigations, I will also compare how these investigations progress, and what effect any disparity in progress may have upon the reader. Yet another comparison will be made about how the unknown obstructs the reading process as opposed to how it impedes the narrative flow. And finally I will consider the problem of revelation. How do the reader's revelations compare to those in the discourse? What remains unknown to the reader compared to what remains unknown inside the discourse? By answering these questions, I hope to be able to determine what significance the unknown has for the reader.

These two analyses will be applied to three texts by Lovecraft, which I will present shortly. In the concluding chapter I will summarize the findings yielded by the analyses of the three texts, and attempt to reconstruct a narrative technique common to all of them. Finally, I will assess this model critically and inspect its validity in relation to other works by Lovecraft.

### **The selection of texts**

As stated repeatedly, this thesis will analyse three texts by H. P. Lovecraft. I will now briefly present the texts I have chosen, and state briefly the reason for this choice. In order to select three texts from the vast bibliography of Lovecraft's fiction, I will have to supply further criteria. In the outline of Lovecraft's fiction I have given above, I have mentioned that both Lovecraft and his critics have suggested that "The Call of Cthulhu" marked the emergence of his stylistic independence. I have already advanced the claim that this 1926 short story coincides with the emergence of Lovecraft's narrative technique. Therefore, the first chapter will feature an analysis of "The Call of Cthulhu", in the hope of providing the initial outline of an emerging narrative art. The other two texts were written after "The Call of Cthulhu", and will hopefully allow me to distinguish how Lovecraft refined his narrative technique. Selecting two more texts from all the fiction Lovecraft wrote after 1926, I propose to discuss two novellas that are frequently named among his most popular works. Both of these texts also reflect refinements of Lovecraft's narrative technique. The second and third chapters, respectively, will therefore be devoted to "The Shadow over Innsmouth", a novella written in

late 1931, and to “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”, a novella Lovecraft wrote in early 1927.

## Chapter 1 – The Call of Cthulhu

In the introduction I have argued that “The Call of Cthulhu” marks a watershed in the fiction of Howard Philips Lovecraft. I would argue that it holds the same distinction in regards to the development of a narrative technique, centered on the unknown, which came to characterize most of Lovecraft’s subsequent works. Indeed, the unknown makes itself felt from the beginning of the story. The first sentences clearly states the importance the narrator, “the Late Francis Wayland Thurston”, attaches to something yet unknown (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 139): “The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity [...]” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 139). The narrator quickly goes on to reveal that he knows what this unknown is, and that its revelation would entail horror on an unimaginable scale. It would, he states, “open up such terrifying vistas of reality [...] that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee [...] into the peace and safety of a new dark age” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 139). This is why he pledges not to assist anyone else who might attempt to reveal this unknown and hopes that no one will succeed in doing so on his or her own (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 140). At this point, the narrative returns to an earlier point and he begins reporting how he first became aware of the ‘thing’.

What can we say about the unknown at this point? Two things primarily: First, the narrator has just outlined what he considers to be the major unknown. It clearly occupies his every thought, and is intimately linked to the sensation of horror, in his eyes. More importantly, the narrator suggests that the major unknown will also play a central role in the main narrative: “My knowledge of the thing began in the winter of 1926-27 [...]” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 140). Second, the unknown is still intact, despite the retrospective point of view of the narrator. By refusing to identify the ‘thing’, the narrator interposes a communicative unknown that obscures the major unknown entirely to whoever he narrates the story to. However, in order to be effective, this refusal would have somehow to be extended onto the main narrative, which will focus on how the narrator gained knowledge of the unknown.

### **The protagonist investigator’s unknown**

The narrative shifts back into the past, and the narrator’s former self enters it as the protagonist investigator. The distinction between Francis the narrator and Francis the protagonist investigator is an important one to make, even though they are the same person. The main narrative, in contrast to the introduction, presents the events, and thus the unknown,

through the eyes of the protagonist investigator. The narrator, who possesses knowledge of the unknown, becomes hardly perceptible. This manifests itself as a lack of *commentary* on the main narrative, and particularly the way the unknown is perceived by the characters in it (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 97-100). By withholding comments on whatever the protagonist investigator discovers about the unknown, the narrator attempts to maintain the integrity of his vow not to aid others in revealing the unknown. Nonetheless, as we shall see, the narrator's silence is not complete. This means that the main narrative will primarily deal with the unknown the protagonist investigator *perceives* and how he attempts to *understand* it. Both these are aspects of focalization, which, as we will see, play a major role in creating unknowns for the protagonist investigator (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 78-81). The following analysis will therefore primarily deal with the unknown as it is realized by the protagonist investigator and merely supplement the narrator's perspective on the unknown when he offers comments.

As predicted by the narrator, the protagonist investigator Francis is mercifully ignorant of that horrifying major unknown. The text supports this by stating that the main narrative will commence at the time Francis first became aware of the "thing" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 140). This comment by the narrator confirms that there is some unknown that overarches the entire narrative, which is the very definition of the major unknown. We note the vague term "thing", which does not yet reveal just what the major unknown will entail. Returning the protagonist investigator, his first step in the main narrative must be to become aware of a major unknown, i.e. to realize it.

### **Professor Angell's research – identifying the major unknown**

Francis' investigation is divided into two distinct parts. Totally ignorant of any unknown to begin with, he discovers his uncle's, Professor Angell's, research into something called the 'Cthulhu cult'. The first stage is therefore his attempt to familiarize himself with this material, leading to the eventual realization of the major unknown. In other words, he has to become *aware* that there is a major unknown before he can investigate it. It takes all his uncle's material for Francis to make that realization, after which he moves on to *investigate* it on his own, resulting in the horrifying realization that transforms him into the narrator Francis. But let us return to the first step – becoming aware of the major unknown.

This is a lengthy process, which starts when the narrator's former self, acting as the executor of Professor Angell's will, discovers a locked box among his uncle's belongings. To begin with, this provides him with nothing more than a name, written on the box itself:

'Cthulhu cult' (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 140-141). This name will be the moniker for the major unknown perceived by the protagonist investigator from this point on. While he has no information to connect to that name at that instant, he embarks on a search for any scrap of information which he can connect to it, marking this cult as the major unknown of the story. The narrator's view of the 'Cthulhu cult' is slightly more ambiguous, and it is not clear whether *this* is the major unknown.

What he find inside the box proves even more puzzling to Francis – a heap of disjointed notes, a bas-relief and a file entitled 'Cthulhu cult' containing several documents. These represent the first minor unknowns he encounters. Instead of clarifying what the 'Cthulhu cult' may be, the material itself presents yet more, *functional* unknowns to the protagonist investigator. These he must overcome first in order to understand what this cult may be. There is nothing in the box that describes Professor Angell's research goals, methods or findings; nor are there any notes that describe what the 'Cthulhu cult' is, or how these items relate to this name. There is not even any information that tells Francis how the items might be related to each other. With Professor Angell dead, Francis has no access to supplemental information that can focalize the material in such a way that would make it understandable. He must therefore reconstruct the Professor's research before he can make sense of the material now lying before him. Indeed, the lack of information on the material leaves him only with a prejudgment which seriously inhibits his investigation. He suspects that Professor Angell had become senile and fallen victim to an impostor, so meaningless does the content of the box appear to Francis (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 141). Lacking an alternative, his immediate reaction is to attempt to make sense of the *individual* pieces and the minor unknowns they represent, before attempting to correlate them and arrive at some conclusion about Professor Angell's research. The narrator remains silent about the significance of these items, and limits himself to reporting the protagonist investigator's thoughts.

Francis first attempts an examination of the bas-relief. Far from providing any progression towards revealing the unknown, it only confuses Francis further. Indeed, the only significant conclusion he can draw after a detailed examination is the "shockingly frightful" impression caused by its "general outline" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 141). Francis simply lacks the professional knowledge to interpret this piece, since he is no archaeologist like his uncle was. In addition to that, he has no knowledge of the history of the object – how it came into Professor Angell's possession, and who made it. Instead, he turns to common sense and attempts to speculate on the significance of the sculpture. Its distinct modern origin leads him to assume that Professor Angell, whose field was archaeology, had fallen victim to an



impostor. By extension, this seems to imply that the ‘Cthulhu cult’ and all the objects inside the box that pertain to it are part of a hoax (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 141). His common sense approach fails to determine any other purpose of the bas-relief, since Francis cannot decide whether the monster it depicts should be interpreted literally or symbolically, and what the inscription means (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 141). As it is clear that the protagonist investigator will be unable to understand this item in isolation, he turns to the file he discovered alongside it. Any explanation of the bas-relief’s function and nature will therefore have to be postponed until Francis can discover information about it elsewhere.

So our protagonist investigator turns to the file. Written by his late uncle, it may promise more revelations, not least due to Francis’ familiarity with the author. Inside it, he discovers a report on “Dream and Dream Work of H.A. Wilcox” and the “Narrative of Inspector John R Legrasse” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 141). Here, too, there is no text by Professor Angell accompanying these two narratives, meaning that Francis must again first familiarize himself with each manuscript before he can utilize them. He starts by reading the report on Wilcox’s dreams. In reading the report, he automatically embarks on a *hypodiegetic narrative* because what he reads is directly inserted into the text (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 93). Consequently, since Francis is reading to gain information, he is shifted to the more passive role of *narratee* (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 90). The hypodiegetic narrative introduces a different protagonist investigator, Professor Angell, who in this document limits himself to “recall and record verbatim” what Wilcox told him (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 142). This statement signals that the document fails to record Professor Angell’s thoughts. Indeed, it only contains Wilcox’s statement that he had created the bas-relief the night before and an interview of the young artist. In the course of this interview more unknowns appear: First Professor Angell suddenly appears to react to Wilcox’s mention of the phrase ‘Cthulhu fhtagn’, which lead him to recognize the “hieroglyphics and pictorial design” of the bas-relief (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 143). Then the professor suddenly poses Wilcox leading questions regarding the bas-relief which the young artist had shown him and asks him whether he had any connections to a cult or secret society (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 143). No explanation of why the Professor poses these questions or what he has recognized in the bas-relief is forthcoming, since Wilcox is the focalizer during this questioning. During a later visit by Francis, the narrator adds, the young artist could tell nothing about this interview except that the “questions seemed highly out-of-place to [him]” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 143). The consequence is that *our* protagonist investigator, Francis, cannot extract any useful information from this manuscript, which becomes another functional unknown, as its relationship to the bas-relief

and the Cthulhu cult remains elusive. The direct consequence is that the purpose of Professor Angell's research is still an unknown to Francis.

Wilcox's potential as key witness is exhausted, at least in the eyes of the protagonist investigator. As the manuscript states, he had fallen ill on March 22, lapsing into a state of alternating "unconsciousness and delirium". He suddenly recovered on April 2 without any recollection of what had happened since March 22 (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 144). The only reports in the file about Wilcox during this time come from the young man's attending physician, Dr. Tobey. He reports Wilcox's feverish ravings which Francis speculates are exacerbations of the visions of the "nameless monstrosity" the artist had sought to depict in the dream-sculpture, brought on by an illness (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 144).

While the manuscript detailing Wilcox' dreams ends there, Francis is able to retrace the progress of Professor Angell's research from "certain of the scattered notes" also found inside the file. These notes detail how his uncle "had quickly instituted a prodigiously far-flung body of inquiries, [...] asking for nightly reports of the interviewees' dreams" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 145). The data that emerges from these notes seems to be of profound consequences, as Francis remarks "that panic would have broken loose" if anyone else had been able to compare the results of these inquiries (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 145). He notes reports of dreams similar to those experienced by Wilcox. More importantly, the protagonist investigator remarks that all these dream experiences, Wilcox's included, occurred within the same time frame. Surprisingly, the conclusion Francis draws from this material is still a skeptical one: He "half suspected [the Professor] of having asked leading questions, or of having edited the correspondence in corroboration of what he had latently resolved to see" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 145). As an alternative explanation, grounded in his profound distrust of Wilcox, he suspects that the young artist had somehow influenced his uncle's examination of the data (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 145). Francis is unable to corroborate any of these hypotheses at this time: "Had my uncle referred to these cases by name instead of merely by number, I should have attempted some corroboration and personal investigation" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 146). Rather than moving any closer to a solution as to what the 'Cthulhu cult' might be, Francis is still attempting to establish whether or not the material inside the box is evidence of a hoax.

In addition, he discovers several press cuttings which he relates to the dream reports. However, Francis does not form a new opinion based on these cuttings, something which the narrator, in retrospective, regrets: "A weird bunch of cuttings, all told; I can at this date scarcely envisage the callous rationalism with which I set them aside" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 146).

Once again, even though the narrator comments on the protagonist investigator's faulty investigation, he does not rectify the problem by offering an explanation of his own.

### **The cult identified – “The Tale of Inspector Legrasse”**

Francis is only able to recognize what kind of unknown the Professor Angell's research deals with *after* he has read the second manuscript inside the file – “The Narrative of Inspector John R. Legrasse, 121 Bienville St., New Orleans, La., at 1908 A. A. S. Mtg.-Noted on Same, & Prof. Webb's Acct.” The events in this manuscript predates Wilcox's experiences by 17 years, and the narrator immediately comments that Legrasse's narrative must have been the first time Professor Angell had heard the name ‘Cthulhu’ (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 147). The narrator divines that what Legrasse had told Professor Angell had so “stirred” him that “it is small wonder he pursued Wilcox with queries and demands for data” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 147). Here, too, no explanation as to what Legrasse's narrative really revealed about ‘Cthulhu’ is given. This is the first instance in which Francis succeeds in establishing a connection between two pieces of evidence. This also marks the emergence of a trend: The protagonist investigator seems to postpone any major judgments about the material until he has finished all the contents of the box. Apparently, Francis still does not know how the material inside the box fits together. This hardly comes as a surprise, since we now recognize that he has been examining the contents of the box in reverse chronological order. Francis has yet to see the basis for Professor Angell's research, which, the narrator reveals, lies in the narrative Francis turns to now. For the time being, Francis therefore continues on reading. Again, what he reads in the Legrasse manuscript is transcribed by the narrator as a hypodiegetic narrative, just as he did with Wilcox's dream reports. We are therefore introduced to yet another protagonist investigator – John Raymond Legrasse (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 147). Any considerations by Francis based on this narrative are postponed until after he has finished reading it.

Conducting a faltering investigation into a “dark cult” in Louisiana in 1908, Legrasse hopes to break the case by seeking expert opinions at a meeting of the American Archaeological Society. He hopes that the archaeologists can identify a statuette, and in turn the mysterious cult he pursues (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 147-148). His hopes are in vain, as the experts themselves are baffled by this artifact. Indeed, their detailed examination only expands the unknown by identifying its mysterious aspects: “Totally separate, its very material was a mystery [...] The characters along the base were equally baffling;”(Lovecraft, *CoC*: 148-149). So, far from being merely a functional unknown, this small statuette is at the

same time a physical and communicative unknown. All they can tell with certainty is that this predates anything comparable known to archaeology (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 149).

Only Webb, a professor of Anthropology, offers a hypothesis. He links the statuette to an idol of a cult he had witnessed among natives in Greenland (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 149). However, Webb can supply little more concrete than a phrase frequently used by that Greenland cult. Although Legrasse confirms that his unknown cult apparently made use of the same phrase, this still leaves the Inspector with a communicative unknown, since all Webb can supply is a literal translation: “In his house at R’lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming.” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 150). The lack of knowledge about the context of this phrase does not permit Legrasse or Webb to interpret its function or true meaning, a problem which Todorov calls *polysemy*: Without supplemented information, this utterance can be interpreted in many ways, none of which are certain (Todorov, *Poetics of Prose*: 23). This renders the phrase a communicative unknown.

The experts’ inquiries about the statuette prompt Legrasse to tell of how he came into its possession (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 150). In late 1907, he had been summoned to investigate ritual activities in the swamplands beyond the city limits of New Orleans. This places the cult in a “substantially unknown” region to Legrasse, and indeed even to locals, who only circulate legends about this area (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 150-151). Indeed, not even the police penetrate the swamp, as the ritual they interrupt is “on the merest fringe of this abhorred area”, which a man named Galvez suggests contains potent unknowns (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 151). The narrator intersects here, dismissing Galvez as “distractingly imaginative” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 153). Legrasse’s immediate concern is naturally the investigation of the cult. There is no indication that either Legrasse or the narrator sees any connection between these legends and the cult investigated by Legrasse. Being a police officer, Legrasse limits himself to observations of what happened in the swamp. During the raid the statuette captures his attention. Its placement suggests to him that it has a key function in the ritualistic activities playing out in front of his eyes. Legrasse describes the scene in detail, but draws no conclusion. The swampland, suggested to contain more unknowns, is downgraded to no more than an atmospheric unknown by Legrasse: “It may have been only imagination and it may have been only echoes which induced one of the men [...] to fancy he heard antiphonal responses to the ritual from [...] deeper within the wood” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 152).

The next step in Legrasse’s investigation is naturally to question the apprehended cultists. Their apparent heritage misleads Legrasse into suspecting the cult to be an amalgamation of various practices perhaps including voodoo. Once he starts to question the

individuals, however, he finds this assessment to be wrong. Indeed, the prisoners unanimously describe a cult that is surprisingly homogeneous (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 153). All reveal their devotion to ‘the Great Old Ones’, chiefly among them ‘Cthulhu’. And all of them tell the same story about these Old Ones and the cult to the police, which Legrasse relays verbatim. Legrasse’s reaction to this new information is overwhelmingly negative. He dismisses these statements, describing virtually all of the prisoners as mad: “Only two [...] were found sane enough to be hanged, the rest were committed to various institutions” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154). It is debatable what Legrasse may have gleaned from the statements, as the prisoners themselves are subject to a communicative unknown. They can only relate bits and pieces of orally related history of the cult. They imply that more complete written sources exist, but these cannot be accessed since “no one could read the old writing now” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154). Furthermore, they cannot reveal more about the “Old Ones”, as their setting strictly separated them from the cult. They communicate with the cultists through intermediaries, merely referred to as “shapes” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154). Finally, they do not even share all of their limited knowledge, mentioning only that they know more, but are unwilling to reveal more to the police (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154).

Despite the dismissal of the other cultists as mad, the statement of one individual named Castro is described in greater detail by Legrasse. His judgment of Castro’s testimony is delayed until after the old man has told his story, but he is introduced as a *likely* key witness: “What the police did extract, came mainly from [...] Castro” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154). In contrast to his brethren he tells the police more about the Old Ones and the cult’s history, information he claims to have gained from leaders of the cult in China (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154). Castro gives a very detailed and less mystified account of the Old Ones and their connection with the cult, and also elaborates on the structure of the cult itself (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154-156).

Legrasse’s immediate response to this plethora of information is to probe Castro further “concerning the historic affiliations of the cult” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 156). Legrasse’s focalization proves ideologically motivated, as he doggedly pursues possible leads in his criminal case against the cult. He is simply not interested in the history or beliefs of the cult or even stories about the Old Ones. Unwilling to reveal more about the cult, Castro does not turn out to be a key witness in the Inspector’s eyes, although he is “deeply impressed and not a little bewildered” by the details of Castro’s account (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 156). With Castro’s refusal to provide *relevant* information, Legrasse’s investigation is dead-ended, forcing him to turn to the archaeologists for aid in identifying the cult or its idol.

The narrative then reverts to the meeting of the Archeological Society. Returning to the contents of Legrasse's narrative, the experts there are still unable to provide more information about cult or idol. On the contrary, later correspondences among these experts reveal suspicions of "charlatanry and imposture" regarding what Legrasse told them, proving that they are genuinely baffled by what Legrasse told and showed them (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 156).

Here the manuscript ends, and Francis at last analyzes what he just read. He immediately infers that this was the original document which had prompted Professor Angell to investigate Wilcox's dreams, after recognizing startling parallels to Legrasse's narrative (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 156-157). We can also trace a surprising lack of change in Francis' investigation at this point. Rather than going back over the Professor's subsequent material after identifying the cult, the "rationalism of [his] mind" leads Francis to question the veracity of his uncle's work. Instead of investigating if a common larger unknown underlies Wilcox's and Legrasse's narratives, Francis still works under the assumption that the Wilcox manuscript might be a hoax. He suspects the young artist of having heard of the occurrences in Louisiana beforehand and of exploiting the Professor's research for his own ends (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 157). At that point, his focus becomes so narrow that he does not consider the contents of Legrasse's narrative, particularly Castro's report. Thus, he does not realize any new unknowns or important information after he has finished reading it.

Instead, Francis becomes obsessed with speculating about how Professor Angell might have fallen victim to a hoax at the hands of Wilcox. He seeks out Wilcox in order to "give him the rebuke [he] thought proper for so boldly imposing upon a learned and aged man" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 157). Although he becomes convinced of Wilcox' sincerity, he settles on the hypothesis that Wilcox must have "heard of the cult in some casual way, and had soon forgotten it amidst the mass of his equally weird reading and imagining" and must have later subconsciously expressed it in the form of dreams (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 158). In doubting Wilcox' reliability, the protagonist investigator also doubts the importance of the young artist's narrative. At this point his project to retrace Professor Angell's research fails, arguably because of Francis' compromised focalization of the material. The way he sees it, he has exhausted the material contained within the box without gaining an understanding of his uncle's research.

Nonetheless, after having read both narratives within the file, Francis has come to realize that the cult represents a major unknown: "The matter of the cult still remained to fascinate [him]" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 158). His dismissal of Professor Angell's research,

however, leaves him with virtually no believable explanation or even hypothesis about this unknown. Furthermore, his exhaustion of Professor Angell's research leaves him with no lead to investigate: A visit to Legrasse proves inconclusive, and his attempts to track down Castro reveal that the man is dead (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 158). Dreaming of becoming a famed anthropologist if he could track down and research this cult even further, Francis at last starts to investigate actively.

