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**Boundaries of Reality: The Effects of Madness,
Psychological Disorders, and Dreams in the Works
of H.P. Lovecraft**

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma "Boundaries of Reality: The Effects of Madness, Psychological Disorders, and Dreams in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft" vypracoval samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedl jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Podpis

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Introduction

Howard Phillips Lovecraft is still to this day one of the most well-known authors of horror fiction. Even though he was not praised during his lifetime, he left an important legacy that influenced a countless number of authors, but also movie makers, painters, and helped with forming the genre as we know it today tremendously.

The focus of this thesis will be mostly on madness and nervous disorders presented on the characters of Lovecraft's fiction, which is a motif that is often neglected while analyzing Lovecraft's works and the thesis will hopefully show that it is an important element of his fiction. The motif of madness can be found in most of Lovecraft's fiction. In fact, it has a major importance in fiction analyzed in this thesis, but apart from that, it is also very apparent in works like "The Call of Cthulhu" and "Shadow over Innsmouth". Madness also appears briefly in works like "The Dunwich Horror", "Beyond the Wall of Sleep", and many others. It will also show how madness affects the behavior of the characters and the plot itself. The introductory part (the first chapter) will provide information on Lovecraft's life, themes and influences on his writing and a survey of criticism. The analytical part will analyze the settings of the stories and the effect they have on the characters, the action of the characters and it will also provide brief interpretations of the stories themselves with regards to the nervous disorders.

The criticism used in the thesis includes highly regarded critics, such as Sunand Tryambak Joshi, Donald Richard Burleson, and David Schultz. For the information about Lovecraft's life, I have mostly used Joshi's comprehensive work *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft*, which provided me with a better understanding of Lovecraft's background and his era of living, which was a great starting point to understand his mentality behind his fiction. For the analyses of his works, including the phenomena of insanity, mental problems and illnesses, dreams, but also various other aspects, such as the settings, characters, and themes, I mostly used collections of literary criticism. Among these books belong works, such as *Primal Sources* and *Subtler Magick* by Joshi, *An Epicure in the Terrible* by Schultz, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, and more. These works provided me with a better understanding of Lovecraft's fiction and definitely reshaped my way of thinking about his works, which eventually helped me to manage to write this thesis. Apart from that the thesis also uses precious

information from Robert Cambell's *Psychopathology: Research, Assessment, and Treatment in Clinical Psychology*, which aided my classification of the various mental problems and illnesses presented on the characters.

The works analyzed in this thesis are novels *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, as well as short stories "Dagon", "The Rats in the Walls", "The Music of Erich Zann", and "The Colour Out of Space". The selection is based on extensive reading of Lovecraft's fiction in its entirety, which led me to believe that these stories in particular are a suitable representation of this topic. I arranged these works in a thematic order and the order of certain moods and atmosphere they produce for the ease of reference and to give the thesis a certain feeling of unity even though it is composed of smaller works of fiction.

1. Mental Disorders, Other Problems, Themes, and Influences of Other Writers in the Life of H.P. Lovecraft

To better understand the matter of mental disorders and other aspects of psychology in the works of Lovecraft, I started by studying the life of the writer himself to see whether his background could have an impact on his fiction in the first place. It is really important because especially the darker aspects of their life usually have an influence on their writing. *I Am Providence* was more than suitable for those purposes, as the book uncovered many facts about Lovecraft's life and it made me to understand his work more precisely. In this part of the thesis, I will provide an overview of the facts about H.P. Lovecraft's life, which are important to themes, which I orient this work towards.

1.1. Lovecraft's Parents

The first important aspect of Lovecraft's life worth discussing is his parents. It can be possible that some of his darker influences could have roots in his childhood and his parents impacted it heavily. The first hard event of his childhood was the illness and the death of his father Winfield Scott Lovecraft. He was struck by an illness in 1893 and remained in Butler Hospital in Providence for a long time.¹ The reason, why am I mentioning his father's illness is that it was mostly of psychological character. It was noted that "For a year past he has shown obscure symptoms of mental disease—doing and saying strange things at times; has, also, grown pale and thin in flesh. He continued his business, however, until Apr. 21, when he broke down completely while stopping in Chicago."² Apparently, it also led him to be slightly violent and when Winfield died in 1898, his diagnosis in his medical record was the so-called "General Paralysis."³ Even though Lovecraft was only two years old when his father was taken to the hospital and seven years old when he died, he apparently knew about the nature of the disease.⁴ Being at that small age, one can wonder what impact could experience like this have on him. It could be considered as one of the first turning points in life and it is possible that it had an influence on his writing, especially on some of his characters indicating issues with their mental health.