### **Francis' investigation**

Part III of the short story, then, narrates the emergence of Francis as the investigator of the cult. The chance discovery of a newspaper article breaks the stalemate and allows him to begin his own investigation of the cult. The article details the discovery of a derelict vessel, the *Alert*, in the South Pacific. The events reported in the article lead Francis to pose some pertinent questions about the unknown, which show the focus to his renewed investigation of the Cthulhu cult:

Here were new treasuries of data on the Cthulhu cult, and evidence that it had strange interests at sea as well as on land. What motive prompted the hybrid crew [of the *Alert*] to order back the *Emma* as they sailed about with their hideous idol? What was the unknown island on which six of the *Emma*'s crew had died, and about which the mate Johansen was so secretive? What had the vice-admiralty's investigation brought out, and what was known of the noxious cult in Dunedin? And most marvelous of all, what deep and more than natural linkage of dates was this which gave a malign and now undeniable significance to the various turns of events so carefully noted by my uncle? (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 162)

It remains to be seen if Francis is able to answer all these questions, and how satisfactory his answers prove to be. The remote setting in which this event occurred prevents any immediate answers, as it takes Francis considerable effort and time – especially story time – to track down all relevant, and by now scattered, sources: Locals in the *Alert*'s homeport of Dunedin, the vice-admiralty court in Sidney, the *Alert* itself, the artifact Johansen had held when he was found, and finally Johansen himself. However, this delay only allows him to begin forming hypotheses about several of the unknowns he had encountered up to this point.

Before leaving Providence to investigate the Emma-Alert incident, Francis starts to correlate dates mentioned in Professor Angell's material with those mentioned in the article (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 162). In this way, Francis discovers portentous links between Professor Angell's research and the events mentioned in the article. He discovers that the strange encounters the *Emma* had with the *Alert* and later an uncharted island on March 23 coincided

with the start of Wilcox delirium and fever-visions and the worldwide reports of strange dream experiences. (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 144-145; 162). Suddenly, Francis finds his doubts about the validity of the Professor's research called into question, and immediately searches for other parallels. He also begins to consider what Castro testified about the Old Ones, particularly their mastery of dreams (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 162). Yet these correlations end in nothing else but the realization that whatever had happened ended on April 2, and Francis is unable to draw any conclusions from Castro's tale at this point, beyond the sense of "cosmic horror" which the old man's account suddenly instills in him (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 162).

Francis therefore systematically tracks down every lead offered by the newspaper article. His journey to Dunedin, the Alert's homeport, and his brief visit to the vice-admiralty court in Sidney shed little light on the cult. On the contrary, his examination of the idol found in mate Johansen's possession reiterates the physical unknown that already confronted the archaeologists in 1908: "Geologists [...] vowed that the world held no rock like it [is made of]." Francis once again draws on Castro's account – that the Old Ones brought with them idols from the stars – but makes no inference and offers no hypothesis (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 163).

The final piece of the puzzle only falls into place when he sets out for Oslo to visit Johansen. Once again, a potential key witness has died before Francis had the opportunity to interview them. However, unlike Castro, Johansen left behind a journal, which Francis now obtains. Francis filters Johansen's experiences and merely relays what he deems to be the most important parts of the Norwegian mate's journal (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 164). That Francis selects certain parts of Johansen's narrative implies that Francis has begun to form a coherent hypothesis about the unknown. Simultaneously, we can trace a change in Francis. A *psychological* facet of Francis' character emerges that impedes his ability to investigate: As he interprets Johansen's descriptions, he realizes that the island the Norwegian sailor and his shipmates landed on must really have been R'lyeh. In this instant, the horror the narrator had initially foreshadowed instills itself: "When I think of the *extent* of all that may be brooding down there I almost wish to kill myself forthwith" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 165). This sensation of horror leaves Francis' mind paralyzed – he becomes unable and unwilling to hypothesize about the nature and significance of the minor unknown reported by Johansen. The paralysis also prevents him from re-examine minor unknowns that were introduced by other sources. The horror that takes a hold of Francis' mind at the realization that R'lyeh really exists also heralds his realization of a new major unknown, one which surpasses the significance of the cult: the Old Ones. However, the horror prevents him from investigating this new major unknown.



Instead, Francis continues reciting from mate Johansen's diary, without attempting to explain the unknowns encountered by the Norwegian and his crewmates (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 166). In silence, the protagonist investigator reads about the series of increasingly disturbing unknowns Johansen encounters at R'lyeh. Upon making landfall, Johansen and his shipmates experience the island as a massive atmospheric unknown: "Something very like fright had come over all the explorers before anything more definite than rock and ooze and weed was seen" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 166). Then they come upon a gateway, which they succeed in opening. This aperture, however, only yields further unknowns, since whatever lies beyond it is shrouded in a darkness which Johansen is convinced, is "almost material [...] indeed a *positive quality*", i.e. a physical unknown (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 167). Unable to see what lies beyond the threshold and unwilling to enter the darkness, the sailors nevertheless can hear and smell something approaching the opening. Finally, an entity emerges from the darkness. This entity represents yet another unknown, as Johansen can hardly *attempt* to describe what "It" is (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 167). The encounter with "It" traumatizes Johansen, who can do little more than chronicle what he remembers of his escape from the island before descending into a delirious state. Francis cannot help but remark that the entity Johansen described as "It" must have been Cthulhu, who had risen again (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 167). However, Francis does not dare to think more about Johansen's experiences.

The protagonist investigator's involvement comes to a definite close when he finishes reading the diary. The narrative has reached the timeframe of the narrator, into whom Francis is now transformed. The narrator then closes the frame opened by the introduction. The unknown, however, is not given any closure by him, either. Rather, his mind is occupied by worries for his own safety. After having read all these accounts, he is struck by the fact that witnesses and investigators which have succeeded in investigating the cult have met untimely deaths at the hands of this cult: "As my uncle went, as poor Johansen went, so I shall go" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 169). However, even this threat to his life cannot completely displace the narrator's thoughts on the major unknown which Francis has come to realize while reading Johansen's diary: "Cthulhu still lives, too, I suppose, again in that chasm of stone [...] His accursed city is sunken once more [...] but his ministers on earth still bellow and prance and slay around idol-capped monoliths in lonely places" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 169). When his thoughts turn to explaining this unknown, however, he quickly chastises himself: "A time will come – but I must not and cannot think!" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 169) The self-restriction – "I must not think" – reiterates the vow he had made not to reveal anything about this major unknown, and which he apparently had forgotten for an instant. In addition, "I cannot think"

suggests that the narrator is really unable to explain that unknown even to himself. Instead, he gives an explanation why he narrated this story, the purpose of which, according to him, was not to reveal the major unknown: He states that he had merely revisited the events which lead to his discovery as a “test of [his] own sanity”, which he now intends to lock away along with Professor Angell’s research (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 169).

### **Protagonist investigator – unknown – narrator**

The previous sections have repeatedly referred to the respective relationships the narrator and protagonist investigator have with the unknown. This issue deserves further analysis, as it will have bearings on the following section concerning the reader. Whereas the narrator freely admits to the reader that he has important knowledge about the unknown, he vows not to reveal it. This vow affects the main narrative: While he clearly is responsible for presenting what the protagonist investigator experiences, the narrator shapes the narrative so as to minimize the chance of exposing the major unknown. Since this is the story of how the protagonist investigator has come to realize the major unknown that the narrator seeks to hide, the narrator merely retreats into the background and comments very sparsely on the narrative – his presence diminishes. This lack of presence becomes especially conspicuous when the woefully ignorant protagonist investigator encounters unknowns. In such instances the narrator refrains from making comments that would compensate for the protagonist investigator’s inability to explain or recognize unknowns. In the few such cases where he does comment, he merely points out that the protagonist investigator has made a mistake, but he does not rectify that mistake. This results in Francis pursuing an investigation of the cult until almost the end of the narrative. It is only when the narrative approaches the ending, and Francis approaches his transition into the narrator, that he becomes aware of the true major unknown. This realization leaves him incapable of investigating any further, and the narrator, who eventually re-enters the narrative, maintains his vow not to discuss this major unknown. Despite their limitations, the few comments the narrator makes, as well as his role in the introduction to the main narrative and in the ending, are significant for the reader, and I will therefore have a closer look at them in the following section.

### **The reader’s view of the unknown**

The detailed description of the unknowns perceived by the protagonist investigator and the narrator may appear trivial. As pointed out in the introduction, however, it is a necessary contrast that will enable us to understand the unknown as it presents itself to the reader of

this short story. At first, we need to remind ourselves that the reader occupies an entirely different diegetic level than either the narrator or the protagonist investigator: The reader sees the text before him, with all its embellishments. In the case of “The Call of Cthulhu”, the reader will start by reading two epigraphs even before he comes in contact with the narrative. The first one identifies the source of the text, while the second one is a quote from a text by Algernon Blackwood. Immediately, there is little the reader will gain from the second epigraph, but the first one indicates that the following text will somehow involve the “late Francis Wayland Thurston, of Boston (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 139). These epitaphs present a functional unknown, as their relationship to the text is uncertain, especially in the case of the second one. Nonetheless, the fact that it is an epigraph suggests that it is connected to the theme of the text.

Turning to the narrative, the reader is presented with the introduction. We will recall that the narrator describes the existence of a major unknown in this section. However, despite his statement to the contrary, he provides help to the reader. This provides us with the first example of stable irony in the text, and it proves highly significant. First of all, he moves the major unknown into the reader’s focus, making it a major unknown in the reader’s eyes, as well. The reader is told in no uncertain terms how significant and disturbing this unknown is to the narrator and that its revelation will have dire consequences. More importantly, the narrator’s commentary at the end of the introduction links it directly to the following main narrative: “My knowledge of the thing began in the winter of 1926-27 [...]” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 140). We can identify this as the ‘launch’ of the main narrative (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction*: 18). This makes the major unknown a global feature, meaning that it does not only play a significant role in the introduction, but also in the main body of the text. In this manner, the reader approaches the following narrative with a purpose – that of discovering and explaining this major unknown. The narrator has ironically imbued the major unknown with a *primary effect* (Perry, qtd. In Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 121).

Second, merely stating that he intends to conceal information about the unknown subverts the purpose of that statement. It warns the reader that he or she cannot rely on the narrator to relay vital information. This is compounded by the fact that the narrator repeatedly reveals *how* he came to possess knowledge about this unknown: He thinks it merciful that the human mind is unable to “correlate” the contents of the world, warns against the consequences of the sciences “piecing together dissociated knowledge” and ultimately tells the reader that he himself had gained knowledge of this unknown by successfully “piecing together [...] separated things” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 140). Coupled with

the narrator's refusal to reveal the major unknown, the repeated description of this technique produces precisely the opposite effect in the reader. In this instant, the reader realizes the dramatic irony that leads the narrator to inadvertently provide him or her with a blueprint for investigating the major unknown. By piecing together scraps of information provided by the text, he or she may be able to reveal the major unknown without the narrator's. The overt nature of these subversions of the narrator suggests that these instances of irony are indeed intended by Lovecraft.

The knowledge that the major unknown will play a significant role throughout the text, and particularly the significance the narrator ascribes to it, naturally arouses the reader's interest. By saying that the main narrative will be about how his "knowledge of the thing began", the narrator has started the narrative in such a way, that only the revelation of the major unknown would be meaningful and indeed *natural* to the reader. Coupled with the possibility that the narrator's presentation of the events might attempt to hide that major unknown from him or her, this means that the reader's interest is activated already before the main narrative commences. He or she will be wary of how the narrator and protagonist investigator present unknowns, and keep an eye open for "dissociated knowledge" that could yield knowledge about the major unknown.

At the outset of the main narrative, then, the reader is aware of the major unknown's existence. In this regard he or she is better prepared than the protagonist investigator, who is genuinely ignorant of it. Nevertheless, the narrator's refusal to reveal the major unknown to the reader means that he or she, too, has to realize what the nature of the major unknown is before he or she can investigate it.

In opening the box with Francis, the reader is subject to some of the same limitations faced by the protagonist investigator. Just like Francis, the reader is confronted with these items for the first time. The consequences are similar, too. How these items relate to Professor Angell's research is just as unknown to the reader as it is to the protagonist investigator. More importantly, no connection between the contents of the box and the major unknown can be identified, either. Nevertheless, the reader is unlikely to judge the material in the same way Francis does. The very fact that the narrator chose to mention this material, particularly in a narrative the reader knows will deal with the major unknown, disqualifies the protagonist investigator's opinion that these are evidences of a hoax played upon Professor Angell (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 141). The lack of this last limitation is crucial, since Francis' doubts concerning the authenticity of the statuette and Wilcox' honesty linger for a long time and delay his investigation considerably.

The effect of this different assessment becomes evident when the narrative progresses to Wilcox's narrative. We need to remind ourselves that Francis' reading of this manuscript signals the transition into a hypodiegetic narrative. The reader and Francis are here told about Professor Angell's investigation of Wilcox's experiences. According to Rimmon-Kenan, a hypodiegetic narrative can relate to the main narrative in three ways: it may advance or maintain the action in the main narrative, it may serve to explain a particular aspect of the main narrative, or it may serve to amplify the thematics of the text (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 93). Considering these three functions, that of Wilcox's narrative would seem to be explicative, as the identification of a purpose behind Professor Angell's research is the primary objective for both the reader and Francis. In his reaction, however, we can see that Francis fails to extract an explanation from this hypodiegetic narrative. In fact, the contents of the manuscript only make him "distrust[ful] of the artist", and he completely fails to analyze the contents of Professor Angell's interviews with Wilcox (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 145). The reader, on the other hand, is not prejudiced against Wilcox, and can therefore utilize the manuscript far better. In the absence of any markers of its unreliability, the reader has to assume that Professor Angell's research is valid, and is therefore unlikely to dismiss the manuscript. But the reader does not derive an explanation from this manuscript, either. Instead, he or she realizes an unknown that eludes the protagonist investigator – the strange presence in Wilcox's dreams. This entity is moved into the centre of the reader's attention by Professor Angell's sudden attention at the mention of the phrase 'Cthulhu fhtagn' (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 143). It communicates to him or her that, for some reason, the Professor attaches significance to this name, and hence to Wilcox's dream-experience. However, since the manuscript is focalized through Wilcox, the reader can learn little more about this unknown, as Wilcox's poetic descriptions afford very few hard facts: a description of a disembodied "voice that was not a voice" rendering the unintelligible phrase "Cthulhu fhtagn" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 143).

In another instance of stable irony, the narrator's comments aid the reader in expanding his or her understanding of Professor Angell's interview of Wilcox. His revelation that Professor Angell "besieges his visitor with reports for future reports of dreams", which "bore regular fruit", allow the reader to recognize that these dreams, by virtue of their repetition, reiterates their significance in the eyes of the reader (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 143). In addition, his comments also suggest to the reader that there is a connection to the cult. The nature of this connection remains a functional unknown, however.

In the aftermath of Wilcox's narrative, another ironic intervention by the narrator guides the reader's investigation: "Here the first part of the manuscript ended, but references to certain [...] scattered notes gave me much material for thought" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 144). Strategically well-placed, this and similar remarks by the narrator rebuke his former self – the protagonist investigator – for misinterpreting the correlations between the manuscript and the notes he had discovered. Ironic comments such as this help the reader in mitigating instances in which the protagonist investigator's perception or interpretation of an unknown becomes grossly unreliable. In this particular case, the reader realizes that the parallels Francis recognized do *not* point to the duplicity of either Wilcox or Professor Angell (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 145-146). The recurrence of such comments has the additional effect of distancing the reader from the interpretations offered by the protagonist investigator, who is marked as unreliable by them. This enable the reader to interpret the material presented in the text freely. However, this ironic comment proves unstable, as it does not tell the reader what the parallels between Wilcox's narrative and the notes signify. The task of discovering that significance, and thus the correction of Francis' misinterpretations, is transferred onto the reader.

This is also the first instance in which the reader can rely on superpositioning, as Todorov terms it, to reveal an unknown (Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*: 242). This simply means that the reader imposes information from another part of the text over the gap – he or she begins to "piec[e] together separated things", the technique the narrator had initially warned against (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 140). In fact, Francis had already attempted to do so by correlating the newspaper clipping and Wilcox's narrative. The reader thus simply retraces the correlations, as the parallels Francis discovered in this correlation appear genuine. However, rather than suggesting a faulty methodology in Professor Angell's research or Wilcox' duplicity, the reader realizes that the parallels point to a common phenomenon which had caused dream-experiences in both Wilcox's and a variety of people (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 145). This draws the reader's attention back to Wilcox's visions, but there is still nothing to indicate what they mean. Instead of allowing a hypothesis that explains this unknown, the text merely highlights that these visions play a much more central role than Francis realizes. The global and simultaneous occurrence of cases similar to Wilcox's implies a common and immensely powerful source for these visions. In addition, the unfounded feeling of dread connected to the appearance of a "thing" or entity towards the end of most visions and the severe effects experienced by some people mark the unknown source as dangerous. The only thing the reader can recognize at this point is that a mysterious entity called 'Cthulhu' looms over everything the protagonist investigator has encountered so far.

The conclusion one must draw at the close of this part of “The Call of Cthulhu” is that the reader has identified a new and *different* major unknown which, in the reader’s mind, demands an urgent explanation, whereas questions concerning the cult are de-emphasized. In addition to bringing new unknowns to the reader’s attention, this section also significantly erodes the reader’s relationship with the protagonist investigator. Francis’ almost virulent skepticism of Professor Angell and Wilcox, compounded by his own very uncertain reasoning and the narrator’s criticism of him, marks him as so unreliable that the reader will seek to operate independently from this point onwards, unless his reliability is shown to improve again. This means that while Francis continues to pursue an investigation into the cult, the reader is more likely to continue investigating the source of Wilcox’s visions and the mysterious entity.

### **The reader and the protagonist investigator – separated or united?**

As we have seen, the reader’s understanding of the unknown differs substantially from that of Francis even before he or she comes into contact with the narrative of Inspector Legrasse. This gulf widens even more in this next section, chiefly because the reader can approach Legrasse’s narrative on his or her own. This independence is enhanced by Francis’ typically methodical approach of delaying his own comments on Legrasse’s narrative until after he and the reader have read the manuscript. Unlike Francis, however, the reader is unlikely to delay any thoughts on what he or she is reading until the end of the hypodiegetic narrative. The reader’s investigation of the unknown appears to separate entirely from that of Francis.

This does not mean that the text’s presentation of Legrasse’s narrative to the reader is unmediated. It is preceded by a brief initial comment by the narrator: “Once before, it appears, Professor Angell had seen the hellish outlines of the nameless monstrosity, puzzled over the unknown hieroglyphics, and heard the ominous syllables which can be rendered only as ‘Cthulhu’ (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 147). This comment confirms the reader’s belief that the real major unknown to investigate is not the cult, but rather the entity. It also reveals that Professor Angell noticed eerie similarities between Wilcox’s bas-relief and the statuette (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 147). The significance of these statuettes – and especially why Wilcox, who is apparently ignorant of any cultist activity, created one – needs to be explored. However, despite the fact that the reader is becoming aware of an increasing number of minor unknowns that cluster around this unknown entity, this new major unknown itself remains elusive and ill-defined.

“The Tale of Inspector Legrasse” quickly presents the reader with important material. Since it is the first item mentioned by Legrasse, the statuette becomes the initial focus of the reader in this section. Legrasse’s tale about how the statuette was seized from a “dark cult totally unknown to [the police]”, combined with Legrasse’s and Webb’s detailed descriptions of cultist activities once again bring the cult into the reader’s focus. However, the reader’s view of the cult differs significantly from that held by the Inspector. As the investigating police officer on the case, his interest lies in revealing the identity and disposition of the cult’s members. The reader, on the other hand, sees an explanation of the cult as instrumental in order to explain the major unknown represented by the entity, which once again makes its presence felt. This difference in focalization will have repercussions when Legrasse and the reader attempt to utilize the information gained from the interrogations of the captured cultists, as we shall see shortly.

However, before Legrasse begins narrating his encounter with the cult, the reader is presented with the archaeologists’ assessment of Legrasse’s statuette. This significantly expands the reader’s understanding of the unknown, as their scrutiny reveals several minor unknown aspects of the statuette. Its material, inscriptions and artistic style are all described as alien – meaning not from our world (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 148-149). While the archaeologists, likely due to their professional background, refrain from making that judgment, the sheer amount of inexplicable qualities discovered in this artifact, as well as its age, convince the reader that an alien origin is the only viable explanation. The realization of these minor unknowns is transcribed onto the major unknowns, as the frequent appearance of the statuette – which is clearly stated to be similar to the one made by Wilcox – in close proximity to this entity suggests.

Legrasse’s tale, which follows now, is set up by the narrator, who comments that this is “a story to which I could see my uncle attached profound significance” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 150). Again, a reference to the importance of something to Professor Angell – whose research remains reliable in the reader’s eyes – signals to the reader that the following section will contain some crucial information. Legrasse’s account of the raid on the cult site, just like Webb’s account of the esquimaux cult before it, reveals the statuette to be an idol central to the cult, but can shed little light on its true significance. The mentioning of old legends and local gossip about the area beyond the cult site, and particularly the witness report of Joseph D. Galvez serve to convince the reader that some deeper, larger unknown looms behind the cult (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 151-153).



The interviews conducted by the police are a moment of revelation for the reader. By comparing the prisoners' statements with information taken from elsewhere in the text, the reader gains a near complete understanding of the cult itself and its connection with the mysterious 'Cthulhu'. Both the prisoners' statements and the archaeologists' experiences reveal the ancient origin and global nature of the cult. Furthermore, its purpose is the worship of aliens called "Great Old Ones", chiefly the one named Cthulhu. Cthulhu is identified as the high priest of the cult, and his liberation is their immediate goal (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 153-154). While providing definitive answers about the cult itself, their statements also expand the unknown surrounding Cthulhu and the Old Ones. Indeed, the cultists can tell nothing more definite about Cthulhu, as "[n]o man had ever seen the Old Ones" (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154). The reader is not sure whether these ritualistic descriptions can be accepted at face value. Nevertheless, the reader recognizes an important connection to a distant part of the text. The interviewed prisoners claim that the Old Ones had formed the cult by manipulating the dreams of men. Given what the reader knows of Wilcox' dreams, we cannot but conclude that Wilcox's dreams must have been an attempt at communication by the Old Ones.

Even more potent, at least to the reader, is the testimony of Castro. Indeed, the reader immediately recognizes him to be a key witness. Such a judgment is supported by the detailed and vivid descriptions the old man gives, contrasted with the cryptic lore echoed by his fellow cultists interviewed earlier. Baffled by his tale, not even Legrasse or the assembly of archaeologists dare mark Castro as unreliable (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 156). Castro's testimony has a two-fold effect on the reader. On the one hand, his detailed account results in a satisfactory explanation of the cult, which, for the reader, ceases to be an unknown at this point. It even confirms the reader's hypothesis that the cult itself is only of secondary importance compared to Cthulhu.

On the other hand, Castro's account at last allows the reader to fully realize the unknown that Cthulhu represents. Even though Castro's account reveals many important aspects of Cthulhu that allow the reader to understand the events of the preceding narratives, Castro at the same time introduces new unknown aspects of the Old Ones, which are even more significant to the reader. Crucially, Castro's clear and concise statements about the cult contrast with his practically unintelligible descriptions of the Old Ones, such as his description of their physical nature:

These Great Old Ones, [...] were not composed altogether of flesh and blood. They had shape [...] – but that shape was not made of matter [...] They could plunge from world to world through the sky; but when the stars were wrong,

they could not live. But although They no longer lived, They would never really die [...]. But [...] some force from outside must serve to liberate Their bodies. (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154-155)

The Old Ones function according to unknown principles, too, which Castro can only reveal depend on the “stars [being] right” – what that means, neither Castro nor the reader know. Similarly, their origins and abilities are mysterious, save the fact that they came “from the stars”, and that they communicate through telepathy (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154). That Castro is unable to provide answers to these questions is quite evident. As he himself reveals, the cult has had no contact with the Old Ones ever since R’lyeh sank, and for generations it has merely pursued its purpose of “keep[ing] alive the memory of [the Old Ones’] return (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 155). This assertion means, to the reader, that there is really no one that could present a properly focused account of the Old Ones, and that even the cult only knows about the Old Ones apart from the mystic lore it perpetuated for centuries. The unknown nature of the Old Ones is complemented by Castro’s mention of prophecies about their eventual return. It seems that not even Castro is able to fathom the power of the Old Ones, or the consequences of their return, since he can merely say that “the liberated Old Ones would teach [man] new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom” (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 155).

What does this mean for the reader, then? First and foremost it means that the reader has to contend with a much more complex new major unknown. Castro’s quasi-religious descriptions of the Old Ones do not provide answers to the pressing questions that now occupy the reader. He or she cannot be sure if the “the stars came right again”, but he or she has seen indications, in Wilcox’s dreams, that it is a distinct possibility (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 155). Castro’s descriptions of the telepathic communication between Old Ones and mankind, which he said was cut off when R’lyeh sank, conflicts with the reader’s knowledge about Wilcox’s dreams (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 155, 143-145). The young artist’s dreams and the newspaper cuttings signify that something must have changed. Nor does the reader find answers to the many unknown aspects of the Old Ones which Castro introduced. Although he tries to describe their nature, these descriptions only show the reader that their physiology is utterly alien, as is indeed their origin. More importantly, their great power is only implied, and not even Castro can fathom their potential. Similarly, their motives and dispositions are not even hinted at. Nor does the reader know whether he or she has realized the full nature of this unknown. Castro’s and other cultists’ hushed whispers about “black spirits” or “Black Winged Ones” that apparently serve as messengers for the Old Ones, leave the reader

wondering what other entities might make up the Old Ones entourage (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 154-156). The only hypothesis the reader can form about this major unknown is that the correlations with Wilcox's dreams confirms that the unknowns Castro introduced are *real* (fictional) concerns, and that the Old Ones' return, with its consequences, is a clear and present danger.

However, none of the hypodiegetic narratives which we have up until this point provide firm answers to the set of questions that has come to characterize the new major unknown. Consequentially, the reader can do little but hope that Francis's ability to uncover new material for him or her. Unfortunately, Francis' immediate reaction to Legrasse's narrative is to ignore any of its contents pertaining to anything else but the cult (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 156-157). While the protagonist investigator's dogged pursuit implies that the cult is responsible for Professor Angell's death, the reader is entering a state of suspense (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 159; Todorov, *Poetics of Prose*: 47). The reader's waits in vain for new material that would allow him or her to hypothesize about the Old Ones and the threat they pose as Francis' investigation of the cult ends in a cul-de-sac when his leads run out.

Even though the divergence between the reader's and the protagonist investigator's unknown seem insurmountable, Castro's tale actually reunites the reader and protagonist investigator. Far from finding Francis obsolete, the reader now depends on him to provide new material to investigate. The suspense is partly lifted in part III, as both investigators' perception of the unknown converges again. Francis' discovery of the newspaper article in the Sidney Bulletin in fact turns him into a key witness for the reader. Not only are the questions Francis' poses after reading the article the same that have plagued the reader since Castro's tale, but Francis confirms the hypotheses the reader has formed in the aftermath of Castro's account. R'lyeh had indeed risen again, and its rise must have caused Cthulhu to once again communicate telepathically, as implied by Wilcox's experiences in the same timeframe (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 162). Francis thus begins to piece together the evidence in much the same way the reader had done before him to reach conclusions similar to those the reader has already realized. As Francis leaps from conclusion to conclusion, he rapidly comes to realize the unknowns contained in Castro's tale. More importantly, however, this process allows him to uncover more new material which has relevance for the reader's interpretation of the new major unknown.

Joining forces again to pursue new information promised by the newspaper item, both protagonist investigator and reader find in Johansen the ultimate key witness. The reader, in particular, must view Johansen as such, for he is the only living person known to have

actually encountered Cthulhu. He may therefore provide information that fills the gaps in Castro's narrative, whose lack of first-hand knowledge had created more unknown aspects. Here, the reader has again the chance to improve upon Francis' interpretations of a hypodiegetic, as the protagonist investigator recoils from analyzing the contents of Johansen's diary in detail. Again, the reader's attempts are frustrated, this time by Johansen himself. Despite coming face to face with Cthulhu, Johansen is unable to provide hard facts for the reader to utilize, as he is unable to describe what he had seen. Once the reader has finished sifting through Johansen's account, the unknown surrounding Cthulhu has crystallized in its multi-faceted form. Johansen's encounter reveals the existence of "positive qualities" that specify the unknown qualities Castro hinted at (Lovecraft, *CoC*: 167). The strange, impenetrable darkness, R'lyeh's indescribable architecture and Cthulhu's mysterious dissolution and recombination during the *Alert's* ramming attempt are thus aspects of a complex unknown that remains inexplicable to Johansen, Francis and the reader alike. In addition, because Johansen's encounter with Cthulhu had been a chance one, his account contains no hint as to what conditions have caused R'lyeh to rise and Cthulhu to awaken, which thus remain unknown. Neither does the *Alert's* escape, during which Johansen loses sight of Cthulhu and R'lyeh, provide an answer to what happened on April 2.

Neither does the reemergence of the narrator provide any more revelations. His brief slip of the tongue merely reiterates the new major unknown. Thus, the reader is made aware of the possibility that R'lyeh may rise again, with all the dire consequences prophesized by Castro. For the reader as for Francis, this unknown embodies the sensation of horror since it suspends the reader in total uncertainty. The reader does not know the precise circumstances that cause the resurrection of the Old Ones and therefore does not know when or if R'lyeh will rise again. Nor can he or she know what the exact consequences of the Old Ones' resurrection will be. The ending of the narrative only allows the reader the formation of one certain hypothesis: that the cult still exists. The epigraph to this short story allows the reader to realize that the narrator's fears for his life prove well-founded, as this narrative has been "Found Among the Papers of the Late Francis Wayland Thurston". However, this leads the reader into an evil circle of revelation. He or she realizes that the cult is still active, and therefore still pursuing its goal of ensuring the resurrection of the Old Ones. Yet all this revelation achieves is to provide the reader with a degree of certainty that the Old Ones *will* eventually rise again. It does not allow him or her to dispel the unknown surrounding their nature, intentions and the consequences of their rise. These unknowns linger in the mind of the reader, and so does the horror.

### Concluding observations

These two analyses of this short story allow me to confirm several basic elements which Lovecraft repeatedly used to create and narrate unknowns. Predominantly, focalization, setting and communicative disruptions create unknowns which the reader and the protagonist investigator have to overcome in the course of the main narrative. The narrator disrupts his communication with the reader once he refuses to reveal the major unknown. As a result, both reader and protagonist investigator are subjected to the same unknowns created by the same narrative devices during the main narrative. The individual pieces of evidence in the main narrative all feature a very restricted focalization of Cthulhu and his cult. Moreover, both cult and entity are difficult to access due to their setting, which isolates them from all the characters, and indeed the narrator, within the story. Ultimately, only Castro and Johansen provide somewhat more focalized witness reports that are less restricted by their setting.

However, the text treats the reader's understanding of the unknown somewhat differently from that of the protagonist investigator and narrator. The ironic communication between implied author and implied reader, established in the introduction, is maintained in the main narrative. The implied author successively prompts the reader to investigate on his or her own, providing him or her with a blueprint for this investigation. The implied author thus mitigates the impact of the unknowns in the main narrative. By following the blueprint, the reader correlates, or, as Todorov calls it, superpositions the various unknowns over each other. The reader is further aided by the narrator's decision to *show* the reader all the details of hypodiegetic narratives rather than *telling* about Francis' interpretations of them (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: 154). This allows the reader to interpret hypodiegetic narratives such as Wilcox's and especially Castro's statement independently of the protagonist investigator and the narrator. The reader is afforded even more help by the *ironic* actions of the narrator, whose comments actually ease his or her efforts to interpret the unknowns in each hypodiegetic narrative, contrary to the narrator's intentions. One significant effect of this strategy is that the reader conducts a successful, entirely separate investigation that allows him or her to realize the existence of a new major unknown - Cthulhu. At the same time, Francis' investigation of the cult stagnates and misleads his focus by insisting on interpreting the evidence in relation to this major unknown.

In fact, the text *de facto* validates each of the steps the reader takes to investigate the unknown. As the narrative progresses, Francis eventually begins to apply just the same strategies as the reader has employed earlier in the text, and reaches remarkably similar

conclusions. In this manner, the text provides support and affirmation of the reader's steps, which it had prompted him or her to take earlier (Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: 159-160).

However, the lack of synchrony between the reader's and the protagonist investigator's investigation has another significant effect. Through Castro's and Johansen's reports, the reader eventually realizes the full scale of the new major unknown, which mouths into a set of specific questions: Will R'lyeh rise again? And if so, when? And what consequences will the rise of the Old Ones have for mankind? However, the reader's investigation falters at this point, since he or she is not introduced to any further material by the protagonist investigator or narrator which could provide an answer to these questions. The cause is obvious – how can the protagonist investigator introduce material about this major unknown, of which he is not even aware yet? This dependence also means that the reader will never find answers to these questions, as the narrative terminates in the instant Francis' realizes that Cthulhu and the Old Ones really represent the major unknown.

A closer examination of the unknown which the reader is left with at the end of the narrative also yields interesting results: The new major unknown that has emerged from Castro's tale and which Johansen's diary indubitably links the sensation of horror by these two witnesses and both the protagonist investigator and the narrator. There can be little doubt that this sensation of horror is therefore transferred to the reader. "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is the fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 21). This sentence, which I have already quoted in the introductory chapter, becomes relevant to what we consider now. In the unknown that the reader is left with at the end of "The Call of Cthulhu", is contained an even purer form of the horror than what the narrator has realized, for he fled into voluntary ignorance before his mind could properly form the questions the reader has formed. It is purer in that the reader actually recognizes the *potential* of the unknown, or at least a measure of its scale. However, this is all the reader realizes. The text does not provide any information that would allow the reader to even form hypothetical answers to these questions – they are unanswerable. For, as Lovecraft had intended, it is the *reader*, and the reader alone, that establishes the horrifying "contact with unknown spheres and powers" (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 23).

## Chapter 2 – The Shadow over Innsmouth

”The Shadow over Innsmouth”, a novella penned by H. P. Lovecraft in late 1931, is regarded as one of his finest works of fiction. Written nearly five years after “The Call of Cthulhu”, this novella shows how Lovecraft’s application of the unknown as a narrative technique had matured. Indeed, as will become clear in the following analyses, Lovecraft retained most features of the narrative technique employed in “The Call of Cthulhu”, but refined their application, particularly with regards to the reader. Already the introduction discloses a familiar basic structure: a narrator who introduces a major unknown and then launches a narrative that will revolve around this unknown, along with the invitation to the reader to investigate that unknown.

The narrator’s retrospective debate over a secret government investigation and a subsequent clandestine raid of Innsmouth provides an exposition for the induction of the major unknown. Only reluctantly does the narrator admit that his own experiences in Innsmouth are in fact the unknown that is the subject of “The Shadow over Innsmouth”: “It was I who fled frantically out of Innsmouth [...] and whose frightened appeals [...] brought on the reported episode.” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 269). Immediately following his acknowledgement that a major unknown exists, he states that the following narrative will be his attempt to come to terms with it:

I have an odd craving to whisper about those few frightful hours in [Innsmouth]. The mere telling helps me to restore confidence in my own faculties; to reassure myself that I was not simply the first to succumb to a contagious nightmare hallucination. (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 269)

This introduction of the major unknown is accompanied by an invitation to the reader. Already in the exposition, the narrator notes that “[u]ninquiring souls let this occurrence pass as one of the major clashes in a spasmodic war on liquor” while “[k]eener news-followers [...] wondered [at these events]” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 268). This warns the reader that he needs to investigate actively if he wishes to understand what happened in Innsmouth. While this is a novel way to activate the reader, the text also utilizes a more familiar and more direct strategy to achieve the same end. It leads the reader to doubt the narrator’s ability to reveal the unknown through his narration. For the narrator confesses that “[he] do[es] not know how much of the whole tale has been told even to [him]”. He goes on to state that he has “carried away impressions that are yet to drive him to drastic measures, and have in fact marred him so much that he does “not [wish] to probe deeper” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 259). While the narrator’s

situation in “The Shadow over Innsmouth” differs significantly from that of the narrator in “The Call of Cthulhu”, the effect remains the same. Whether through unwillingness or incapability, the narrator’s ability to narrate the unknown is called into question. This point will be explored later, for we must first turn to the unknown as it presents itself to the narrator and protagonist investigator. The immediate effect of the introduction, too, is the same as in “The Call of Cthulhu”: the narrator introduces the existence of the major unknown, without identifying its nature and without any revelations. Having established this, the narrator introduces the protagonist investigator, and thus the main narrative.

### **Legends and hear-say**

The introduction has already suggested that the unknown is so localized within Innsmouth that little more than rumors circulate among the various outside sources that tried to interpret the government’s activities in Innsmouth. This suggests that the setting is the first narrative device employed to create unknowns. It also makes it inherently clear that the protagonist investigator is entirely ignorant of any unknown at the beginning of the narrative, since he has never even heard of Innsmouth when he arrives in Newburyport during his tour of New England (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 269). Just how locally contained the unknown is becomes clear once the protagonist investigator hears more about Innsmouth from the locals in Newburyport. A conversation with the agent at the railroad ticket-office there grants him a first general impression of the unknown aspect of Innsmouth: “Any reference to a town not shewn on common maps [...] would have interested me, and the agent’s odd manner of allusion roused something like real curiosity” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 270). However, the protagonist investigator quickly discovers that the agent is only aware of a few ill-defined, atmospheric unknowns that are the subject of legends and gossip, which the agent himself distrusts: “[...] I come from Panton, Vermont, and that kind of story don’t go down with me” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 271). Nevertheless, our hero learns of mysterious events in Innsmouth’s distant and recent past, such as the strange epidemic of 1846 and of the bizarre appearance of the town’s inhabitants.

During the agent’s recital of these legends, the cause of the legendary appearance of these unknowns is revealed. Innsmouth is the subject of a reciprocal isolation: “Nobody around here or in Arkham or Ipswich will have anything to do with ‘em, and they act kind of offish themselves” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 273). This suggests that the legends and hear-say about Innsmouth are caused by skewed ideological and perceptual focalization (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 78-83). The few persons who have been to Innsmouth keep silent about their experience, while the remaining locals have such a low opinion of Innsmouth that they



are satisfied with either ignoring the unknown aspects of that town or spitefully proposing fantastic explanations of them.

Even though the agent distances himself from this local practice, he is still subject to the restrictions imposed by Innsmouth's isolation. He reveals that he has never been to that town himself. Acutely aware of his limited power to explain these unknowns, he merely offers a few brief and tentative explanations for a few unknowns. In this manner, he attributes Captain Marsh's visits to Devil Reef to the possible existence of a pirate stash there, the "big epidemic of 1846" to "some kind of foreign disease" and the appearance of the locals to miscegenation (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 271-273).

How does the protagonist investigator react to these unknowns? There is nothing to suggest that the protagonist investigator has in fact even noticed them. The agent, noting this lack of response, drops discussing unknowns and finishes with some general advice: "If you're just sightseeing, and looking for old-time stuff, Innsmouth ought to be quite a place for you" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 274). Nonetheless, the protagonist investigator is still curious about the town and therefore begins a search for other local sources of information it. This is a totally unspecific survey for "data about [the town]" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 274). A search of official records yields little results, as do additional inquiries with other locals. All the protagonist investigator gathers from these early investigations is that the generally dismissive attitude among "the educated" towards Innsmouth (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 274-275).

Despite the dearth of concrete information, the records mention "the strange jewelry vaguely associated with Innsmouth", and thus precipitate the protagonist investigator's next step – a visit to the Newburyport Historical Society (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 275). His appraisal of the jewelry there forms the protagonist investigator's first realization of an unknown connected to Innsmouth. He is bewildered by the jewelry he finds there, a tiara in particular. Although he can clearly identify the unknown physical aspect presented by the tiara's material, it presents an atmospheric unknown to the protagonist investigator. Struggling to pinpoint the source his uneasiness, he finally discovers it in the form of two further unknowns: The distinctly unfamiliar artistic style of the tiara and the mysterious reliefs adorning it. The appearance of the curator interrupts the protagonist investigator's thoughts about these unknowns, only allowing him to briefly voice doubts that the tiara is "of probable East-Indian or Indo-Chinese", as proposed by the museum's tag (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 276-277).

Miss Tilton, the curator, can only offer a theory about the object's recent history, suspecting it to have "formed part of some exotic pirate hoard discovered by old Captain Obed Marsh" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 277). Its origins are not discussed. Anyhow, Miss Tilton

overshadows any consideration the protagonist investigator might have had for the tiara by introducing a new unknown to him – “The Esoteric Order of Dagon” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 277-278). This cult, which she describes as quasi-pagan, has become the dominant denomination in Innsmouth. She also offers the hypothesis that it was brought to Innsmouth through trade contacts with the Far East when the community experienced economic decline almost a century ago. The protagonist investigator does not accept her hypothesis at face value, suspecting “the pious Miss Tilton” of being biased (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 277-278). However, whereas he previously merely wished to visit Innsmouth with “architectural and historical anticipations”, the protagonist investigator now adds an “anthropological zeal” to his list of reasons for visiting Innsmouth (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 278). There is no indication that this means that he wishes to investigate any of the unknowns about Innsmouth that have been introduced to him. Rather, it seems from his attitude so far, that he views the unknowns reported by the people of Newburyport as mere curiosities. Whatever the nature of his anthropological interest, it merely co-exists with his original purpose of a historical and architectural survey of towns throughout New England, and Innsmouth appears to be little more than another waypoint in that survey.

### **Into Innsmouth**

The next morning, our protagonist investigator boards the infamous bus to Innsmouth. There, the unknown reiterates itself in the form of bus driver Joe Sargent. His appearance leads the protagonist investigator to recall what the agent told him about the strange appearance of the inhabitants of Innsmouth. Unable to attribute Sargent’s appearance to racial intermixing, he tentatively suggests that it might be some form of biological deformity (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 279). Any attempt to explore this hypothesis further is forestalled when his thoughts turn away from Joe Sargent’s appearance and towards the area the bus traverses.

His arrival in Innsmouth confirms that the protagonist investigator’s focus has returned to the primary topic of his New England journey: the sightseeing of architectural points of interest. Captivated by the decaying architecture, he embarks on a detailed survey of the town by identifying landmarks and taking a general overview over the town’s various parts (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 281-282). Even the ‘disquieting’ intermittent appearance of the town’s people does not bring the unknown represented by their looks back into his focus.

The protagonist investigator’s haphazard first encounter with another unknown in Innsmouth reveals how much his ability to focalize unknowns through observations is compromised by his engrossment with the town’s architecture. Still on the bus, his focus on

the town's architecture allows him only a passing glimpse at a church. This glimpse, however, fills him with an unaccountable sense of horror. He is uncertain what he has seen, rendering this impression an atmospheric unknown. On a second look, he judges that he must have been the pastor in the church basement, and that the vestment and tiara which he wore were the source of his horror. He dispels this unknown as having been caused by his distraction, which allowed his "imagination had supplied nameless sinister qualities" to a blurry observation (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 283-284). He reasons that his distracted mind had allowed his subconscious to dredge up the unease at what he had seen and heard at the Newburyport Historical Society and fasten it to this distracted observation. Satisfied with the explanation that such jewelry, coming from a treasure trove, and vestments belonging to a foreign cult would naturally appear odd, the protagonist investigator dismisses this episode as a false unknown (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 284). Rather than becoming more alert and re-evaluating his focus, he resumes his survey of the town's architecture immediately.

In addition, the anthropological interest, which the protagonist investigator had felt after his visit to the Historical Society, now resurfaces as he makes inquiries at the local grocery store (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 285). The only employee there is a young man originally from Arkham, who provides the protagonist investigator with two things. First, he gives him a rough overview of Innsmouth. His descriptions of the town are accompanied by warnings to avoid certain areas, including the Marsh refinery, the churches and the Order of Dagon Hall, which the clerk describes as "almost forbidden territory" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 286). In doing so he starts introducing new unknowns to the protagonist investigator. Why these particular areas are off limits to foreigners is not known to the young man. The store clerk continues reporting about unknowns he had witnessed since he began working at the store. From his descriptions of these unknowns, it is clear that once again focalization is their main source, this time even for someone who has experienced the unknown *in* Innsmouth. Even though he lives in Innsmouth, he is still an outsider and therefore socially isolated from the town's inhabitants as well as excluded from the forbidden areas (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 287).