¹ Sunand Joshi, *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2011), 30.

² Joshi, *I am Providence*, 30.

³ Joshi, *I am Providence*, 30.

⁴ Joshi, *I am Providence*, 35.

Before getting to Lovecraft's own mental health during his life, it is also important to inspect the mental state and relationship to his mother, Sarah Susan Lovecraft. There is a slight similarity to his father because she was hospitalized in the same hospital as Winfield.⁵ The reasons for her hospitalization was apparently her nervous temperament and she died there in 1921 after an operation of a gall bladder.⁶ Apart from this, she was also known to be over-protective towards Lovecraft and that could have an impact on his mental health too.⁷ Even details like these, which could be considered as not very important at first sight could have an effect on Lovecraft's way of thinking and therefore be projected onto his writing. Even though I have not found any direct influence on one of his character in this manner, it is definitely a part of the bigger picture, especially when his mother would view him like an ugly person and she would often say it to him directly and shame him for that.⁸ If her peculiar attachment didn't seem as a sort of an extreme influence on his own mental health, this type of shaming definitely is because it could lead him to project a lot of negative traits into his characters. Not only it could resolve in damaging his self-esteem but also to negatively influence his social life, which is also a factor that could lean him towards darker literature filled with twisted people, either mentally or in other different ways.

1.2. Lovecraft's Own Mental Health

The other part, which I would like to pay attention to is Lovecraft's own mental health. *I Am Providence* or any other secondary source on my list did not acknowledge any known diagnosis of his mental health, but there were multiple occasions, which felt quite influential on the matter of psychology in Lovecraft's fiction. The first point, which is interesting for the purposes of this thesis is the death of his grandmother. In 1896, shortly after the death, it led Lovecraft to experience "dreams of night-gaunts."⁹ From the context, it is quite clear that it was some form of nightmares and they definitely could influence his writing because if I consider how strong imagination did Lovecraft have, they must have been excruciating and could shape an important portion of Lovecraft's cosmic creatures and locations. But this is not all because, during his life, Lovecraft apparently suffered from multiple near-breakdowns, the first one

⁵ David Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2011), 70.

⁶ Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 65.

⁷ Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 81.

⁸ Joshi, *I am Providence*, 167.

⁹ Joshi, *I am Providence*, 374.

caused by the death of his father and the other one, which was more intense, was even caused by school and violin lessons.¹⁰ Tragic events were scattered all through Lovecraft's life, but the death of his grandfather Whipple Phillips and the loss of his birthplace, which he was strongly attached to even caused him to consider suicide.¹¹ The death of his grandfather was such a strong event in his life that there are occasions where the shadowy figure of Winfield Lovecraft appears in some of his works, which deal with madness and take place in mid-July, the time of his death, particularly "The Rats in the Walls."¹²

As mentioned earlier, his social life was not really that successful. There were some instances, especially in childhood, which made me realize that his life must have been very hard on his psyche. The one, which stood out to me most was presented in one of Lovecraft's childhood friend's letters, where she described how groups of children would watch him from a distance while he was observing the night sky.¹³ As it was confirmed in Joshi's *I am Providence*, "Psychologically, Lovecraft confessed to a feeling of depression and disappointment."¹⁴ It is no wonder that at some point in life it resulted in such stage and therefore it can be assumed that his sad way of life must have influenced his thinking about fiction.

1.3. Lovecraft's Themes

Even more important part for this thesis other than Lovecraft's life and connections to madness is to investigate some of his themes, which he uses in his fiction. Lovecraft was known for writing not only horror fiction, but he was also regarded as a Weird fiction writer, which is an obscure genre of fiction that emerged mainly from the *Weird Tales* magazine, which was focused on numerous elements, such as Science, tales of the bizarre and unusual, tales of monstrosities, and many more.¹⁵ As Joshi explains, "Lovecraft appears to have had a relatively small number of basic ideas, themes, and scenarios which he utilized over and over again, each time refining them and imbuing them with greater power and effectiveness."¹⁶ This is in fact important for the thesis because as it progresses, it is possible to find numerous instances of ideas

¹⁰ Joshi, *I am Providence*, 374.

¹¹ Joshi, *I am Providence*, 373.

¹² Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 78.

¹³ Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 93.

¹⁴ Joshi, *I am Providence*, 276.

¹⁵ Justin Everett and Jeffrey Shanks, *The Unique Legacy of Weird Tales: The Evolution of Modern Fantasy and Horror* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), 10.

¹⁶ Sunand Joshi, *Subtler Magick* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2016), 327.

and themes, which are similar and recurrent and it in a way connects some of Lovecraft's works together, especially when it comes to the mental problems of the characters, which are not that diverse as it would seem at the first glance. Some of the generally known themes that occur frequently in Lovecraft's fiction are dreams, the cosmos, survival, fear, but also madness, which is quite overlooked. Apart from these themes previously mentioned there are many more specific ones, which are worth pointing out, such as psychic possession, degeneration of people, alien races, and also introspection.¹⁷ Especially the last one is really important because it allows the reader to unveil what is hidden in the deepest parts of the mind, which really helps with analyzing the characters for the purposes of the thesis. As Joshi also pointed out, there is also a recurrent theme of forbidden knowledge.¹⁸ This is worth keeping in mind as it is very useful while analyzing works such as *At the Mountains of Madness*, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and "The Music of Eric Zahn" because this notion eventually deeply affects the mentality of the protagonists.

1.4. Lovecraft's Influences

The last part of this overview is Lovecraft's influences. His major literary influences are worth pointing out because some of them can clarify some of his themes, including mental disorders on his characters. "The major influences are those of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Lord Dunsany."¹⁹ The influences of Poe can be found amongst almost every work he has written, from the earliest fiction to his final works. Poe's influence can be found from the smallest details of his descriptions to structure. It is also worth pointing out that Poe influenced Lovecraft's characters heavily, including his approach to their madness. As was stated in *An Epicure in the Terrible*, "Lovecraft found that it was not necessary to present characters as totally mad to isolate them from the rest of world. Like Poe, he simply exaggerated a perverse personality trait or taste to such grotesque extremes that it is difficult to think of the character as psychologically "normal."²⁰ This is quite crucial for this thesis because it implies that many of the mad traits of the characters can be hidden behind basic personality traits and that there is a lot of space to investigate them even further. For this thesis, it is also worth pointing out that apart

¹⁷ Joshi, *Subtler Magick*, 328.

¹⁸ Joshi, *Subtler Magick*, 332.

¹⁹ Donald Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2016), 201.

²⁰ Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 146.

from the big three influences, Lord Dunsany was the main influence on Lovecraft's fiction, which was more oriented on dreams as well as on artificial mythology.²¹ Apart from these three literary figures, it is worth pointing out that Lovecraft also owned modern psychology manuals by David Van Bush.²² This confirms that Lovecraft himself was indeed interested in psychology and that some of his knowledge in that field could be projected into his fiction. In fact, works such as "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" were primarily influenced by modern psychology and it is also possible to find influences by Freud, Jung and Adler in his works.²³

²¹ Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 174.

²² Joshi, *I am Providence*, 503.

²³ Sunand Joshi, *Primal Sources: Essays on H.P. Lovecraft* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2015), 109.

2. “Dagon” and *At the Mountains of Madness*

For the second chapter of the thesis, I decided to cover Lovecraft’s short story “Dagon” and his very famous novel *At the Mountains of Madness*. The reason for bringing these two works together is the similarity of the reason behind the characters’ mental disorders, the adventurous feeling and setting of the works, and also the fact that these two stories tied together make a good basis for the rest of the works I will cover in the thesis.