After pointing out these locations to the protagonist investigator, the grocery store clerk moves on to other unknowns. He deepens the unknown surrounding the Esoteric Order of Dagon, whose creeds he finds mysterious (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 286). And he also introduces new unknowns to the protagonist investigator. The people of Innsmouth present a particular conundrum to the young man. He is seldom able to observe them, and when he can do so they band together, excluding outsiders like him. He can only speculate that "judging from the quantities of bootleg liquor they consume [,] they lay for most of the daylight hours in some

sort of stupor” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 286). His observations also suggest that the ‘Innsmouth look’ is a more complex nature than the protagonist investigator’s observations have led our hero to believe. The fact that old people are seen only very rarely, and that these were most affected by the look, lead the young man to speculate that it might be a disease whose effects increased with age. This he connects to other observations of strange sounds from inside houses in certain areas, leading him to suppose that “many specimens even worse than the worst visible ones were kept locked indoors” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 287). However, the clerk does not limit himself to merely mentioning unknowns he has observed.

He also presents the protagonist investigator with his opinions on the legends that circulate about Innsmouth. These opinions show that the clerk only gives credit to unknowns he has observed himself. To him, the Esoteric Order of Dagon and the nature and development of the “Innsmouth look” therefore present the only unknowns around town. Everything else, especially the reports spread by other out-of-towners about “monstrous glimpses”, he dismisses as mere illusions caused by “old Zadok’s tales and the [appearance of the] malformed citizens” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 288). Since he dismisses these legends outright, and since he trusts only his personal observations of the present, he makes no mention of the *historical* unknowns mentioned by earlier witnesses, such as the epidemic of 1846. This reductionist view of the unknown entails the consequence of practically denying the existence of a major unknown.

The clerk’s judgmental presentation of the unknown also affects his introduction of Zadok Allen, who, as he points out to the protagonist investigator, is the only native who can be persuaded to talk to outsiders (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 287-288). He warns the protagonist investigator that “little useful data could be gained from him; since his stories were all insane, incomplete hints of impossible marvels and horrors which could have no source save his own disordered fancy” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 288). As stated above, he blames the emergence of legends about Innsmouth on outsiders being influenced by Zadok’s yarn. This means that while he points out that Zadok Allen would be the best person to talk to for the protagonist investigator, the old man is entirely unreliable in that whatever he has to say is not to be trusted.

The protagonist investigator’s reaction to the clerk’s report is once again an apathetic one. He does not stop to consider any of the unknowns the clerk had introduced to him. However, he does not appear to subscribe to the clerk’s view of the unknown, either. He is simply happy that the clerk provided him with a map for him to find his way around town. Far from becoming more interested in investigating the unknowns, he resigns himself to the

sobering realization that he does not possess the professional background to make any attempt to analyze the unknowns, which he takes to be a complex sociological phenomenon: “The town, I could see, formed a significant and exaggerated example of communal decay; but being no sociologist I would limit my serious observations to the field of architecture” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 289).

In his subsequent rambles, though, unknowns created by his observations nevertheless start to encroach on his conscious mind. Initially, he mostly ignores them as involuntary and unimportant reactions of his unconscious, claiming that the desolation “start[s] up vestigial fears and aversions that not even the stoutest philosophy can disperse” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 290). Once he starts encountering increasingly disturbing cases of the ‘Innsmouth look’ in people, he begins to weakly test the competing hypotheses introduced by the agent and the clerk, but he cannot decide whether what he sees is evidence of racial intermixing or indeed a disease (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 290). He once again dismisses his thoughts about ‘Innsmouth look’ as distracting and returns to his exploration of the town. However, observations of unknowns, which he until now has dismissed as false realizations, become more distinct and unsettling. First, the “*distribution* of the faint sounds” he hears puzzles him, for they do not come from the visibly inhabited houses but the “most rigidly boarded-up facades (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 290). This makes him “unaccountably anxious” not to hear the voices of those living behind these facades. Next, he finds himself *somehow* unable to pass the church in where he had his first encounter with an unknown. Eventually, even his archaeological observations are disrupted by visual manifestations of the unknown, such as the mysterious absence of cats and dogs across the town, and again the appearance of “tightly shuttered” windows in the upper stories of even “the best-preserved mansions” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 291). Alarmed by the mounting number of unknowns he has observed, he finds that Innsmouth “was rapidly becoming intolerable”, leading him to return to the bus stop and leave the town immediately (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 292). This decision shows that the protagonist investigator can no longer dismiss the minor unknowns, but that he nonetheless refuses to investigate them.

### **Zadok Allen**

By chance, the protagonist investigator’s path crosses that of Zadok Allen, and this encounter “set[s] up new currents in [his] mind”. He recalls the clerk’s assurances that the old man was thoroughly unreliable, “yet the thought of this aged witness to the town’s decay, with memories going back to the early days [...], was a lure that no amount of reason could make me resist” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 292). The protagonist investigator’s anthropological interest has

conquered his fear. However, this once again distracts him from the unknowns he has been introduced to and which he has observed himself. Instead of hoping to find answers to these unknowns, he merely anticipates that he might be able to extract some historic facts from what he anticipates to be the “strangest and maddest myths” about Innsmouth (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 292-293). In expressing this hope, which echoes the grocery store clerk’s warning of the old man’s unreliability, the protagonist investigator foreshadows his prejudiced focalization of what Zadok tells him. He has already made up his mind that anything Allen tells him must be meticulously filtered from the expected insane yarn.

Successfully baiting the old man with a bottle of whiskey to a spot where our hero plans to question him undisturbed for the remainder of his stay in Innsmouth, Zadok eventually commences a lengthy narrative about the history of Innsmouth. Not daring to interrupt Zadok, the protagonist investigator merely listens in silence. Zadok Allen begins with an account of Captain Obed Marsh’s encounter with a tribe of South Seas natives. He goes on to give a detailed description of what Captain Marsh learnt about the secret symbiotic relationship which existed between these natives and a mysterious society of aquatic creatures (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 297). According to Allen, the eventual destruction of the natives proved detrimental to Innsmouth’s economy, as the loss in trade was compounded by the demise of fishing and other industry. This, the old man reveals, prompted Marsh to declare that “he cud mebbe git a holt o’ sarten paowers as ud bring pleny o’ fish an’ quite a bit o’ gold” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 299). The intermittent pauses in Zadok’s monologue allow the protagonist investigator to form an opinion about what Zadok tells him. Initially, his response is invariably one of disbelief. Nonetheless, the hope that Zadok’s account might allow him to understand Innsmouth as an anthropologic phenomenon remains, as he still fancies that “contained within [Zadok’s tale is] a sort of crude allegory based upon the strangeness of Innsmouth” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 300). Clearly, he sees the various reports about unknowns and his own observations as a cultural phenomenon, which is confirmed by his doubts that “[Zadok’s] tale had any really substantial foundation” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 300).

Zadok apparently recognizes the protagonist investigator’s doubts, causing him to challenge the silent disbeliever to explain his observations of the strange events following Marsh’s declaration (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 301). It is apparent at this point that what little communication existed between Zadok and the protagonist investigator breaks down completely. Zadok’s challenges are delivered in such a hysterical manner that they leave the protagonist investigator no chance to answer them. Even worse, the clearly agitated Zadok does not reveal the answers to these challenges when the protagonist investigator remains

silent, and instead simply begins listing unknown events which the protagonist investigator has never even heard of (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 302). When Zadok eventually regains control of himself, he has skipped past the origins of the unknown in Innsmouth, which remain isolated in a communicative unknown because of his frantic delivery. Whatever Zadok is trying to tell him only registers as an atmospheric unknown in the protagonist investigator, who “[begins] to shiver with a nameless alarm” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 301).

Zadok’s next pause indeed reveals that the communication with the protagonist investigator has broken down entirely. What he reveals about the events of 1846, Innsmouth’s coexistence with the aquatic creatures, and even the promises of highly significant revelations that will soon unfold does not capture the protagonist investigator’s attention anymore. Rather than thinking about what the old man is trying to tell him, he becomes engrossed by his delivery, ultimately pitying him for his apparent insanity: “Poor old soul – to what pitiful depths of hallucination had his liquor, [...] brought that fertile, imaginative mind!” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 304). The frantic Zadok Allen suddenly flees from the interview, frightened by something that the protagonist investigator cannot identify. This leaves the protagonist investigator with the realization that Zadok’s “insane earnestness and horror had communicated to [him] a mounting unrest which joined with [his] earlier sense of loathing for the town and its blight of intangible shadow” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 307). He cannot identify the source of Zadok’s horror, but at last he begins to realize the presence of some unknown within Innsmouth, even though it remains entirely atmospheric. He even resolves to “sift the tale and extract some nucleus of historic allegory” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 307). However, the structure of the narrative does not allow him the time to investigate the unknown: Noticing that it is already 7:15 pm, catching the bus to Arkham becomes an overriding concern for the protagonist investigator.

### **Realizing the unknown**

It is remarkable that the protagonist investigator still has not identified the existence of a major unknown, despite all the unknowns he has been introduced to up until now. The interruption of his plans caused by the bus’ breakdown change that situation. Until now, the protagonist investigator has only realized the unknown as a nebulous impression based on his strange observations and the bizarre and questionable reports by others. It is something that he has largely ignored or registered as anthropological curiosities without apparent consequences. This changes when he realizes that he has to spend the night in Innsmouth: He now finds himself exposed to the unknown whose existence he has recently come to

acknowledge. Immediately, some of the unknowns related to him by other surface in his mind, as they become relevant to his situation:

The insane yarn I had heard from the aged drunkard did not promise very pleasant dreams [...] Also, I must not dwell of what that factory inspector had told the Newburyport ticket-agent about the Gilman House and the voices of its nocturnal tenants – not on that, nor on the face beneath the tiara in the black church doorway; the face for whose horror my conscious mind could not account. (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 309-310)

However, he immediately works to suppress these memories. The reason is that he seeks to “keep [his] thoughts from disturbing topics”, which can only refer to the one major unknown that has come to occupy his mind: What will he experience during the coming night at the Gilman? Recognizing that the unknowns brought to his attention would allow him to form an unsettling answer to this question, he chooses to ignore thinking about this issue altogether. His repressions, however, merely ensure that this major unknown remains atmospheric, as he finds himself “instinctively on [his] guard” or “unconsciously listening for [...] something which [he] dreaded but could not name” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 310-311). He ultimately locks himself up in his room, placing him in a setting that curbs his ability to perceive what occurs outside.

This action preserves the atmospheric unknown of his situation. The footsteps he soon hears in the hall only prompt wild speculations, leading him to realize that his anxiety might color what little and ambiguous sensory input his isolation affords him (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 311). When someone tries to open his door, this only brings the realization that “the vague premonition [of menace had given way] to immediate reality”, but it still leaves uncertain what danger he is in, and from whom or what (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 311). Subsequent events only expand the unknown further. Discovering that the power has been cut, he merely realizes that “some cryptic, evil movement was afoot on a large scale—just what, I could not say” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 312). His choice to barricade himself again deprives him of a clear perception when he vaguely recognizes that a conversation is taking place on the floor below. Unable to overhear what is being said, he can only reveal his doubts whether all sounds he heard really were voices. With the danger of capture imminent, his mind is bent on planning an escape from the hotel. This of course precludes any amount of thought about the unknown, although he continues to make observations on further unknowns – most notably the penetrating fish-odor and the lack of vocal communication among his assailants (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 314; 316).



The protagonist investigator's successful escape eliminates the limitations imposed on his ability to perceive unknowns by the confines of the hotel room. However, by emerging onto the streets, he encounters a new setting that imposes a different set of limitations on his observations. The continued danger naturally still prevents him from thinking about the unknown. It is now night-time, and this, combined with his instinct to maintain a safe distance from any of his pursuers while trying to make his way out of town, means that he still is unable to tell much about them. Observing his assailants exiting the Gilman Hotel, he can only note certain of their features, such as their "shambling gait", singling out only one figure that appeared to be clad in robes and wearing the familiar tiara (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 318). Otherwise, he often catches little more than sounds and glimpses of his pursuers, doing his best to avoid them. Having observed several search parties, he stops briefly to think about the major unknown: "Just how fully the pursuit was organized—and indeed, just what its purpose might be—I could form no idea" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 319). Finding that he cannot answer either question, his thoughts turn to planning his escape from Innsmouth. However, his next observations reiterate the question of who pursues him, and for what purpose. At first he witnesses an exchange of light signals between Devil Reef and the Gilman Hotel, but it is unable to interpret what it means. The reef captures his attention once again, and soon enough he discovers "a teeming horde of shapes swimming inward toward the town" from the direction of the reef (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 319-320). In the moonlight, despite the great distance, he can identify the strangely alien features of these swimmers.

Moving along, he again loses sight of the swimmers and the reef, and is confronted again by the pursuers close at hand. Following his observations of another search party, he reaches the conclusion that "all roads leading out of Innsmouth were [...] patrolled" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 320). Finding the railroad unguarded, he manages to make his escape from Innsmouth. Once outside town, he catches sight of yet another column of pursuers on the far-away Ipswich road. The great distance only allows him some vague but nonetheless unsettling observations of their appearance and utterances. These kinds of impressions about his pursuers have grown increasingly bizarre and unsettling throughout his escape. Apparently having reached safety, the protagonist investigator at last finds himself able to draw some inferences about his pursuers: "All sorts of conjectures crossed my mind. I thought of those very extreme Innsmouth types said to be hidden in crumbling, centuried warrens near the waterfront, I thought, too, of those nameless swimmers I had seen" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 325). It is the unknown introduced by the clerk that he recalls at this point, and which he thinks his observations have just revealed. Unsurprisingly, events again overshadow the protagonist

investigator's efforts to resolve the unknown. Increasing sounds of murmurs indicate that another column of pursuers is approaching his position (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 326).

Both dreading and longing to finally see them up close, the protagonist investigator waits and watches. The action is suddenly suspended by the re-appearance of the narrator, who until now has restrained himself from making any comments. His momentarily displacement of the protagonist investigator is motivated by the fact that the narrative has reached the crucial point the narrator wished to test. The narrator has laid out the entire Innsmouth experience of his former self, as he said he would, but all this merely serves the purpose of testing "[his] own faculties", which he the event that follows next has called into question. It becomes quickly apparent that the narrator is still unable to decide whether what the protagonist investigator will see next is real or not, despite having gone over the entire Innsmouth experience once again: "I am not even yet willing to say whether what followed was a hideous actuality or only a nightmare hallucination" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 326-327). Indeed, the narrator finds that not even "credit[ing] old Zadok's crazy tale" can explain what the protagonist investigator observed from that railroad cut (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 328). Reconciling himself to uncertainty, the narrator merely relays the protagonist investigator's observations and thoughts of that final scene.

With the action resuming, the protagonist investigator, before blacking out at the sight of what he sees, manages to establish a few tentative connections between what he sees and unknowns that had been introduced earlier: He discounts the possibility that the creatures he sees are deformed humans, as they seem to show "no mixture of the normal at all" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 327). Indeed, he realizes that these creatures match the ones depicted on the tiara back at the Newburyport museum (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 328). He cannot realize anything else, as he loses consciousness at this point. Awakening only the next morning, the protagonist investigator could not find any evidence that what he had witnessed really occurred (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 329). This is the source of the narrator's uncertainty. Despite this uncertainty, however, the unknown still exists, for the protagonist investigator remains convinced that "something hideous lay in the background" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 329). The experience, in spite of last night's real or imagined encounter, has so marred both protagonist investigator and narrator that they abandon any further attempt to reveal the unknown. This resolve appears so complete that even the opportunity to follow up a lead that does not entail even a return to Innsmouth is turned down: "Nor did I dare look for that piece of strange jewellery said to be in the Miskatonic University Museum" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 329).

**The narrator's unknown**

Having closed the narrative frame opened by the introduction, the Innsmouth narrative comes to an end. The novella and the unknown do not, however. The narrator introduces a second narrative, again centered on another version of his former self: "I wish, for normality's sake, there were nothing more to tell. Perhaps it is madness that is overtaking me – yet perhaps a greater horror – or a greater marvel – is reaching out" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 329). In the aftermath of Innsmouth, he intentionally ignores the unknowns connected to that town, and pursues an entirely different unknown: his own ancestry.

At first just meant as an innocuous collection of genealogical data, the discovery of a previously unknown great-grandmother amongst marks the unexpected emergence of a new major unknown (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 329). Inquests concerning this grandmother reveal her maiden name to be Marsh, which immediately causes the narrator to suspect an unpleasant connection to the Innsmouth Marsh's. Some time later, a stay with his late mother's family in Cleveland gives him the chance to continue his genealogical research (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 332). This visit causes him to reminisce about some of the strange aspects of his family's history, particularly concerning his grandmother, his uncle and his cousin (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 332). This had been an atmospheric unknown that had been plaguing him for years, for there was always something about these family members that he found unsettling. Peering over pictures of his grandmother and uncle Douglas, a "comparison began to obtrude itself [his] mind" that reveals the source of those impressions (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 332). He finds his suspicions confirmed when he is shown pieces of his great-grandmother's jewelry. It is virtually identical to the tiara he had seen in Newburyport (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 333).

This realization sets a train of thought in motion, forcing the narrator to revisit his Innsmouth experience and draw certain conclusions. He recalls what Zadok told him about how the Marsh's had tricked someone from Arkham into marrying Obed Marsh's daughter, and realizes that the tricked one must have been his own great-grandfather. This leads the narrator immediately to the question about "[w]ho—or *what*—" his great-grandmother really was (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 333). However, once his thoughts turn to himself and the question how that ancestry might affect him, the narrator quickly dismisses such correlations as "madness" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 333). For two years, in spite of doubts, he avoids thinking further on these unknowns.

The situation changes dramatically in the winter of 1930-31. The narrator begins to experience strange dreams, which form a new and entirely inexplicable unknown to him.

Unable to interpret them, he merely describes certain recurring images and initial sensation of horror induced by these images (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 333). He merely realizes that “some frightful influence [...] was seeking gradually to drag me out of the sane world”, suggesting that there is some sinister effect to his dreams (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 334). Simultaneously, he notices changes in his physical appearance. Finding the conjectures he had made earlier about his ancestry proven true, he merely acknowledges that he, too, “had acquired *the Innsmouth look*” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 334-335). At the same time, the dreams continue. Most alarmingly, the descriptions of those dreams do not appear to come from the persona of the narrator. The descriptions are made by someone who is intimately familiar with the persons and places in this dreamscape, which had just been so mysterious to the narrator (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 334). The end of the novella comes quickly as the new persona displaces the narrator’s original persona entirely even in a waking state. Questions about his ancestry and about his Innsmouth experience, all unknowns which had up until now continuously mystified the narrator’s original persona, are either non-existent or inconsequential to the new persona.

In summary, I have outlined how the protagonist investigator’s and narrator’s views of the unknowns in this novella are continuously impeded, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the unknown. The protagonist investigator’s focus is repeatedly diverted from the unknown by various means. On the one hand, there is his psychological make-up. In addition to skepticism, his interest in architecture proves detrimental to his ability to realize unknowns. On the other hand, unknowns that are introduced to him by witnesses are presented heavily modified and presented in the forms of legends, hear-say, or alcohol-induced ravings. As a result, the witnesses often fail to communicate them to the protagonist investigator. Furthermore, the structure of the plot also serves to impede the protagonist investigator. He only realizes the unknown once it threatens him. At the same time, the very threat posed by the unknown forces him to focus on his own survival rather than think about it. Even the narrator that then takes over the investigation is subject to severe limitations: his mind is focused solely on explaining a single event, which to him forms the kernel of the entire narrative: the protagonist investigator’s encounter with his pursuers. In failing to explain this, he casts doubts over his ability to investigate the unknown and chooses to ignore all unknowns connected to Innsmouth. Later on, the realization of a link between his own ancestry and Innsmouth forces him to reassess the unknown aspects of that town. The plot inscribes the narrator with a new persona that holds no interest in investigating these unknowns. The deletion of the old persona, furthermore, means that the unknown persists.

Here we can already identify structures that are remarkably similar, if slightly more refined, to those we have already seen in “The Call of Cthulhu”.

### **The reader – activation and realization of the unknown**

Compared to “The Call of Cthulhu”, the introduction to this novella contains both familiar and unfamiliar features. It is strikingly similar in that it lets the reader know that some major unknown does exist in Innsmouth, and that the following narrative might contain information about this unknown. It is also similar in that the narrator does not reveal much more, not even the nature of this unknown. So, just as in the 1926-short story, the reader is introduced to an atmospheric unknown.

That the introduction serves the purpose of encouraging the reader to actively investigate the major unknown is another similarity that needs to be mentioned. The method of activation has two main components, which only superficially appear different than the method in “The Call of Cthulhu”. First, there is the narrator’s concession that he cannot explain what happened in Innsmouth at this time because he is uncertain that “the whole tale might [has] been told even to [him]”. He concedes that additional information, discovered by someone else, might allow for “more than one explanation” of what happened in Innsmouth (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 269). Second, the narrator reveals that his experience has affected him so deeply that he does not wish to look for further information himself. This admitted lack of attitudinal distance signals to the reader that the narrator’s insight into the unknown and therefore his ability to explain it are questionable (Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film*, 36).

While this is a different kind of limitation than the one imposed by the narrator of “The Call of Cthulhu”, it nonetheless achieves an ironic effect upon the reader. The narrator’s uncertainty signals that the reader will once again be faced with a protagonist investigator who is ignorant of the major unknown. It also means that the reader will be unable to rely on the narrator’s commentary to guide him through the main narrative. This addition again represents a contrast to “The Call of Cthulhu”, where the narrator’s commentary provides important toe-holds for the reader’s interpretation of unknowns throughout the narrative. Indeed, as we have seen in the preceding analysis, the narrator’s uncertainty results in a total lack of commentary until that final encounter with the unknown. This does not eliminate the narrator from the reader’s investigation of the unknown, however, as we shall shortly see.