2. 1. “Dagon”

In this following part, I will be discussing a short story by Lovecraft, “Dagon.” Even though it is one of the very brief works by Lovecraft, it is really interesting and important for this thesis, as it includes a big portion of phenomena, which I am focused on. It was written in 1917 and first published in 1919 and it is “only the second tale of Lovecraft’s mature fictional career.”²⁴ Apart from the plot itself and the multiple twists, which are hidden among the few pages, “Dagon” is also a great starting point for readers, who are not experienced with Lovecraft’s writing because “it scarcely shows Lovecraft even approaching the full development of his narrative powers, clearly foreshadows the later efforts and gives us an early glimpse of some of his fictional techniques and devices—the isolated character, the narrator of tantalizingly questionable trustworthiness, the careful linguistic manipulation of mood, the suggestive vagueness of description, and the impressionistic emphasis on narrator response to the horror—devices that would come to shape Lovecraft’s work increasingly in later years.”²⁵ In “Dagon,” it is also possible to find Lovecraft’s early attempts of creating his own horror fiction that “extended the tradition of the Gothic novel with an emphasis on the macabre and the supernatural.”²⁶

The story starts with opening lines, which take the reader right into the mind of the first person narrator and create certain feelings toward an apparently broken person. “I am writing this under an appreciable mental strain, since by tonight I shall be no more.”²⁷ Right the first sentence suggests that the narrator has his own mentality broken and thinks about suicide, which is clarified right in the rest of the paragraph, where he states that he is addicted to morphine and

²⁴ Joshi, *Primal Sources*, 97.

²⁵ Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 23.

²⁶ Edward Quinn, *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2006), 200.

²⁷ Howard Lovecraft, *Dagon* (Scotts Valley: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 4.

thinks about casting himself from the window.²⁸ The story then continues by describing what event has happened to him to clarify his current state. Before I get to further analysis, there is an aspect, which needs to be kept in mind. Burleson analyzed it in his essay “On Lovecraft’s Themes” and it greatly shapes the overall perception of the story. The important part goes as “by suggesting his own madness, the narrator of course creates the possibility that the entire experience is delirium.”²⁹ This makes the reader question the reliability of the narrator because his thinking can be heavily shaped by the usage of morphine or some other form of delusion. The problem with the reliability of the narrator or other secondary characters is a recurring problem of many Lovecraft’s protagonists, especially those, which are discussed in this thesis. For the purpose of the analysis, I will be analyzing the short story with the point of view that the narrator is completely reliable, even though it can be doubted.

If I look at the story with modern psychological terms in mind, there is one diagnosis that comes to mind while reading “Dagon.” It is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or in short PTSD, and it is “a set of persistent anxiety based symptoms that occur after experiencing or witnessing an extremely fear-evoking traumatic event.”³⁰ There are multiple proofs that there is a possibility that the narrator suffers from such anxiety because he goes through multiple traumatic events through only such a short story. The first one could be his escape from the military ship he was imprisoned on because one can imagine how hard can it be to leave his fellows in the hands of an enemy while being under the pressure of possibly getting killed. The other is his long sail on the sea, where he searches for some land and partly expects death from exposure and other elements.

While struggling on the sea, there is also an occurrence of dreams infesting his mind, as it is with many of Lovecraft’s protagonists. Dreams here manifest a kind of anticipation, because after the first occurrence, the narrator points out “When at last I awaked, it was to discover myself half sucked into a slimy expanse of hellish black mire which extended about me in monotonous undulations as far as I could see, and in which my boat lay grounded some distance

²⁸ Lovecraft, *Dagon*, 4.

²⁹ Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 123.

³⁰ Graham Davey, *Psychopathology: Research, Assessment, and Treatment in Clinical Psychology* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 625.

away.”³¹ The change of scenery and location is done quite abruptly, but it is also smooth at the same time, as it gives great dynamics to the setting.

The setting from this point on is also another aspect that could affect the mind of the narrator because right from the initial usage of words like “hellish black mire” one can assume that it is not a pleasant place for an already slightly broken and weak person.³² This is confirmed in a part, which follows closely after, where the narrator says “I was in reality more horrified than astonished; for there was in the air and in the rotting soil a sinister quality which chilled me to the very core. The region was putrid with the carcasses of decaying fish, and of other less describable things which I saw protruding from the nasty mud of the unending plain.”³³ The reason, why I am showcasing this part is that I think that the abrupt change of surroundings signals the turning point of the story. The narrator’s deterioration of psyche and the change to the darker and more evil setting foreshadow the coming of the climax of the story, as it frequently happens in Lovecraft’s fiction.