The situation at the beginning of the main narrative once again shows many parallels to “The Call of Cthulhu”. Upon introducing a protagonist investigator that is once again totally ignorant of any unknowns, the narrator fades into the background. The reader’s

situation at the outset of the main narrative is similar to the one in the short story, too. He or she is aware of the fact that some major unknown exists within Innsmouth. Furthermore, the introduction clearly told the reader that the following narrative will contain information about this unknown. In the light of the narrator's endeavor to come to terms with the unknown in Innsmouth, the fact that he chooses to present the legends and hear-say circulating in Newburyport in verbatim signals to the reader that they might contain information. This overrides the station agent's and curator's dismissive attitudes.

By treating the legends contained in the station agent's monologue seriously, the reader gains a more nuanced picture of the "shadow" that lies over Innsmouth. He or she realizes that certain locations, such as Devil Reef, and certain historic events, such as the epidemic of 1846 are likely to be central aspects of any major unknown in Innsmouth. The local gossip mentioned by the agent also revolves around a distinct set of unknown features of Innsmouth. First, there is the unknown cause of the "strange kind of streak in the Innsmouth folk today" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 272). Second, and perhaps even more inexplicable, is how Innsmouth continues to function despite its evident desolation. The Marsh refinery still somehow manages to process gold of unknown origin, goods for native trade are still bought by the Marshes despite the fact that there is no shipping to or from Innsmouth and the seas around Innsmouth are strangely teeming with fish (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 273-274).

The protagonist investigator's visit to the Newburyport Historical Society provides another facet to the unknown surrounding Innsmouth that the reader needs to consider. The origin, material and purpose of the tiara he finds there remain, despite the curator's speculation, shrouded in mystery. On the other hand, Miss Tilton's expressed disgust at Innsmouth's society reveals yet another unknown aspect to the town – the Esoteric Order of Dagon (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 277-278).

How does the reader react to these unknowns? First of all, the reader cannot find any explanations for them in the text. While it is true that both the station agent and the curator offer brief explanations for a few of these unknowns, these explanations are mere speculations not based on any evidence, as they readily admit themselves: "[W]e can't be sure about the ins and outs of the matter" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 272). Second, the reader cannot yet discern how these minor unknowns relate to a major unknown that is still elusive, other than postulating that they *are* related to it, as circumstances would suggest. Only the tiara, so far the only hard piece of evidence, allows for the vague realization that there is a cosmic quality attached to the major unknown. In the absence of comments by the narrator, the reader has to rely on his own interpretations of witness reports and on observations made by the protagonist

investigator. The lack of observations and thoughts by the protagonist investigator and the great limitations imposed on the witness reports in this section can therefore only complicate the unknown in the reader's eyes.

How this reliance on interpreting the protagonist investigator's observations and witness reports impedes the reader's ability to investigate the unknown becomes apparent in chapter II of the novella. Whereas it has proven a useful technique in chapter I, where it allowed the reader to realize different facets of the major unknown, it now inhibits his progress towards resolving these unknowns. The reader has to struggle with the protagonist investigator's inability to focus on the unknown and the resulting flawed observations of unknowns. Far from providing answers, the protagonist investigator's initial observations in Innsmouth primarily yield atmospheric unknowns that appear directly connected to unknowns introduced in chapter I. To the reader, this merely signals that important aspects of these unknown remain unrealized. The disturbing and beckoning impression Devil Reef makes upon the protagonist investigator, for example, highlights the need to explore the reef's significance (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 282). The disquietening appearance of Innsmouth's inhabitants has a similar effect, particularly since the protagonist investigator's observations of Joe Sargent eliminate the only explanation of the 'Innsmouth look' offered so far (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 279). Lastly, there is the "unaccountable horror" caused by a glancing observation of the pastor deepens the unknown surrounding the Esoteric Order of Dagon (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 284).

The grocery store clerk, the only witness found in this chapter, also complicates existing minor unknowns and brings new ones to the reader's attention. Nor can he help the reader in identifying the major unknown, since his attempts to explain the few minor unknowns he is aware of are based on the denial of any underlying unknown. One of the minor unknowns he does realize are the "heterodox and mysterious creeds" of the Esoteric Order of Dagon (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 286). Following his pastor's suggestion to distance himself from any congregations in Innsmouth, the young man makes no attempt to discover more about these creeds, which therefore adds to the unknown nature of the Order the reader already has to consider. Another unknown which the clerk only succeeds in expanding is the "Innsmouth look". In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, he reveals that the worst cases may not have been observed yet, and suspects that they are kept hidden. This brings another minor unknown to the reader's attention, the many boarded-up houses, which the clerk suspects house the most afflicted individuals. His tentative suggestion that the 'Innsmouth look' is a degenerative disease cannot be substantiated by the reader. Nor can he or she be certain that those mysterious vacant buildings really serve the purpose of housing advanced

cases of the 'Innsmouth look', which therefore becomes a minor unknown the reader has to consider independently. Yet another minor unknown emerges from the clerk's observation that certain areas of Innsmouth are forbidden territory (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 286). Soon after parting company with the clerk, who commented on the decline in fishing despite the abundance of fish, the protagonist investigator observes that the Marsh refinery "seem[s] oddly free from the noise of industry". This reiterates the question of how Innsmouth continues to function despite the decay.

In the immediate aftermath of the report given by the clerk, the reader is thus faced with a bewildering array of minor unknowns, which as of yet obscure the major unknown entirely. All the minor unknowns that were introduced earlier by way of legends and hear-say have been confirmed and restated more forcefully. At the same time, the material so far does not allow the formation of explanations, most particularly about how these unknowns relate to one another or to the major unknown. In addition to the lack of any apparent connection, they have grown in complexity through the incorporation of additional unknown facets. The consequence is that an explanation of the minor unknowns becomes the reader's immediate concern.

### **The reader's encounter with Zadok Allen**

It is the encounter with Zadok Allen that becomes the turning point for the reader's investigation of the unknown. Unlike the grocery store clerk and the protagonist investigator, who merely echoes the clerk's judgment, the reader does not find Zadok to be unreliable. The reason for this is the reader's recognition of the stable irony that Lovecraft posited in the judgments of Zadok's reliability. First, there is the grocery store clerk's assertion that Zadok is unreliable. On the one hand, the clerk accuses Zadok of being the source of what he takes to be false reports of unknowns (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 288). In addition, the reader has discovered how unreliable and tentative all the other assertions made by the clerk proved to be. Secondly, the protagonist investigator's observations of Zadok's demeanor during the interview repeatedly reassure the reader that the old man provides reliable information. Ironically, these observations stand in stark contrast to the protagonist investigator's judgments of Zadok Allen as utterly unreliable. This contradiction becomes visible in the protagonist investigator's surprise at how little the old man appears to be affected by the amount of alcohol he consumed and how alert he remains (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 300-301). Even the accusation of insanity can be disproven by the reader as a gross misinterpretation by the protagonist investigator of his own observations. Zadok's apprehensiveness can be explained through the



clerk's observation that "it was not always safe to be seen questioning [Zadok]" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 289). He is simply afraid that locals might observe him with the protagonist investigator. Nor is the old man's increasing agitation a sign of insanity, but rather, the reader realizes, a sign of his mounting frustration at the protagonist investigator's obtuseness and the unsettling nature of his tale. Judging Zadok to be a reliable witness, the reader is free to take in the *literal* meaning of what the old man says, in contrast to the protagonist investigator, who is hoping to extract mere 'crude allegory'. This ensures that the reader's understanding of the unknown diverges greatly from that of the protagonist investigator.

Turning to the contents of Zadok's tale, it affects the reader's understanding of the unknown in two ways. First of all, it provides a major revelation of the minor unknowns and also of the major unknown that have plagued the reader so far. It then forces the reader to realize a new set of major unknowns. In fact, Zadok's account begins with a shock, as it immediately allows the reader to positively identify Devil Reef as the elusive major unknown: "Thar's whar it all begun – that cursed place of all wickedness whar the deep water starts." (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 295). The last part of Zadok's narrative provides information enabling the reader to form an entire alternative plot of Innsmouth's history which explains the reef's role in Innsmouth's history, and its relation to the minor unknowns.

After establishing the major unknown, the reader can form a definitive hypothesis about what happened in Innsmouth. This delay is possible since Zadok re-launches his monologue by reporting about Captain Obed Marsh's experiences in the South Seas. In the course of this recital, the reader will notice details which correspond to aspects of unknowns he or she realized: A strange abundance of fish, strange jewelry and the disappearance of older people all find their parallels in Obed Marsh's encounter with the natives. Assuming that the rest of Obed Marsh's experiences were also repeated in Innsmouth, the reader can now form a few powerful hypotheses. In this way, the reader can speculate that Innsmouth, just like the South Sea tribe, formed a symbiotic relationship with "some kind o' god-things that lived under the sea" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 296). This assumption also allows the reader to speculate on the nature of the "Innsmouth look": It is nothing less than the visible signs of transformation occurring in the offspring of humans and the aquatic creatures. Both these hypotheses can be substantiated by superimposing sections of Zadok's tale over aspects of unknowns the reader encountered in Innsmouth. For example, Obed Marsh reports on how the natives, through their symbiotic relationship with these beings, were given fish and gold in abundance is remarkably similar to observations about Innsmouth. Similarly, what the reader knows about The Esoteric Order of Dagon resembles aspects of the native cult worshipping

these beings. And the practice of hiding those in the advanced stages of transformation would explain the purpose of the boarded-up houses in Innsmouth (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 297).

When, after a longer pause, Zadok challenges the protagonist investigator to explain the emergence of the unknown in Innsmouth, the reader is able to take up that challenge. He or she can do so because he or she has already extrapolated a cause for the parallels between events in Innsmouth and those in the South Seas: Innsmouth's economic decline, precipitated by the tribe's destruction, caused Obed Marsh to summon the aquatic creatures to Innsmouth (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 298). This also explains Marsh's ominous notion that the people of Innsmouth should start worshipping "gods that give somethin' ye reely need" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 299). Zadok's challenge also reveals the reef's true significance to the reader, since the event that Zadok wants the protagonist investigator to explain is none other than Obed Marsh's summoning of the aquatic creatures to Innsmouth, carried out at Devil Reef (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 301).

The successful explanation of this kernel event in Innsmouth's history enables the reader to understand the increasingly patchy narration of the town's history in the aftermath of the summoning. In contrast, the protagonist investigator's failure to answer the challenge denies him any chance of understanding the rest of Zadok's monologue. Finally, the reader comes to understand what happened in 1846, and realizes it to be another kernel in Innsmouth's history: In 1846, the people became aware of Marsh's activities and realized his connection to the increasingly frequent disappearances and put an end to them. The aquatic beings responded by decimating Innsmouth and forcing the remaining inhabitants of the town to mix and live with them (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 303). To prevent another episode like this the people of Innsmouth must take the first Oath of Dagon, which amounts to nothing less than a vow of silence (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 303). This explains the strange secrecy displayed by the town's people. In the aftermath of the events of 1846, the town rapidly decays as it becomes little more than a breeding ground for the offspring of the mixed population, which they abandon upon completing their transformation (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 304). In realizing this, the strange "functioning" of the desolate town is resolved, as is the nature of the boarded-up houses and the off-limit areas. Of the original unknowns, the only one which the reader cannot yet answer is the question what the narrator has experienced that horrified him so much. However, this question becomes one of secondary importance once the reader realizes the full potential of Zadok Allen's monologue.

**The reader's unknown**

We have just seen how Zadok's tale reveals *most* of the unknowns that the reader has been aware of up to this point. More significantly, the casual manner in which Zadok reveals them leads the reader to realize that he has only been dealing with minor unknowns up until now. Therefore, when the reader notices that Zadok displays considerable excitement and apprehensiveness at the attempt to reveal something he has never told anyone about, the reader realizes that Zadok possesses knowledge about a much more significant unknown – one which has completely eluded the protagonist investigator and narrator (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 306-307).

Having lost the protagonist investigator, who at this stage only pities the old man's display of insanity, Zadok introduces this new unknown only to the reader. The historical events that transpired in Innsmouth pale in significance to what the aquatic beings are planning to do: “[...] it ain't what them fish devils *hez done*, but *what they're a-goin' to do!*” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 306, original emphasis). Zadok has been able to observe some aspects of these preparations. In particular, he draws the reader's attention to the boarded-up houses, which Zadok explains now harbor certain things brought up from the sea that he calls 'shoggoths' (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 306). Suddenly, the old man breaks off, believing he has been discovered. This leaves the reader with a new unknown to consider, one that according to Zadok contains the real horror (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 306). The desperation and agitation with which Zadok tries to bring this unknown to the protagonist investigator's attention convinces the reader that this is truly the major unknown that underlies Innsmouth. It consists of two questions: What are the creatures planning? When will they be ready? These questions also highlight certain unknown aspects of the aquatic creatures, such as their society, intentions, capabilities and the purpose of their interest in breeding with humans. A closer look at Zadok's tale suggests that he has no answers to these questions. Zadok's narrative shows how he increasingly distances himself from the new society that arose in Innsmouth after 1846, illustrated by his refusal to be initiated into the Order of Dagon (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 304). This means that he is increasingly treated as an outsider, which affects his ability to observe what occurs in Innsmouth. It also means that he is not privy to information about the aquatic creatures, which appear to be the source of his fears. Only Obed Marsh's reports, echoed by Zadok, show the magnitude of these unknowns: the beings reveal to the tribal chief that “they cud wipe aout the hull brood o' humans ef they was willin' to bother” (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 297). To make these unknowns even more engrossing to the reader, Lovecraft allows him or her to

realize how the creatures can be stopped. Zadok mentions in one place how they can be stopped by using “certain signs”. The reader realizes that the little stone swastikas discovered by Obed Marsh at the site where the tribe was later massacred must have been these signs (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 297; 299). Ironically, this transforms the reader into a Cassandra-like figure<sup>1</sup>, as he realizes that *only he or she* possesses the knowledge how these aquatic beings can be stopped, while the protagonist investigator never discovers this information (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 306).

Any further considerations of this new major unknown are sidelined when Zadok’s recognizes that they have been discovered. In Todorov’s terms, the “story of investigation”, in which the detective is immune, is discontinued. While up until now *curiosity* has been the primary interest of the reader, the sudden threat to the protagonist investigator throws the reader into a state of suspense, wondering just what will happen to the protagonist investigator (Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, 44; 47). The old man’s frantic urgings that the protagonist investigator should leave Innsmouth immediately, and the knowledge that some horrifying encounter still awaits the protagonist investigator, are the catalysts to this transition. The major unknown merely steps into the background, though, as this transition promises to be only temporary, given the fact that the narrator has yet to re-evaluate his Innsmouth experience. However, when the protagonist investigator’s encounter with his pursuers proves to be the experience that the narrator wishes to explain, the reader finds him- or herself disappointed. Not knowing what the narrator had wished to re-evaluate, the reader could sustain the hope that the event that mystified the narrator might have been Zadok’s tale.

This disappointment does not last long, however, when the reader realizes that the narrative is not at an end yet. As the narrator re-launches a new investigation, he provides the reader with a new major unknown that he had previously not realized. This humbles the reader, for he or she only realizes the significance of the narrator’s unknown genealogy once the narrator introduces it explicitly. In this instance, the reader realizes that this unknown has been implied repeatedly throughout the text, as various witnesses had noted the protagonist investigator’s resemblance to members of the Marsh family. This insight forces the reader to partially reassess his or her *own* Innsmouth experience, permitting him again to anticipate what the narrator realizes only reluctantly – that he is the offspring of Obed Marsh’s daughter. However, this new unknown suddenly transforms with entirely unexpected results for the

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<sup>1</sup> Cassandra, according to legend, was first granted the gift of foresight by Apollo who fell in love with her. When he discovered that she did not return his love, he cursed her so that no one would believe her prophecies, rendering her impotent.

reader. The narrator's realization that he himself is undergoing a transformation akin to those reported by Zadok Allen causes the major unknown introduced by Zadok Allen to resurface in the reader's mind. However, instead of resolving it the narrator's descriptions of his own dreams merely introduce new unknown aspects of the Deep Ones' society. In this way, the reader realizes that an entire city, called *Y'ha-nthlei*, exists in the depths beyond Devil Reef. He also learns that the Deep Ones are connected to other beings, called Old Ones and *shoggoths*, though the nature of that relation remains a mystery. And, most importantly, the dreams reiterate the unknown plans of the Deep Ones, merely noting that they intend to spread, and that "[i]t would be a city greater than Innsmouth next time" (Lovecraft, *SoI*: 334). Yet the new persona that allows the reader these glimpses of the unknown also denies any explanation of them.

### **Concluding observation**

These two analyses have revealed several parallels between "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and "The Call of Cthulhu" regarding the general narrative structure and the way unknowns are created and developed. The introduction again introduces the reader to the existence of a major unknown that will then form the basis for the following narrative. The main narrative develops the unknown in a familiar fashion. Initially ignorant of the major unknown, the protagonist investigator gradually becomes aware of its existence, and eventually succeeds in revealing it. At the same time, the narrator's scenic presentation of the minor unknowns allows the reader to conduct his or her own investigation. Zadok's tale proves to be the key witness to the reader, just as Castro did in "The Call of Cthulhu", allowing him or her to reveal the true history of Innsmouth and the significance of the 'Innsmouth look'. It also introduces the reader to a new, menacing major unknown – the Deep Ones and their plans. Just as in "The Call of Cthulhu", this unknown is developed obliquely in the text, only allowing the reader to realize more disturbing facets. The novella's ending, too, resembles that of "The Call of Cthulhu" in its effects on the unknown. The reader is denied a revelation about the nature of the Deep Ones and their plans. Instead, the cryptic new persona of the narrator merely assures him of the imminence of the realization of those plans, and affords him a brief, yet non-revealing, glance at the cosmic magnificence and power of the Deep Ones.

The tools with which Lovecraft created the unknowns in this text are also the same as those in the 1926 short story. Setting, focalization and failed communications are once again the primary cause of the unknowns in Innsmouth. Familiar, too, are the tools which the

text provides for the reader to deal with the unknowns: stable and dramatic irony, superpositioning, repetitions, characterization and the representations of witness reports and observations as scenes and descriptive pauses.

However, Lovecraft's use of the unknown in this novella proves to be much more subtle and demanding on the reader when compared to "The Call of Cthulhu". The unknowns in the main narrative in particular prove a formidable challenge to the reader. Presented with inherently more challenging material, such as legends, conjectures and the protagonist investigator's distracted observations, the reader of this novella finds that even *realizing* the unknown proves difficult. In fact, he or she cannot even form a hypothetical plot that explains what really occurs in Innsmouth until Zadok Allen's tale. Another significant change is the virtual elimination of narratorial commentary from the main narrative. This denies the reader a very powerful support that safeguarded him or her against misinterpretations of the unknown in "The Call of Cthulhu". As a result, the reader of "The Shadow over Innsmouth" finds that the unknown in this novella changes in unpredictable and surprising ways. But this also means that the unknown appeals to him or her on a much broader spectrum: Instead always being "one step ahead" of both protagonist investigator and narrator, the reader finds investigating the unknown successively a rewarding, frustrating, surprising and even humbling experience.

The end result of this narrative is once again identical to "The Call of Cthulhu". The reader remains solitary in his awareness of the new major unknown, which he or she realizes represents a clear and present danger to the fictional world. He or she remains unable to explain the nature of the Deep Ones and their plans. Thus Lovecraft once more leaves it to the reader to realize the *cosmic* horror in this text, represented by the agonizing uncertainty when the Deep Ones will put their plans into actions and what precisely these plans entail; only assuring the reader that the realization of these plans will be accompanied by a horror whose mere glances had proven overwhelming to Zadok, the protagonist investigator and the narrator.

### Chapter 3 – The Case of Charles Dexter Ward

I choose to dedicate the final chapter of my thesis to this 1927 novella because it shows the degree of complexity H. P. Lovecraft could achieve in contriving and narrating unknowns. Condensed in the space of 115 pages, we can find a plethora of mutable unknowns. This novella also creates an unknown that seeks to engage the reader on a scale unmatched by the other two texts. At the same time, it also shows many recurring features which ultimately allow us to identify a narrative technique common to all of the works considered. In the light of the complexity of the work, it may be helpful to juxtapose a brief summary of the text and some comments about its general structure before immersing ourselves in a detailed analysis.

When speaking of the complexity of the unknown in this work, I refer both to the large number of distinct unknowns and their diverging nature. At first glance, the introduction features a familiar structure. The narrator introduces three apparently related questions representing the major unknowns: What is Charles Dexter Ward really suffering from? How did Charles Dexter Ward escape from his cell? And what does Dr. Willett know about Charles' case? However, this appearance is deceiving. In reality, the narrator is ignorant of what the major unknown really is, and it is therefore uncertain whether these questions really contain major unknowns. Instead, the reader realizes, it is Dr. Willett who has identified the major unknown after an investigation of Charles. Clarifying this point enables us to recognize that the text represents the narrator's attempt to reveal the truth about the case of Charles Dexter Ward. The narrator is therefore the protagonist investigator in this novella.

Dismissing Dr. Willett's realizations as "too wildly fantastic for general credence", the narrator launches his investigation entirely ignorant of what the major unknown really is (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 92). As a result, he lacks any indication about *what* he is looking for, and finds himself blindly retracing Dr. Willett's research into Charles. In moving from one piece of *Willett's* evidence to the next, the narrator is unable to see how they relate to Charles' case. This is the reason why the main narrative, which represents the narrator's investigation, is dwarfed by the three hypodiegetic narratives it contains. Without any interpretation by the narrator, there is no "connective tissue" binding these narratives together. They are merely detached narratives, each containing a different protagonist investigator confronting an apparently different major unknown. Immediately following the introduction is Charles Dexter Ward's genealogical research into his ancestor, Joseph Curwen. From the material collected by Charles another protagonist investigator emerges – Ezra Weeden. He, too, investigates Joseph Curwen. Following this, the narrator introduces a second narrative,

wherein Charles' baffled parents attempt to make sense of their son's increasing secrecy and bizarre behavior. The introduction of Dr. Willett marks the beginning of the third narrative. Initially only called in to examine the young man, he quickly assumes the role of protagonist investigator. Initially, the objective of his investigation is the same as that of Charles' parents. However, the emergence of Dr. Allen complicates matters, leading Dr. Willett to consider a new major unknown. Between these powerful hypodiegetic narratives, the narrator's investigation appears diminutive.

Unable to connect or interpret the narratives, the narrator's presence diminishes and his investigation fails. Whereas he at least offers a few comments to introduce the various hypodiegetic narratives, these comments grow increasingly sparse. By the time Dr. Willett starts investigating Charles in earnest, the narrator's voice and perspective have disappeared almost entirely. Immediately after Willett has realized the true nature of Charles' case, the text adopts him as the new narrator, dismissing the original. Thus, the reader follows Willett as he confronts Charles in his cell with what he discovered, allowing the reader to witness the event that had mystified the original narrator.

The above outline succinctly documents the narrator's failure to conduct an investigation of the unknown. This, in turn, signals that the entire investigative work is going to rest on the reader's shoulder. The simple reason for this is that reading is a process first and foremost. Even though Dr. Willett's narrative will ultimately provide a revelation of the major unknown introduced by the introduction, the reader simply cannot sit back and wait for this to occur. There is no prior indication that the narrative will eventually sack the narrator and simply reveal what Willett experienced. That means that the reader before this point is confronted with a series of unconnected narratives and the narrator's failing investigation, a text that lacks a clear structure, or plot. However, as Chatman notes, the reader's mind "inveterately seek structure, and [...] will provide it if necessary" (Chatman, *Story and Discourse*: 45). Thus the reader must resolve the major unknowns of every hypodiegetic narrative in order to *create* a plot for this novella. In doing so, he is bound to realize and explain the major unknown before Dr. Willett's eventual revelation, which therefore merely confirms what the reader already knows. This shows that there is little to be gained from a presentation of the unknown perceived by the narrator, and I will therefore only present a single analysis in this chapter – that of the unknown as perceived by the reader. However, for the sake of comparison, I will include side glances at the unknown as it presents itself to the narrator and the protagonist investigators within the hypodiegetic narratives.



**Introducing the major unknown(s)**

Similar to “The Call of Cthulhu”, an epigraph precedes this novella. It represents an unknown that the reader alone realizes, since it is an entity separated from the fictional universe containing the narrator and the characters. However, this separation also makes it impossible for the reader to see how it relates to the text at this time. Consideration of this unknown is postponed for the time being, since the reader cannot discover any connection to the introduction, which presents the reader with more immediately significant unknowns.

The introduction is split into two sections – one dealing with the result of the story, and one that represents a prologue, as suggested by the chapter’s title: “A Result and a Prologue”. The first part, evidently meant to represent the “result”, features the familiar retrospective narrator that introduces some major unknowns. The first unknown the reader encounters is the medical case of Charles Dexter Ward. This is immediately recognizable as a major unknown, because both the narrator and even medical experts are “baffled by [the] physiological as well as psychological [oddities]” of Ward’s case and because of the suggestive power of the novella’s title (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 90). The narrator reveals just how perplexed he is by this unknown in that he can only offer a list of symptoms which was apparently compiled by the youth’s equally nonplussed doctors. The narrator is also mystified by Charles’ disappearance from his cell and how Dr. Willett may be involved in it (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 91). The way in which the narrator introduces these three major unknowns allows us to identify the narrative device that causes them. The narrator can only narrate what he has learned from the publicized statements of the characters involved, which naturally can only offer an internal perspective on these unknowns. That he is unable to enter the thoughts of the characters becomes clear when he remarks that Dr. Willett “has no public explanation to offer” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 91). This is why Dr. Willett’s involvement in Charles’ escape remains a mystery. It is also the reason why Charles’ escape itself is left unexplained, for “[Willett] was the last to see the patient”.

The narrator’s efforts to resolve these unknowns by collating the reports of persons immediately involved in the events and exploring commonsensical explanations fail miserably. However, this benefits the reader. Ironically, in failing to resolve these unknowns by such simple means, the narrator succeeds in highlighting that these unknowns require a more complex explanation. That the symptoms observed in Charles are unlike any medical condition known to doctors means that the real explanation is not likely to be medical, or at least not purely medical. Similarly, that common sense cannot account for Charles’ escape

from “[a] window open above a sheer drop of sixty feet” suggests that the explanation for his escape must really be extraordinary (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 91). And the observations of Dr. Willett’s strange reaction to Charles’ escape clearly warrants further investigation of Dr. Willett’s activities. Furthermore, the narrator’s failure to obtain answers from the immediate context of these unknowns means that the explanation must lie further away, meaning in the past.

The only major unknown which the narrator finds possible to investigate at this time is Dr. Willett’s strange behavior, by analyzing several witness statements he is aware of. This investigation stalls, however, since the narrator filters the evidence through a thick ideological lens. In the end, he dismisses the clues gained “from certain closely confidential friends of Willett and the senior Ward” as “too wildly fantastic for general credence” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 92). Rather than learning something about Dr. Willett’s connection to Charles’ disappearance, the statements reveal Dr. Willett’s view of Charles’ case, which is radically different from that of the other medical experts. Crucially, the narrator does not follow this trail of investigation, merely giving a crude and non-revealing summary of what his sources revealed about “certain frightful investigations and discoveries which [Willett] made” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 93).

This first investigation is relevant for the reader in several ways. First of all, it establishes Dr. Willett as the key witness in the reader’s eyes. The frequent allusions to Dr. Willett’s strange reactions to Charles’ disappearance indicate that he is capable of explaining how the young man vanished from his cell. Naturally, Willett must also be able to explain his own involvement in this event. Indeed, Willett also appears to be in a position to resolve the unknown surrounding Charles’ condition. This is suggested by the conviction with which he refutes the opinions of his fellow doctors, and in the fact that he was evidently able to reconstruct a very detailed timeline of Charles’ condition. The narrator, however, prevents the reader from gaining access to this key witness. He entirely withholds what he learned Willett had told friends about Charles’ escape on the grounds that it is too fantastic to believe. Regarding Willett’s alternative explanations of Charles’ case, he does not bother to report on what Willett thinks he discovered, either because it appears too incredible or because the narrator focuses on finding an explanation of Charles’ escape. For whatever reason, he merely gives the reader a summary of the Doctor’s investigation of Ward (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 94). This summary manages to obscure every single of Willett’s findings, as it merely tells of the various pieces of evidence Willett had considered. More importantly, however, the narrator is aware of Willett’s revelation about Charles, which again he withholds from the reader: “And

most conclusive of all, there are the two hideous results which the doctor obtained [...]” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 94).

What is the narrative effect of this first investigation? First of all, it frustrates the reader by denying the immediate resolution of all the major unknowns. Second, it is a strong marker of the narrator’s unreliability, which in turn signals the reader that he will have to investigate on his or her own. And third, it provides a blueprint for the reader’s investigation. Knowing what pieces of evidence had given Dr. Willett his revelation will enable the reader to retrace these waypoints in his or her own investigation.

### **Joseph Curwen investigated**

The narrator, in fact, comes to a similar conclusion. Despite his dismissal of Dr. Willett’s findings, he is simply unable to dispel the *significance* of the chain of evidence Willett presents (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 93-94). Following the complete failure of his initial investigation, the narrator now decides to revisit Dr. Willett’s evidence in an effort to discover *what* it signifies. Dr. Willett attaches particular importance to Charles’ discovery of an item “behind the panelling of the crumbling house in Olney Court” in 1919, which he claims “formed the definite source of Ward’s undoing” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 99). Given the circumstance that the narrator has no access to Willett’s mind, he does not know what item the Doctor’s statement refers to. However, since this discovery came as a result of Charles’ genealogical research of Joseph Curwen, the narrator has a lead he can follow. Being in the possession of a collection of all material Charles had collated about Joseph Curwen, he now files through this material in the hope of learning what Charles may have discovered behind that wall and how it may relate to Charles’ case.

In this way, he introduces the first hypodiegetic narrative, which presents “what Ward [had] heard and unearthed” about Joseph Curwen (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 99). Any attempt by the narrator to analyze this material for signs of what Charles may have found in Olney Court would leave a trace of *interpretive* commentaries (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 99-100). However, no such comments are to be found, whether before, during or following this hypodiegetic narrative. This ellipsis signals the narrator’s failure to establish this material’s relevance to Charles’ case and prevents him from realizing what Charles discovered. Indeed, the sole commentary that can be found shows that he considers the Curwen material to be little more than anecdotes: “[...] Charles Ward may well have wondered whether any citizen of Providence killed Joseph Curwen” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 126).

The reader, on the other hand, utilizes this narrative better because he or she will approach it differently. We have noted that the narrator turns to Charles' collection of Curwen papers in order to determine the identity of the item Charles discovered in Olney Court. The material collected by Charles, however, makes no direct reference to what he might have found. Yet it permits the reader to infer that whatever Charles had found must have been something belonging to Joseph Curwen, since he had owned Olney Court (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 99). Even more important is Dr. Willett's adamant insistence that certain discoveries about Joseph Curwen were the direct cause of Charles' fate (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 98-99). Given these circumstances, the reader realizes that an investigation of Joseph Curwen might yield results that bear relevance to Charles' case, *even* if this relevance might not be apparent at this time. Once the reader immerses himself into the material Charles collected, Joseph Curwen's activities actually emerge as a major unknown of considerable interest, further motivating the reader to investigate. Seeking an explanation for Curwen's secret enterprises becomes even more concerning when the reader discovers that they relate to the epigraph, which stems from one of Curwen's alchemical treatises (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 103).

Turning to the contents of this narrative, the reader is first confronted by a collection of observations of Joseph Curwen, made by several of his contemporaries. None of these early witnesses cares to investigate Curwen closer. Nonetheless, the reader can gradually form a hypothesis about the nature of the man's activities, especially after Mr. Merritt succeeds in penetrating the unknown location of Curwen's house. Merritt's memorization of a passage from an alchemical work, which the reader realizes is identical to the epigraph, allows the reader to correlate several minor unknowns that are observed to cluster about Curwen. If taken literally, Borellus' statement that "any dead Ancestour" might be "called up [...] from the Dust whereinto his Bodie has been incinerated" identifies Curwen's interests as necromancy (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 103). This would also explain Curwen's interest in graveyards and his uncanny ability to divulge family secrets that "only direct talks with the long-dead could possibly have furnished" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 106). However, this hypothesis does not explain the mysterious disappearances of sailors, soldiers and slaves that the locals connect to Curwen (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 103-105). Nor does it explain the purpose of his research. Observations of unknowns around Curwen drop off sharply when the man decides to engage more in society.

This brings about the emergence of a protagonist investigator, Ezra Weeden, who quickly recognizes that "all this outward activity [...] was no more than a mask for some nameless traffick with the blackest gulfs of Tartarus" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 109). Weeden

displays great skill in his observations of Curwen, and thereby furnishes the reader with more material with which to expand his hypothesis. In this manner, the reader comes to correlate the change of Curwen's secret import from slaves to "boxes [...] suggestive of coffins", which takes place following Curwen's "ill-concealed exaltation of perfect triumph" in 1766 (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 109-110). That this display of triumph is a sign of some breakthrough in Curwen's necromantic activities is suggested by Weeden's observation that soon after "the sinister scholar began to astonish people by his possession of information which only their long-dead ancestors would seem to be able to impart" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 109). This suggests that the earlier noted disappearances were individuals that were used during the experimental stages of Curwen's necromancy. His display of triumph meant that he had achieved a breakthrough and was now ready to apply his art by raising the long-dead. Further observations by Weeden lead the reader to realize that Curwen is pursuing some mysterious goal in resurrecting the dead on such a large scale. For example, Weeden overhears what the reader gathers must be Curwen's interrogation of a reanimated person. Ezra states that "most of the questions and answers he could understand were historical or scientific; occasionally pertaining to very remote places and ages" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 112). The unknown represented by Curwen's activities becomes thus even more accentuated. Curwen appears to interrogate dead with a specific goal in mind. What this goal might be remains obscure.

Weeden's formation of a conspiracy against Curwen brings about the revelation of several minor unknowns, thereby confirming the reader's hypothesis. This is the result of a shift from a mere observation of Curwen to action against him. For example, the interception of Curwen's mail confirms that Curwen's studies, experimental until 1766, are now put to use in an effort to extract some specific knowledge from the dead (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 118). Yet the conspirators have yet not penetrated the barrier created by Curwen's farm. This location, as their observations allow the reader to surmise, shields Curwen's secret activities. At first, this is merely suggested by the traffic of "fresh" subjects into this location, by the appearance of "used" specimens from it, and by Weeden's eavesdropping on Curwen's interrogation (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 114).

Finally, however, the reader's hypothesis is confirmed by the observations and reports about the raid Weeden and his conspirators conduct against the farm. Crucially, "[n]ot one man who participated in that terrible raid could ever be induced to say a word concerning it, and every fragment of the vague data which survives comes from those outside the final fighting party" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 125). This means that the reader is not given a revelation of Curwen's activities, although Weeden and his man clearly succeeded in revealing them. Even

the narrator realizes that their silence about what they have seen inside and below the farm must be the direct result of the revelation of Curwen's activities (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 122). Lacking the raider's perspective, Charles's material can only present the raid as it is described in the two witness accounts he has managed to discover: Luke Fenner's letters and Eleazar Smith's diary (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 122,124). This focalization is limited to observation of what happens above ground and outside the farm's buildings, since Luke Fenner's vantage point is the neighboring farmstead, and that of Eleazar Smith is several miles distant. Nevertheless, their observations and the "mute clue" of Ezra Weeden's note to Eleazar Smith allow the reader to hypothesize what the raider encounter (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 126). The strange and powerful phenomena observed by Luke Fenner – the strong smell, light and thunderous voice – are evidence of Curwen's sorcery, which he directs against the invaders. Weeden's note suggests that Curwen attempted to raise the dead in an effort to vanquish the raiders. This apparently proved his undoing, for Weeden's note indicates that Curwen did not heed the warning "not [to] call up Any that [he could not] put downe" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 126). As noted already, the narrator offers no further commentary on this hypodiegetic narrative. Instead, the reader finds himself placed before a new hypodiegetic narrative, which spans Acts III and IV.

### **A parental investigation**

Lacking a proper introduction by the narrator, the reader nevertheless recognizes what this narrative represents. This is the narrative of Charles' parents, detailing their increasingly disconcerting impressions of Charles. It takes the form of observations and reports about their son, who "subsequently [recall] his conduct at this period" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 136). In establishing this structure, we can already discern that Charles represents the major unknown in this narrative and that focalization will play a significant role in creating unknowns for the parents.

In the course of this section the narrator remains virtually invisible. While he does not explicitly state why he introduces the new hypodiegetic narrative, the comments he offers during this narrative suggest that he has discontinued his analysis of Dr. Willett's evidence. His only comments in this section echo the opinion of the same medical experts who are baffled by Charles' case. This represents yet another reorientation in the narrator's investigation of Charles's case. His reiteration of the professional opinions of Dr. Lyman and his fellow psychologists means that the narrator has subscribed to the assessment that Charles is indeed mad (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 127, 135, 143). This new hypodiegetic narrative is his

attempt to establish a timeline of Charles' activities in an effort to pinpoint the beginning and course of the young man's madness. Once again, that the narrator fails to offer any interpretive comments on this narrative signals that this renewed attempt at an investigation also fails.

However, the narrator's decision to present the parents' observations of Charles as scenes benefits the reader. It means that the reader is *shown* what Charles' parents have seen, instead of being summarily told by the narrator that he has failed to extrapolate anything important from their observations. This allows the reader to circumvent the narrator and interpret the observations of Charles' parents on his or her own. In fact, everything the narrator *tells* the reader, through his comments, leads him or her to investigate in another direction. The narrator's attempt to chart the youth's descent into madness by interpreting his activities as signs of a gradual mental decline are reinforced by references to the professional opinions of Dr. Lyman and his fellow psychologists. However, each of these comments, intended to back up such an interpretation, is accompanied by a vehemently dissenting comment by Dr. Willett (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 135, 143). Since the reader has repeatedly been given indications that Dr. Willett can explain the major unknowns involved in Charles' case, he is urged to seek alternative interpretations of Charles' activities.

This is the framework which governs the reader's approach to Acts III and IV. To begin with, Charles is still collecting genealogical data on Joseph Curwen and freely shares his thoughts with his parents. For example, they recollect how "[h]e often expressed a keen wonder as to what really had taken place a century and a half before at that Pawtuxet farmhouse whose site he vainly tried to find" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 127). In fact, this first part of this new narrative forms a natural extension of the previous, as it introduces *additional* material on Joseph Curwen, which Charles presents to his parents, and thereby to the reader (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 127-135). In this part of the narrative the reader acquires a more detailed understanding of Joseph Curwen, and, in particular, of his associates, Hutchinson and Orne (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 128-131). This knowledge will enable the reader to respond to the overwhelming unknown that confronts Charles' parents as a result of one of their son's discoveries.

The event that precipitates this change is instantly recognizable to the reader. It is the event which Dr. Willett singled out as the "definite source of Charles' undoing" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 99). This time, however, the reader is given a report of what it is that Charles finds behind the paneling of the house in Olney Court. The two workmen present testify that the space behind contained Joseph Curwen's journal and certain other papers (Lovecraft, *CDW*:

134-135). The change that follows this event is profound. Charles' investigation from this point onward is shrouded by "confinement and secrecy" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 136). As the quote suggests, his policy of secrecy comprises two components: He conducts his researches behind closed doors, thereby inhibiting any visual observations of what he is doing. In addition, he evades giving answers when being asked about his research. This reticence causes problems for his parents, who respect their son's privacy and make no stern attempt to overcome the sensory and communicative unknowns imposed by Charles. Bereft of their primary observational tools, the parents are nonplussed at their son's behavior, and their observations and reports about Charles become very vague and often misleading. Periodically, Dr. Willett is summoned by the parents to examine Charles. However, the Doctor is not yet granted investigative powers and Charles makes every attempt to limit his observations (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 138-140).

The limitations imposed on the observations and reports of the young man's parents are of course significant to the reader, too. The recollection of Dr. Willett's portentous statement that Ward's discovery of these papers is the kernel event in the young man's eventual fate imparts a definite goal to the reader's investigation – the explanation of what will happen to Charles in the aftermath of his discovery. In order to achieve that goal, the text provides the reader with a narrative device that allows him to compensate for the parents' limited observations. That device is repetition. Owing to the knowledge which the reader gained during his investigation of Curwen, he or she can now recognize that the observations of Charles' secret activities imply a repetition of events and actions from the Curwen data (Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film*: 63-64). Thus, by superpositioning what he had learned about Curwen, the reader manages to form a strong hypothetical plot about the young man's clandestine activities.

Charles' sudden shift of interest from "antiquarian matter" to "[w]itchcraft and magic" and "chemical research" matches the three main components of Joseph Curwen's secret activities (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 136-137). This indicates that the discovery of Joseph Curwen's papers prompted the young man to attempt to recreate that research. However, no analysis of Curwen's life can reveal Charles' motives for emulating Curwen's necromancy. Equally uncertain, at least for now, are his reasons for searching for Joseph Curwen's grave and the reasons for his European travels (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 137-138). Thus the function of this clandestine enterprise remains a mystery to the reader. Only that Charles is indeed attempting to recreate Joseph Curwen's experiments becomes virtual certainty when the reader analyses the parents' increasingly mystifying observations: Charles' chanting of formulae and the



odours emerging from his laboratory are all very familiar (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 143). By interpreting the unknowns observed by the parents, the reader is even able to chart the progress of Charles' research. In January 1927, Charles' parents witness a "peculiar incident", when Charles emerges with an expression of triumph following a ritual chant that coincided with their observation of inexplicable phenomena around the house (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 144). There can be little doubt that Charles had succeeded in recreating Curwen's arts. In the light of this realization, the young wizard's "odd inquiries about the date of the spring thawing of the ground" are portentous to the reader (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 144). When Charles finally returns late at night with a "long, heavy box", there can be no doubt that Charles, in likeness with Joseph Curwen, will attempt to apply his research to raise the dead (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 144-145). The reader is even able to understand even more about this event when he realizes the identity of the corpse exhumed. A cross-referencing between the newspaper article about nocturnal diggings near the gravesite of the Field family and Charles' discovery that Curwen was "interred 10 ft. S. and 5 ft. W of Naphtali Field's grave" leaves little room for another explanation.

The successful explanation of this event enables the reader to explain the following one. The "strange development" on April 15, Good Friday, to which "Dr. Willett somehow attaches great importance", while inexplicable to the narrator and Charles' parents, is perfectly understandable to the reader (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 146-147). Knowing that Charles had exhumed Joseph Curwen and that he mastered his necromantic arts, the observations made by the parents allow only the conclusion that Charles now attempts to resurrect Curwen. That his mother and father clearly heard *two* voices inside the laboratory soon after their son had finished the ritual further indicates that it succeeds (Lovecraft: *CDW*: 148-149).

Extending the plot yet again, revealing Curwen's resurrection allows the reader to uncover the minor unknowns that appear in its aftermath. Charles' father clearly recollects how the "other" voice in Charles' laboratory formed the phrase: "Sshh!-write!" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 149). The use of such a command strongly indicates that Curwen gives Charles a list of instructions. What he instructs Charles to do can be seen from observations of the young man's actions: His "curious delvings in the cellar" of the old house in Olney Court and his attempt to "secure access to the rather hedged-in river-bank" of the Pawtuxet triggers once again the reader's memories of Curwen (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 151). Apparently, the young man is sent out to reclaim the sites of Curwen's original research. At this time, the summarized presentation of observations made by Mr. and Mrs. Ward permits the reader to understand a rapid succession of events. The argument overheard in May must have been between Charles

and Joseph Curwen (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 152). This, in turn, makes the “queer nocturnal incident” in the middle of June understandable (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 152). The butler’s observation of Charles leaving the house is really a misinterpretation. The “unholy glance Charles fixes upon” the butler and Mrs. Ward’s perception of “faint sounds [...] as if from sobbing and pacing” from the laboratory indicate that Charles remained in the laboratory (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 152). Therefore, it must have been Curwen the butler saw exiting the house. The reader gains confirmation when the newspaper reports the desecration of Ezra Weedon’s grave the next day (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 153). Only Curwen had a motive for doing so: revenge. This and another episode have a clear effect on Charles. “[His] aspect now became very haggard and hunted, and all agreed in retrospect that he may have wished to make some statement or confession from which sheer terror withheld him” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 154). The only significant event that Charles *can* confess is his resurrection of Joseph Curwen. The young man’s horror, the reader realizes, lies in the fact that Charles is now under Curwen’s control, who locks him up in the attic laboratory while he satisfies his vampiric needs (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 154).