The second appearance of dreams occurs near the ending of the short story, right before the climax. The narrator states “I know not why my dreams were so wild that night; but ere the waning and fantastically gibbous moon had risen far above the eastern plain, I was awake in a cold perspiration, determined to sleep no more. Such visions as I had experienced were too much for me to endure again.”³⁴ Here, the reader can sense that the narrator is close to the breaking point because when one is even scared to go to sleep that is when the trauma starts to root deeply into the mind. At the same time, there is a negative visualization of the moon in this passage, which amplifies the sinister effect of this part.

Not long after, the real climax comes. It is the narrator’s encounter with Dagon itself, which is of course the main reason for his current state. To come into contact with an entity like this is crippling for the mind of the narrator and it can be seen right in his description, which goes as “Then suddenly I saw it. With only a slight churning to mark its rise to the surface, the thing slid into view above the dark waters. Vast, Polyphemus-like, and loathsome, it darted like a stupendous monster of nightmares to the monolith, about which it flung its gigantic scaly arms,

³¹ Lovecraft, *Dagon*, 5.

³² Lovecraft, *Dagon*, 5.

³³ Lovecraft, *Dagon*, 6.

³⁴ Lovecraft, *Dagon*, 6.

the while it bowed its hideous head and gave vent to certain measured sounds. I think I went mad then.”³⁵ Not only the narrator himself confirms at the end of the utterance that it was probably the point, where his healthy mind went away, but also it is possible to sense the feel of extreme fear from his description. As Burleson also stated, “Lovecraft, who has undeservedly been accused at times of having “adjectivitis,” simply shows that what is important is not any objectively detailed picture of the creature, but rather the narrator’s emotional response.”³⁶ This is indeed confirmed with the ending of the story, as the reader gets only a slight description of the entity, which appears in front of the narrator. This leaves a lot of space for the reader to paint the description in an individual way, which definitely has an effect that can empower the impact, which the apparition has on the narrator. It can also create a sort of empathy towards the character and understand his current condition.

As mentioned earlier, the narrator’s disorder can be PTSD. The events, which occurred in this short story left a deep scar on the narrator’s mental health. As if it was not enough, it seems that the character suffers from addiction too, particularly on morphine. As the definition states, addiction is “When a person’s ‘normal’ body state is the drugged state (so that the body requires the substance to feel normal).”³⁷ In the case of the protagonist of “Dagon,” the morphine addiction is formed by the need to lower the effect on the trauma that he has, which is understandable, but in this case, this combination does not work that well for him and even though it is not explicitly stated in the story, it can be assumed that the character will eventually succumb to suicide. Apart from these phenomena, the narrator also achieves a certain form of abreaction, which is “the intense re-experiencing of traumatic events.”³⁸ He reaches this state by a deep recollection, which he does for the purpose of completing the letter, with which the story is told. Abreaction, even though it must be an intense experience helps the narrator to finish a work, which functions as a way of memoir and it can also be assumed that he does this for a possible redemption of his behavior and to make people around him to understand his feelings and raise awareness of his purgatory.

³⁵ Lovecraft, *Dagon*, 8.

³⁶ Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 21.

³⁷ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 613.

³⁸ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 613.

2.2. At the Mountains of Madness

The novel was first published in 1936 and arguably remains as one of Lovecraft's most notable and popular works even to this day. The popularity of this novel comes from the fact that even though Lovecraft is considered as a master in writing shorter works, "his best tales are almost without exception his longer narratives."³⁹ There is a vast number of details, which are important for this thesis. As was the case with "Dagon," the characters go through traumatic experiences, which I will be discussing in the following paragraphs, but I will also go through the effects, which the arctic surroundings and ancient otherworldly ruins in the later parts of the book have on them. Apart from the presented insanity and stress on the characters, I will also be discussing the reactions of the characters to multiple events occurring in the story, as they are quite different from the traditional Lovecraft character because they are experienced arctic expeditioners.

To begin with the analysis, it is appropriate to start with the surroundings and the effect, which it has on characters and the plot. As mentioned previously, the story takes place in the Antarctic and the main characters are scientists who are sent here on an expedition, which is oriented on geology and geography. The main protagonist, who is also the narrator of the story is a scientist called Dyer, and he is definitely a more reliable narrator than the one in "Dagon." First of all, taking in the fact that he is a scientist helps this assumption, and also even though he eventually goes through hell too, he seems to get out of it with lesser mental strain than his colleague Danforth, but I will get to this aspect later.