Charles’ relocation to the Pawtuxet bungalow, to which he “transfer[s] all the secrecy with which he had surrounded his attic realm” dooms any hope the parents’ held for discovering the source of their son’s bizarre behavior. Mrs. Ward is sent away to Atlantic City “for an indefinite recuperative sojourn”, leaving her husband and Dr. Willett to investigate Charles. However, the restrictions imposed by the settings allow him to receive mere reports by third parties about his son’s activities there. The unknown surrounding their son is further expanded by the sudden appearance of two new characters in Charles’ company, a “villainous-looking Portuguese half-caste” and Dr. Allen, who appears to be a colleague of some sort (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 155). Their significance eludes Mr. Ward, and indeed to Dr. Willett, whom Mr. Ward summons with increasing frequency to talk to Charles (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 156).

The reader, on the other hand, is little impaired by the relocation of Charles’ secret research. Indeed, the reader is concerned with two different unknowns. The first is Charles’ insistence on acquiring precisely this bungalow, which even the narrator notes must have some “odd reason” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 155). The reader soon hits upon this reason, when locals report of “disproportionate orders of meat” delivered to the bungalow and of muffled sounds “supposed to come from some very deep cellar below the place” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 155). These observations exactly match those made by the Fenners of Curwen’s farm. Either Charles or Curwen must have at last discovered that the bungalow occupies the same space,

and acquired it in order to gain access to the subterranean. With Curwen in control of Charles, it is hardly surprising that the reoccupation of his own laboratory is a prelude to a renewal of his original research. The interception of caskets addressed to “Charles Ward” confirms the reader’s suspicions (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 156-157). It also marks the resurfacing of a major unknown that the reader was unable to resolve earlier: What is the aim of Joseph Curwen’s research?

However, the reader’s consideration of this major unknown is immediately complicated when events take a truly unexpected turn. Charles’ letter to Dr. Willett, which the narrator reproduces in verbatim, has a quadruple effect on the reader’s unknown. First, the letter is a call for help, confirming the reader’s hypothesis that Charles has become alienated from and ultimately dominated by Joseph Curwen (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 157). More interestingly, it emphasizes the importance of the major unknown that has just resurfaced in the reader’s mind. Whatever the intentions of Joseph Curwen’s research are, Charles insists that they represent a danger to “all civilization, all natural law, perhaps even the fate of the solar system and the universe” and must be stopped immediately (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 158). Third, it allows the reader to reveal the minor unknown of Dr. Allen’s identity. Charles’ call for shooting him “on sight and dissolv[ing] his body in acid” is so peculiar that it can only apply to Joseph Curwen (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 158).

The fourth effect of Charles’ letter is the most relevant for the narrator, for it frustrates the reader’s focus on the important major unknown that just re-emerged. Being addressed to Dr. Willett and calling for an immediate interview with him, it prompts a brief narrative of the Doctor’s experiences after receiving this letter. This narrative, naturally, focuses on Dr. Willett’s wonder at what Charles might reveal to him (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 158-159). However, this narrative proves abortive, since Charles fails to appear for the agreed interview.

This abortive narrative also diverts the reader’s thoughts from that major unknown alluded to by Charles. This narrative overwrites the reader’s curiosity for the major unknown by introducing a moment of suspense that appears immediately relevant to the narrative (Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*: 47). This situation is very similar to “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, where the reader’s attention is diverted by the question of what will happen to the protagonist investigator once his life comes under threat. Instead, here, the reader is forced to answer the question of *why* Charles failed to appear for the scheduled interview with Dr. Willett. The interpretation offered by the guards at the Ward residence directly contradicts Ward’s stated intentions “not to be out of the house” and that he hoped that “nothing may prevent this meeting” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 158). As no one offers an alternative explanation at

this time, the reader finds that he is the only one able to reinterpret the guards' observations. Ward appears to have had a telephone conversation with Joseph Curwen with the aim to delay Curwen's plans for the time being, as suggested by what the guards overheard (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 159). The observation that Charles suddenly re-entered the house leads the guards to surmise that Charles had secretly slipped out earlier. Therein lies a grave misjudgment, the reader now understands. In reality, the reader realizes, Charles never left the house, and it was really Curwen who *entered* the house. This also explains what happens next. The cry and choking gasp heard from the library irrefutably indicate that Curwen killed Charles Dexter Ward in that instant (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 159). The subsequent clattering and thumping are caused by Curwen's efforts to hide the body, for he was soon after seen to leave the house alone, and Willett afterwards waited in the library without realizing what had transpired there (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 159).

The following unknowns surrounding the person who Dr. Willett, Mr. Ward and the narrator mistake for Charles are thus moot to the reader, since they all concern behavior that seems highly unusual for *Charles* (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 160-167). The reader, however, has realized that this is really Curwen who merely assumed Charles' presence, and that every observation of "Charles'" behavior is merely evidence to that fact. Therefore, the reader remains in a state of suspense, waiting for someone to realize what really happened to Charles.

### **Enter Dr. Willett, exeunt narrator**

Because of the introduction, the reader already knows that it will be Dr. Willett who eventually realizes the truth about Charles. Indeed, the unknowns caused by Curwen's impersonation of Charles mount rapidly and cause the Doctor to investigate Charles' case more actively. To begin with, "Charles" inexplicable behavior is interpreted as symptoms of madness – a selective loss of memory about modern events and the emergence of an archaic style in his expressions (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 162-163). While Willett begins to understand that there is something mysterious about these "symptoms", he still concurs with the interpretation that "the youth must be definitely out of his mind" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 164). However, once more unknowns surface, Willett begins to make a closer assessment of these. Comparing the forged cheques made out in Charles' name with other samples of handwriting, Willett is certain that he has seen this hand before somewhere else (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 167). This marks the beginning of Dr. Willett's investigation, for *he*

[...] now reviewed the whole case with febrile energy; it being at this time that he obtained the statements of the workmen who had seen Charles find the Curwen documents, and that he collated the incidents of the destroyed newspaper items, looking up the latter at the *Journal* office. (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 167)

However, the Doctor's investigation does not yet emerge as a narrative in its own right. Instead, the narrator still focuses on presenting the opinions of Dr. Lyman and his colleagues, marginalizing Dr. Willett's perspective. This means that the reader's suspense continuously increases in the course of Act IV, as he or she recognizes that Dr. Willett's interpretations of the unknowns in this section diverge increasingly from the interpretations endorsed by the narrator. This narrative conflict becomes irresolvable towards the end of Act IV. When Willett at last identifies the handwriting on the cheques as "the bygone penmanship of Joseph Curwen himself", the narrator merely remarks that the psychologists interpret this discovery "as a phase of imitativeness only to be expected in a mania of this sort" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 171). "Recognising this prosaic attitude in his colleagues," Dr. Willett advises secrecy considering further such discoveries (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 171). The narrator's investigation of Charles' case has long been rendered dysfunctional because of his choice to fully endorse all interpretations made by Dr. Lyman and the other psychologists. Dr. Willett's decision thus foreshadows the termination of the narrator's investigation. The introduction and the subsequent narratives have made it abundantly clear that the narrator only has access to information made publicly available by the characters. Thus, Dr. Willett's decision to withhold any future considerations about the unknown from Dr. Lyman and the other psychologists also means that they are kept secret from the narrator.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the end of Act IV also marks the end of this narrator and his investigation. Instead, Act V introduces a new narrator, and therefore a new narrative. This transition is hardly visible, because both the old and the new narrators are almost imperceptible. However, this common feature is the effect of entirely different characteristics of each narrator. The new narrator has unmediated access to the *internal* perspectives of Mr. Ward and Dr. Willett, something which the old narrator never had (Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film*: 42-43). Another contrast is that the new narrator does not participate in the story he narrates, he is merely a "witness-narrator" (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 97). This means that whereas the original narrator attempted to investigate Charles' case, the new one does not. Instead, he merely transmits Dr. Willett's investigation.

Of course, these changes affect the unknown. First of all, the non-involvement of the new narrator means that, from this point on, the burden of investigating the unknown is

shifted entirely onto the reader. Although Dr. Willett also engages in a very successful investigation of the unknown, his investigative ability proves nonetheless limited. As a *character* who only emerged as a protagonist investigator in the final stages of Act IV, his access to unknowns in other parts the text is very restricted. As the following analysis of Act V will show, Dr. Willett's characterization reveals him to be preoccupied with unknowns that relate directly to the discovery of what happened to Charles, leaving the major unknown, which centers on Joseph Curwen, largely unconsidered.

Owing to the shift in narrator, the reader is directly present at the conference between the Doctor and Mr. Ward at the beginning of Act V. Together they begin reassessing the unknowns that they have become aware of. As "Willett and Mr. Ward [pass] from conclusion to conclusion", the reader finds confirmation that the hypothetical plot of Charles' activities that he or she had painstakingly constructed throughout Act III and IV is indeed correct (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 173-174). However, Dr. Willett's limited ability to explain the unknown become immediately apparent, for "[t]he final madness of Charles neither father nor doctor could attempt to explain" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 174). The reader is therefore still held in suspense, as Dr. Willett has yet to discover Charles' fate. In order to discover more clues about "Charles' madness", Dr. Willett and Mr. Ward conduct a thorough examination of the Pawtuxet bungalow (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 175-176).

Inside the bungalow's basement, they find the entrance to the subterranean. This marks the end of Mr. Ward's involvement in the investigation. Stricken by a gust of noxious air released by the opening of that entrance, the father faints and leaves Dr. Willett to explore the subterranean alone. For both the reader and Dr. Willett, the discovery of minor unknown inside these catacombs reiterates the importance of a major unknown. However, each tries to relate the new unknowns to a *different* major unknown. The Doctor is occupied with explaining "young Ward's immediate condition" and therefore focuses on interpreting "the most obviously recent matter" discovered inside the catacombs (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 178). The reader, on the other hand, is more interested in discovering evidence of Curwen's secret activities, and particularly their purpose and precise nature. Since Curwen had confined his arts entirely within this unknown location, Dr. Willett's exploration now gives the reader the opportunity to discover this evidence. Seen in this light, the fact that the exploration is focalized through Dr. Willett may prove detrimental to the reader's investigation.

Initially, it does appear doubtful whether Willett's observations really benefit the reader's interest. He only affords passing glances at rooms that "must have represented the earliest and most obsolete phases of Joseph Curwen's experimentation" in his search of more

modern features (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 177). Willett only makes more thorough observations once he discovers what he judges to be *Charles*' study (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 177). The papers which the Doctor finds inside this study dispel these doubts, however. Despite their obviously modern origin, they mostly bear "the ancient script of Joseph Curwen" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 178). Dr. Willett misinterprets this again as a sign of Charles' madness, as he thinks that these documents show Charles' "sedulous imitation of the old wizard's writing" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 178). However, Dr. Willett's misrepresentation of this unknown is mitigated by the narrator, preserving its usefulness to the reader. In portraying all that Willett sees in a scene, the reader is afforded a glimpse of Curwen's art described in these papers, which he or she recognizes must have been written by the reanimated Curwen. Of particular importance are the two formulae, which represent an unknown to the Doctor. In fact, Dr. Willett aids the reader in recognizing what these formulae represent: "[T]he first one struck an odd note [...] which he recognized later when reviewing the events of that horrible Good Friday of the previous year" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 178). This ensures that the reader remembers how Charles had chanted the first formula in what the reader knows was Curwen's resurrection. The first formula therefore must serve the resurrection of the dead. Even the function of the second formula can be inferred from Dr. Willett's observations: Since it is "no more than the first [formula] written syllabically backward", the assumption that it reverses the process of resurrection seems credible (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 178). However, this scene is interrupted before Dr. Willett can observe anything that contains information about the motivations for Curwen's necromancy. Resolving "to examine no more till he could bring the skeptical alienists en masse for an ampler and more systematic raid", Dr. Willett feels urged to continue his search for 'Charles'' laboratory (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 179).

His renewed exploration of the subterranean forces the Doctor to broaden his focus on unknowns that do not appear immediately related to Charles' case: "From that frightful smell and that uncanny noise Willett's attention could no longer be diverted" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 180). As Willett succeeds in tracking down the source of these odors and sounds, the focus of his investigation expands to include the consideration of Curwen's secret activities (which he understandably attributes to Charles). This provides the reader with a series of astute observations and interpretations by Willett that allow him or her to reconstruct the precise *modus operandi* of Curwen's necromancy. Determining that the sounds and odors emerge from hidden pits below the chamber's floor, Willett removes the slab covering one of them. Inside, he discovers "a thing", which he realizes must have been "called up from *imperfect* salts" and which was "kept for servile of ritualistic purposes" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 181). While

representing an important revelation for Dr. Willett, it merely allows the reader to recognize the existence of an unknown ritualistic aspect of Curwen's activities, which is also suggested by Willett's discovery of what appears to be an altar (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 179). This complicates the major unknown realized by the reader.

This changes profoundly once Dr. Willett at last discovers the "long-sought laboratory of Charles Ward—and no doubt of old Joseph Curwen before him" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 184). Again, a survey of this laboratory provides more details about the nature of Joseph Curwen's activities. The two adjacent storage rooms reveal the purpose of the laboratory. While one contains piles of 'unprocessed' coffins, the other contains jars filled with "a fine dusty powder of very light weight and of many shades of dull, neutral colour" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 185). Dr. Willett ponders the significance of these jars, which are of two distinct types, labeled "Custodes" and "Materia", respectively (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 185). Recalling the contents of various letters from Curwen's co-conspirators, Willett realizes that these jars must be storage containers for the salts employed in the summoning. The 'Materia'-jars, he hypothesizes, must contain the salts of

[...] half the titan thinkers of all the ages; snatched by supreme ghouls from crypts where the world thought them safe, and subject to the beck and call of madmen who sought to drain their knowledge for some still wilder end whose ultimate effect would concern, as poor Charles had hinted in his frantic note, 'all civilization, all natural law, perhaps even the fate of the solar system and the universe'. (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 186)

At last, Dr. Willett has realized the major unknown that has preoccupied the reader for so long. This realization frees the Doctor's investigation from the ideological tether that had limited him to search for clues about Charles' madness: "Willett, boldly determined to penetrate every wonder and nightmare this nether realm might contain" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 187). To the reader, Dr. Willett's realization of the real message merely makes the discovery of the purpose behind Curwen's resurrections and interrogations of the dead all the more urgent. The rest of Dr. Willett's exploration does not yield an answer to this question, however. For individual jars are merely marked by numbers, which Willett surmises refer to a catalogue. Knowing the identity of the persons interrogated by Curwen could allow the reader to hypothesize what kind of information the necromancer is searching for. However, Willett does not search for this ledger, as he becomes more interested in examining another room adjacent to the laboratory.



Willett's description of this room allows the reader to identify the function of this room as the interrogation chamber (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 187-188). Again, an examination of this room provides more details of how Curwen resurrected the dead. Dr. Willett does not discover any further clues as to the purpose of this necromancy. But the reader does. The "disjointed fragments in that crabbed Curwen chirography" which the Doctor discovers on a notepad lying on the table within the chamber provide the reader with a glimpse of one of Curwen's interrogations:

"B. dy'd not. Escap'd into walls and founde Place below.  
"Saw olde V. saye y<sup>e</sup> Sabaoth and learnt y<sup>e</sup> Way.  
"Rais'd Yog-Sothoth thrice and was y<sup>e</sup> nexte Day deliver'd.  
"F. soughte to wipe out all know'g howe to raise Those from Outside."  
(Lovecraft, *CDW*: 187)

The reader has little choice but to concur with Dr. Willett's assessment that these are merely disjointed fragments. Lacking the understanding of their context, which Curwen appears to know, these phrases reveal nothing new to the reader. In fact, they only reiterate yet again that Curwen's activities are somehow connected to cosmic forces.

Willett's exploration comes to an abrupt end when he examines the inscriptions on the walls of the interrogation chamber. Recognizing them to be variations of the formulae he had previously discovered in the study, he inadvertently mouths its words. This prompts a reaction from the dust that is still present in this room. Dr. Willett faints before he fully realizes what happens, and finds himself in the bungalow once he regains conscience (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 189-190). The reader, naturally, understands what had just happened: Marinus Bicknell Willett has successfully resurrected the being whose salts had been left on the table. Apparently, as Willett has observed earlier, Charles had been interrupted in attempting to raise this being when he was apprehended and sent to the sanitarium (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 187).

Facing the familiar narrative situation of a Lovecraftian protagonist investigator that had just encountered a major unknown, Dr. Willett finds himself doubting his catacomb experiences once he regains consciousness. The aperture through which he had descended into the subterranean has vanished, as have the papers he had collected from the study (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 191). However, unlike other protagonist investigator, Willett can regain his certainty that his experiences were real. Mr. Ward confirms that the entrance to the catacombs was really there, for he had seen it, too. In addition, Willett discovers that he had retained a piece of evidence. Searching for a handkerchief, he discovers a note in his pocket. A closer examination and eventual translation of this note reveals that it has been written on a piece of

paper torn from the notepad in the interrogation chamber. Its message, written in Latin in “Saxon miniscules of the eight or ninth century A.D.”, provides a simple instruction: “Curwen must be killed. The body must be dissolved in aqua fortis, nor must anything be retained. Keep silence as best you are able” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 192).

Only when Dr. Willett is able to translate the note does the reader grasp the true importance of this scene. The being which Willett succeeded in summoning must have known who Joseph Curwen is and what he is doing, since it could give such specific instructions to Willett. By logical extension, this implies that this person is aware of Curwen’s intentions. Since the note only represents a one-way attempt to communicate, however, Dr. Willett’s fainting has prevented another opportunity to learn about the purpose of Curwen’s necromancy. A “curious sequel” to this scene confirms that this being would indeed have been in a position to reveal much about the purpose of Curwen’s activities. The sudden demise of Orne and Hutchinson leads Willett to suggest that whoever wrote the note appears to have access to cosmic knowledge: “Willett maintains that the hand which wrote the miniscule was able to wield stronger weapons as well; and that while Curwen was left for him to dispose of, the writer felt able to deal with Orne and Hutchinson itself” (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 195).

In the aftermath of his catacomb experience, the reader is returned to a state of suspense, as Dr. Willett once again focuses on Charles’ case. This time, however, he turns his attention on Dr. Allen, believing he is Joseph Curwen in disguise, and thinking that Dr. Allen is planning an attempt on Charles’ life (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 193). Dr. Willett decides to visit Charles in his cell, in order to warn him of Dr. Allen and report what he had discovered inside the catacombs (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 193-195). Yet Ward’s reactions during this interview confound the Doctor.

The reader’s suspense is only lifted when Dr. Willett receives the reports of the private detectives Mr. Ward had hired to search for Dr. Allen. At last realizing the confusion of identities he has fallen victim to, Dr. Willett finally reconstructs what really happened to Charles after he had sent that frantic note to him (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 196-198). The reader immediately understands what Willett intends to do next, even though the narrator at this point only offers the perspective of Mr. Ward (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 198). Examining the overmantle in Charles’ upstairs room, he discovers the decomposing remains of Charles, which he burns in the fire-place. Secretely removing the ashes, he subsequently buries them in the Ward’s family grave (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 198-200).

In the aftermath of this event the reader also recognizes how the initial supposition of Charles' fate was created. In a letter, Willett informs Mr. Ward that Charles "will have escaped" by the next day, which the reader recognizes as a white lie to provide some measure of comfort to Mr. Ward (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 201). Since Dr. Willett denied discussing what transpired in that cell, this white lie has become the officially accepted version, which had been propagated by the original narrator

In the light of Dr. Willett's portentous letter and the knowledge that it is really Joseph Curwen who occupies Charles' cell, the reader is once again held in suspense. This time, however, it is the suspense of discovering what actions Dr. Willett will take. Here, the narrator once again enters Dr. Willett's mind, allowing the reader the privilege of witnessing directly the scene that transpires in the cell the day Charles supposedly disappeared (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 202-205). Dr. Willett confronts Joseph Curwen, dispelling his impersonation of Charles and confronting him with his discoveries. Being left with no other option, the reader recognizes what Joseph Curwen attempts to do next. Intoning the same formula overheard by Luke Fenner during the raid on his farm, he attempts to summon "his once ancient ally" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 204). As was suggested by Ezra Weeden's note in the aftermath of that raid, Curwen used it to summon something he could not put down. This implies that the reader is about to witness the manifestation of Curwen's access to the cosmic directly. Dr. Willett, however, interrupts this attempt. Intoning "the second of that pair of formulae" which Willett found in the subterranean, Willett succeeds in reversing the resurrection of Joseph Curwen, who "now lay scattered on the floor as a thin coating of fine bluish-grey dust" (Lovecraft, *CDW*: 205).

This ending ensures that the major unknown the reader has realized in the course of this text remains intact. Only the major unknowns considered by the original narrator have been resolved by Dr. Willett and the reader. The nature of Charles' case has long been known to the reader. This ending also definitely dispels the unknown surrounding Charles' miraculous escape from the cell and Dr. Willett's involvement in this event. However, the ending also precludes the reader from ever forming a hypothesis about the intentions of the three necromancers. What knowledge did they seek to extract from whom? And to what end? What kind of forces were they allied with? The reader is only able to realize the danger their research had presented to the world, embodied by Charles' frantic warning to Dr. Willett and the note by the enigmatic being Willett summoned.

### Concluding observations

This analysis has shown that the unknown that is developed in “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward” has several unique aspects. Of particular interest is the different way in which the unknown is composed in comparison to the other two texts. Immediately striking in this composition is the reduction of the narrator’s role to a bare minimum. Even though he initially fulfills the function of a narrator and even approximates the role of a protagonist investigator, his presence declines sharply after his first attempts to investigate Charles’ disappearance fail. His lack of presence becomes apparent during the series of hypodiegetic narratives which follow this failed investigation. The narrator’s presence is limited to a brief introduction of each narrative which he then introduces, but his failure to investigate their significance means that they are not integrated into the diegetic narrative. Thus the narrator’s diminishing presence threatens the coherence of the text as the diegetic narrative fades gradually into oblivion.

In order to compensate for the double deficiency of a lacking protagonist investigator and a lacking narrator at the diegetic level, the text has to rely on the reader. This means that the narrator is reduced to a mere tool for the reader, the narrator’s purpose is to *show* the reader the unknowns in each hypodiegetic narrative with as little modification as possible. This is reflected in a total lack of interpretive commentary and the prevalence of scenic descriptions in the hypodiegetic narratives. The reader is able to fulfill the role of the narrator automatically once he or she accepts the role of protagonist investigator. In interpreting the unknowns within each successive hypodiegetic narrative, the reader also discovers their connection to Charles’ case, and eventually can place them within a hypothetical plot that explains what happened to Charles. In doing so, he or she has performed the narrator’s task and restored coherence to the narrative. This means that the reader’s investigation of the unknown is a mandatory component of this text’s narrative. Not even the eventual emergence of Dr. Willett as a genuinely competent protagonist investigator serves the restoration of coherence to the narrative, for two reasons. First, he is merely a character. Second, he emerges only *after* the reader has re-established coherence, because the reader is never led to expect this change.

Another unique aspect of the composition in this novella relates to the abundance of unknowns which I had commented on initially. The analysis above only mentions the most prominent unknowns that form the kernels of that plot. Even when considering just these most essential unknowns, the hypothetical plot thus constructed by the reader is tremendous. The

text, however, contains several more minor unknowns which a more astute reader can use to create either a more detailed plot or to form hypotheses at an even earlier stage. In short, the text rewards the reader for an even greater focus on exploring the complexities of the unknowns it contains.

While the composition of this novella shows many unique characteristics, we should not overlook the similarities to “The Call of Cthulhu” and “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. As we have seen, this novella does not employ any new narrative devices in creating and narrating its unknowns. All unknowns in this text are created through the use of setting, focalization, reliability and interrupted communication. Typical, too, is the way in which the reader’s understanding of the unknown develops in the course of the narrative. The introduction once again serves the purpose of making the reader aware of the existence of some as yet undefined major unknown – the truth about what happened to Charles Dexter Ward. The sequence of hypodiegetic narratives that follows this introduction allows the reader to realize what this major unknown consists of and provide him or her with minor and major unknowns that he or she has to interpret in an effort to discover what really happens to Charles. Simultaneously, these narratives make the reader aware of another, cosmic, major unknown. The realization of this new major unknown precipitates an indefinite delay of the reader’s ability to investigate this unknown, as he or she is held in suspense while waiting for a protagonist investigator to reach the same stage of understanding. The release of this suspense then ends the narrative, resolving the original major unknown, and simultaneously preventing any further investigation of the major unknown which the reader has come to realize.

## Conclusion

The stated aim of this thesis was to identify and discuss a narrative technique which, I hypothesized in the introduction, Lovecraft developed around the concept of the unknown, and which he first applied in “The Call of Cthulhu”. This conclusion brings together the results yielded by the analyses of the three texts. Initially, I will present the primary tools on which this technique relies to create and narrate unknowns. I will then set out the model of the unknown narrative, which represents the narrative technique common to all three of these texts. Finally, I will offer a critical assessment of this narrative technique. This assessment will explore to what degree this model is reflected in other texts by Lovecraft, how the model reflects Lovecraft’s philosophy of writing, as it is laid out in “The Supernatural Horror in Literature”, as well as my assessment of the model’s efficiency and problems.

### Lovecraft’s toolbox

In the course of the last three chapters we have repeatedly found evidence that Lovecraft employed a very specific set of narrative devices to create and maintain unknowns which dominate his narratives. I will now present the narrative devices which are the building blocks in Lovecraft’s narrative technique, along with a brief explanation of their typical function within Lovecraft’s narratives.

The primary narrative device employed by Lovecraft to create unknowns is the narrator. In Lovecraft’s narratives, the narrator has to have limited knowledge and his presence is strategically restricted. This means that he can neither enter the minds of other characters nor be possessed of universal knowledge of all that occurs in the fictional world. The consequence is that he is unable to reveal unknowns that are introduced at the diegetic and hypodiegetic level. His presence is mainly confined to the introduction, where the narrator serves the purpose of presenting the major unknown and launching the narrative that will focus on this unknown. His role is to make the reader aware of the major unknown in the introduction and to position it so that it achieves a primary effect on the reader. This narrative function stimulates the reader to investigate the unknowns in the main narrative with the aim of realizing and explaining the major unknown. The narrator’s presence diminishes sharply after the introduction, and he only re-emerges to guide the reader’s response at strategic moments, if at all. Crucially, he reappears at the end to ensure that the major unknown that he introduced is resolved, and to reiterate the new major unknown that the reader has realized.

Another important narrative device employed in the unknown narrative is focalization. It is responsible for limiting narrator, protagonist investigator and other characters in their ability to access information. Restrictions placed on their ability to perceive, understand or believe what they encounter in the fictional world, leads directly to the creation of unknowns. In this way, the narrator is unable to explain the major unknown he introduces because he is unable to process it in his mind. During the main narrative, then, focalization is used extensively to create unknowns from the protagonist investigator's direct observations and the witness reports and other hypodiegetic material. Furthermore, I have shown that Lovecraft's text also creates unknowns by disrupting an agent's emotive state to such a degree that he begins either to doubt his senses or becomes unable or unwilling to comprehend what he has perceived.

Setting, we have discovered, is used in close connection with focalization to create unknowns in Lovecraft's texts. By presenting the fictional world through the eyes of the characters and the limited narrator, certain locations become 'forbidden territory', as we have encountered in Innsmouth, R'lyeh and the Curwen farm. Lovecraft's narrative technique uses setting to encapsulate essential information about the major unknown within inaccessible settings, making this an important narrative device used to maintain unknowns, as it forces the protagonist investigator and reader to search for alternative, less revealing sources of information.

All three texts analyzed employ irony on a large scale. Irony is typically deployed in close connection to markers of reliability. This has several important effects on the reader. First, irony and markers of unreliability lead the reader to call into question the narrator and protagonist investigator's ability to represent and investigate the unknown. This activates the reader to investigate the unknown him- or herself. Second, the distinct categories of irony affect the unknown confronting the reader in different ways. Stable irony, as suggested in the introduction, allows the reader to either realize or explain unknowns that pose significant problems for a textual agent. It is usually directly communicated by another textual agent. Examples include the narrator's comments on the protagonist investigator's misconceptions in the main narrative of "The Call of Cthulhu" or Zadok's accusations that the protagonist investigator does not believe his tale in "The Shadow over Innsmouth". Dramatic irony, by virtue of its representing a direct communication between implied author and implied reader, allows the reader to realize unknowns that are not realized by the textual agents. Both stable and dramatic irony can thus mitigate unknowns created in the discourse, for example by allowing the reader to invert the judgments of unreliability invariably cast upon the key

witness by either protagonist investigator or narrator. Unstable irony, however, serves the specific purpose of creating unknowns only realized by the reader, most evidently the new major unknown the reader grasps through the key witness's account.

The role of irony extends beyond that of a mere narrative device employed to create unknowns. In both "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward", Lovecraft de-emphasizes the narrator's role in introducing irony to the reader. Simultaneously, he also limits the narrator's presence and increases his unreliability much more than he already did in "The Call of Cthulhu". This suggests that, in addition to employing specific narrative devices to create an unknown narrative that captivates the reader, Lovecraft also utilizes a heavily modified narrative communication model. In the standard model, narrative communication flows primarily from the narrator to the implied reader (the narratee is optional, and in Lovecraft's case identical with the implied reader):

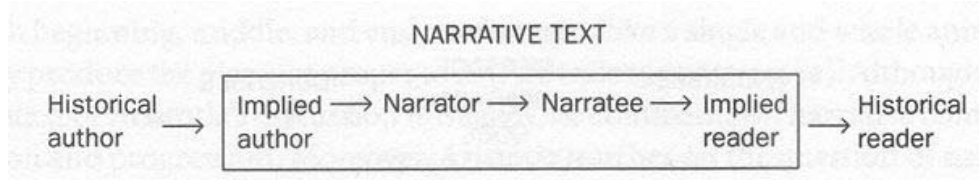


Fig. 1: The narrative communication model (Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film*: 16)

Instead, Lovecraft's narratives rely on frequent uses of irony to create a separate, direct communication between the implied author and the implied reader, which outweighs and in the case of both novellas, overrides the communication between narrator and the reader:

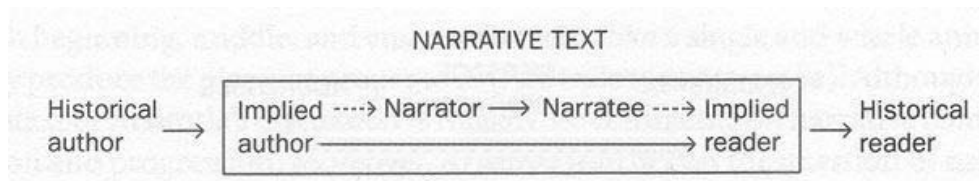


Fig. 2: The narrative communication model developed by Lovecraft

In this communication model, the narrator at the most assumes a secondary or supplementary role after introducing the text and his major unknown. At worst, the text encourages the reader to ignore him.

Just as important for the unknown narrative is the way the text affects the reader's unknown through conscious manipulation of the reading process. Since it utilizes mainly scenes, descriptive pauses and hypodiegetic narratives in the main narrative, the reader is granted a free hand in responding to the unknowns presented there (Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*: 53-54; 93-94). In this way, the reader is able to access for example witness



statements that have been considered as unreliable by the protagonist investigator and/or narrator, and analyze them for him- or herself. Similarly, if he or she is given an account by another character in the form of a hypodiegetic narrative, the reader can access what that character has seen directly, instead of having to rely on the narrator to tell him. In this way, the reader can realize unknowns that have eluded the narrator and or protagonist investigator or extract information about unknowns already realized.

In addition to these narrative devices and the modified communication model, we also note several recurring components essential to the unknown narrative: the minor unknowns, the major unknowns, the key witness, and the characteristic moment of limited 'revelation'. Their precise place and function in the narrative will be discussed in my following presentation of the model of the unknown narrative.

### **The unknown narrative**

In all three texts analyzed in the three preceding chapters, these narratives and key components have been employed within a similar framework. This allows me to present a model of the unknown narrative which shows precisely how Lovecraft utilizes the unknown within his narrative technique. Before presenting this model, however, some clarifications are necessary to prevent misconceptions. The following model is developed in "The Call of Cthulhu", and employed with some compositional variation in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward". Thus it represents a skeletal narrative structure that is common to these three texts. My analyses of these three texts should not be interpreted as teleological, meaning that there is no progressive fine-tuning of this model in each successive text. Such a teleological perspective is reserved for a comparison between "The Call of Cthulhu" and either of the latter texts. Indeed, both "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" improve the following model by adding improved narrative strategies for activating the reader's interest in investigating the unknown. Both novellas also feature refined narrative strategies that aim to maintain the reader's interest once he or she has realized the major unknown.

The model of Lovecraft's unknown narrative can be divided into the same constituent elements that also make up a true narrative: beginning, middle and ending. Since it is directly developed from conclusions of comparisons between the unknown as seen by the implied reader and the unknown perceived by the protagonist investigator and/or narrator, this model will take both standpoints into account.

The beginning of the unknown narrative features a retrospective introduction in which the narrator causes the reader to become aware of the existence of a major unknown. At the same time, the integrity of this major unknown is preserved by the narrator, either through his unwillingness or inability to reveal it. Whatever his reasons for doing so, he restricts his communication with the reader from this point onwards. Immediately compensating this is the establishment of an ironic communication between the implied author and the reader. Through this subversive form of communication, the text provides the reader with information which the narrator cannot or will not furnish. In the introduction, this means that the text allows the reader to recognize how important the major unknown is to the narrator. More importantly, the introduction launches the main narrative in such a way that the reader is made aware of the fact that it will also play a central role in the remaining text. This imbues the major unknown with a primary effect, encouraging the reader to interpret the rest of the text in the light of this major unknown.

At the beginning of the main narrative, the narrator becomes imperceptible, leaving the protagonist investigator and the reader to face the minor unknowns that emerge in this part of the text on their own. The protagonist investigator, who emerges at the beginning of the main narrative, is entirely ignorant of the major unknown. As a consequence, he has no *raison d'être* to investigate, yet. Therefore, when confronted with minor unknowns, which are mostly introduced to him in the form of witness accounts or direct observations, he either dismisses them or sees them as oddities. This again means that he is not yet becoming aware of the major unknown.

The reader's situation is very different. After the introduction alerted him or her to the fact that the major unknown also exists in this part of the narrative and invited him or her to investigate it, the reader approaches the minor unknowns with the basic assumption that they are somehow related to the major unknown. Since the ironic communication remains stable in this part of the text, too, the reader is able to circumvent the protagonist investigator's faulty assessment of the minor unknowns. Successfully interpreting and/or correlating them, these unknowns allow him or her to fully recognize the major unknown whose existence the narrator had indicated initially. Once this major unknown is realized, the reader is able to correlate even further minor unknowns until he or she is eventually able to form a hypothetical explanation for the major unknown.

The mid-point of the narrative is the emergence of a key witness. The protagonist investigator is by this point beginning to become aware of the existence of the major unknown introduced by the narrator, largely due to the large amount of unexplained minor

unknowns he had encountered. As a result of his failure to realize the major unknown before this point, he also fails to recognize the importance of the key witness' account, whom he dismisses as unreliable. To the reader, on the other hand, the emergence of the key witness forms the most significant kernel in the entire story. Again it is irony that allows the reader to reverse the judgment of the protagonist investigator, meaning that the reader accepts the key witness as reliable. This enables the reader to utilize his or her statement in two ways: First the key witness confirms the reader's hypothetical explanation for the original major unknown. Second, he or she introduces a new major unknown to the reader, which again achieves primary effect on the reader.

In the aftermath of the key witness account, the protagonist investigator becomes aware of the original major unknown, and begins a process of reassessing the minor unknowns encountered earlier in an effort to explain it. Inevitably, the protagonist investigator is interrupted in this process before he is able to fully comprehend the significance of the key witness account. However, he at least partially recognizes the new major unknown before the final kernel of the main narrative. This is the protagonist investigator's shocking encounter with the original major unknown.

The reader finds his position reversed at this point. Having realized the new major unknown, he or she is unable to investigate it, for two reasons. First, the protagonist investigator cannot provide any new material for such an investigation, since he is preoccupied with retracing the minor unknowns encountered earlier. And second, the reader's interest is distracted from this new major unknown by the build-up of suspense. The suspense originates once again from an irony, this time dramatic irony, for the reader recognizes the growing threat that the original major unknown poses for the protagonist investigator.

The protagonist investigator's encounter with the original major unknown then marks the end of his investigation and the ending of the narrative. The ending is represented by the re-emergence of the narrator. This ending is marked by a reiteration and/or expansion of the new major unknown by the narrator. However, at this point there is no textual agent left that is able or willing to investigate it. Unable to resolve the new major unknown, the reader therefore becomes its caretaker.

This is the basic structure of the unknown narrative that we can find in each of the three texts analyzed in this thesis. However, in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward", Lovecraft attempts to vary this setup somewhat, each time with the aim of expanding the reader's involvement by capturing his or her interest and providing him or her with more challenging unknowns that in "The Call of Cthulhu".

In “The Shadow over Innsmouth”, Lovecraft created minor unknowns that prove more difficult to realize for the reader before the emergence of Zadok Allen, the key witness. This stands in contrast to “The Call of Cthulhu”, where the reader is able to successfully interpret the minor unknowns. The introduction of more challenging minor unknowns should therefore be seen as an attempt to pace the reader’s investigation and thereby maintain his or her interest. In the same novella, Lovecraft also recognized the problem of maintaining the reader’s interest after the introduction of the new major unknown. In order to forestall frustration on the reader’s part, he attempts to fully capture the reader’s attention by introducing the suspenseful escape-narrative. This episode is designed to maintain the reader’s interest until the eventual reiteration of the new major unknown at the end of the text.

In “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”, Lovecraft attempted to modify another part of the model described above. In an attempt to maximize the reader’s involvement, Lovecraft here minimizes the narrator’s and protagonist investigator’s role to a bare minimum. Essentially, this strategy forces the reader to deal with the unknown, since only by doing so can he or she restore coherence to the narrative. As a result, this novella’s middle part eliminates the narrator’s and protagonist investigator’s involvement, also reducing the amount of irony and other guides for the reader, who consequently investigates much more freely. However, this strategy is not carried through to the end, where again a strong protagonist investigator emerges to resolve the original major unknown.

### **Critical assessment of the unknown narrative**

So far, I have limited myself purely to the identification and structural analysis of the unknown narrative model. However, I still have to answer whether or not this model is valid. In order to adequately respond to this critical challenge, I will show how other works by Lovecraft adhere to it and to what degree it reflects Lovecraft’s philosophy of writing. Following this I will contemplate whether or not this model is successful in activating the reader in the way it purports to do. And finally, I will briefly discuss problems I detect in this model.

I will first establish the validity of the model proposed here. As mentioned initially, Lovecraft achieved stylistic independence only with “The Call of Cthulhu”. This means that the unknown narrative is only truly represented by texts written *after* 1926. The “Dunwich Horror”, for example, centres on a similar exploration of the unknown contents of a mysterious house that are revealed only at the end when the invisible occupant destroys the building and ravages the countryside, only to be stopped by a group of men. Here, too, the

ending leaves the reader wondering and worrying about the cosmic unknown represented by this being (Lovecraft, *The Dunwich Horror*: 244-245). Other famous texts by Lovecraft which adhere to the model I describe include the novella “At the Mountains of Madness” and the novella “The Whisperer in Darkness”. I would also like to point out the short story “The Colour Out of Space”, which constructs a powerful cosmic unknown the scope of which only the reader recognizes. As S. T. Joshi notes, the entities around which the story revolves are “never clearly described—much to the advantage of the tale” (Joshi, *The Weird Tale*: 188). However, this model is not only valid for Lovecraft’s fiction after 1926. Elements of it can even be discerned in Lovecraft’s earlier works. Most prominently, his 1922 short story “The Lurking Fear” displays most of the features of this narrative model.

Furthermore, the model I describe reflects the core concepts of Lovecraft’s philosophy of writing, as expressed in “The Supernatural Horror in Literature”. As mentioned initially, Lovecraft recognized that the unknown he envisaged as the core of weird fiction inspires both fear and wonder (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 22). The model before us balances these interests in the reader. It allows him or her to investigate and reveal the minor unknowns and the original major unknown, thereby catering to his or her interest. On the other hand, it creates a new major unknown that remains unexplainable at the end of the narrative, which is directly linked to the uncertain threat posed by cosmic forces. The model therefore aims to “excite in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers” (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 23). The cosmic unknown realized by the reader therefore realizes the most central theme of Lovecraft’s later fiction: the cosmic.

Another question which we need to consider is whether or not this model achieves the intention of creating an unknown for the reader that horrifies him or her. Are we really horrified by Lovecraft’s fiction? No structural analysis of Lovecraft’s fiction can provide a satisfying answer to this question. However, Lovecraft himself suggested that it might fail to evoke fear: “If any unexpected advance of physics, chemistry, or biology were to indicate the possibility of any phenomena related by the weird tale, that particular set of phenomena would cease to be weird [...] because it would be surrounded by a different set of emotions” (Lovecraft, *Selected Letters III*: 434). While he speaks of scientific advances, I would suggest that advances in science fiction have the same effect. Creatures such as Cthulhu and their likes have become more common since Lovecraft’s time, and the cosmic unknown may therefore not be as horrifying as it once was. Furthermore, cosmicism is probably not a concept the modern reader is likely to be familiar with, which also may result in a failure to realize the cosmic unknown.

However, the model (particularly its refinements introduced by the two novellas) clearly shows how it is designed to captivate the reader in order to implant in him or her that ultimate cosmic major unknown which Lovecraft intended to cause fear. I conclude that this model succeeds at least in captivating the reader, mainly because it presents the reader with strong incentives to investigate the unknown. That the narrator introduces a major unknown in the introduction ensures that the unknown achieves a primary effect in the reading process. The main narrative then sustains this primary effect by introducing the minor unknowns which threaten the narrative progress towards the major unknown. This is a highly unnatural narrative. The reader, according to Culler, will automatically attempt to restore the naturalness of the narrative, and will turn to the most logical strategy in doing so (Culler: *Structuralist Poetics*: 134-160). The irony observable in Lovecraft's texts convinces the reader that the most logical strategy is to investigate the unknown. It is therefore clear that while the unknown may no longer instil horror in a modern reader, it nonetheless motivates him to read the story via the unknown.

Finally, I would like to point to possible problems and/or shortcomings of this model. In particular, I wish to discuss briefly whether or not Lovecraft's narratives are effective at creating unknowns. According to his own statement, the unknown in weird fiction should create an *atmosphere*, not entail the "dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation" (Lovecraft, *SHiL*: 23). Yet this is precisely what this narrative model achieves, if the reader fails to realize the horrifying cosmic unknown and only sates his curiosity by revealing the minor unknowns and the major unknown introduced by the narrator.

However, I wish to contend that we may also advance a universal criterion by which we can judge whether or not a text is effective at creating unknowns: economy of style. If a text purports to create an unknown, it should ideally develop that unknown *obliquely*, and with as few hints as possible. If we apply this criterion to Lovecraft's texts, we conclude that there is definitely a tendency towards economizing the creation of unknowns in his fiction. While the unknowns in "The Call of Cthulhu", especially the ones the reader is capable of investigating and revealing, are developed very directly, the unknown in "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" develops much more indirectly, and taxes the reader's cognitive abilities more. This is a remarkable change in Lovecraft's fiction, particularly given the fact that his writing was never meant for publishing in any other form than pulp magazines.

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