First it is the constantly cold weather with extreme temperatures that has a negative impact on the characters. It is explicitly mentioned on numerous occasions, as in "The falling temperature bothered me."⁴⁰ This comes from a really early point of the book and throughout the flow of the story, the negative feelings towards the cold only intensify. The constant cold definitely impacts the thinking of the characters and it is used quite realistically to capture the atmosphere of this harsh continent. At one point of the book, the surroundings and the excitement from their discovery has the effect on the characters that they are not able to sleep. From the reading, it can be observed that Lovecraft must have been fascinated by the Antarctic.

³⁹ Sunand Joshi, *Lovecraft and a World in Transition: Collected Essays on H.P. Lovecraft* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2014), 279.

⁴⁰ Howard Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 11.

It is even confirmed by Joshi when he states that the book is “the final and triumphant product of a lifetime’s interest in the Antarctic.”⁴¹ The book is also heavily influenced by W. Clark Russell’s *The Frozen Pirate* (1887).⁴² The fact that Lovecraft was indeed deeply interested resulted in a great combination of horror intensified by a realistic fight against the elements. Throughout the book, all the characters struggle against nature, and in the later parts, it can be observed that their mind slowly deteriorates, as in “that daemon mountain wind must have been enough to drive any man mad in the midst of this centre of all earthly mystery and desolation.”⁴³ In my opinion, there probably is not any mental disease directly caused by cold and hypothermia, but it can heavily affect one’s critical thinking and it can also lead to higher emotional sensitivity, as it is occasionally clear from the book itself.

The final part of the quote also brings me to another aspect, which is connected to the surroundings and that is desolation. The fact that all the characters are in the middle of nowhere and they are isolated there for a significant amount of time can also have a direct impact on their mental state. Lovecraft repeatedly isolated his characters, but he did not do it the same way in every story.⁴⁴ The geographical isolation does not have as big impact as, for example, the isolation in “The Colour Out of Space,” but it is an aspect, which constantly came to my mind while reading the story because the feelings, which the characters had from the vast fields of ice are easily imaginable and the feelings are also constantly transmitted to the reader.

Another important aspect of the story are the multiple horrifying and stressful events, which take place in the book. As is the case with a major portion of Lovecraft’s fiction, the story itself starts slowly and innocently at first and then progresses to the typical Lovecraftian horror full of dread. Apart from the already discussed surroundings, many significant moments of the story definitely impact the main characters. Taking it from the chronological perspective, the first one that comes to mind is the plane crash of Lake and his team, which takes place in the story. The plane crash and the impact, which it has on the crew is not that expansive in the description, but it can be assumed that it must have shocked the men to the core. From the perspective of the story as a whole, it is possible to say that it is an opening event of the book, as

⁴¹ Joshi, *Primal Sources*, 156.

⁴² Joshi, *Primal Sources*, 159.

⁴³ Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, 39.

⁴⁴ Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 174.

it marks the true beginning of the horrifying chain of incidents. The other significant part of the book is the finding of the bodies of Shoggoths, also called The Elder Ones. The characters are not really that shaken or scared by this, but instead, they are fascinated and committed to continue with the exploration. At this point the protagonists do not suspect what will this finding cause and they are quite calm about it. As was stated in *Primal Sources*, “Sometimes the accidental presence of a character in a certain geographical area results in his perception of “reality,” or an embodiment of it—i.e., an entity or event not explainable by present scientific knowledge.”⁴⁵ This can be applied not only to *At the Mountains of Madness*, but also to “Dagon” and some other stories such as “The Call of Cthulhu”. The lack of understanding of certain events has direct impact on the final effect on the protagonists, which I will discuss later.

The characters slowly move on from this experience only to get a feel of something even worse. Later in the book, the second camp of expeditioners is stormed by an unknown force, killing all of their dogs and all men except one sole survivor. Some of the dogs and people in this camp are assumed to be killed in a gruesome way, either being mutilated or even dissected. This sighting of gore and the inevitable end has a really negative effect on the mind of the protagonist, as it can be seen from the opening sentence of the fourth chapter, where the culmination slowly begins. The narrative begins with “It is only with vast hesitancy and repugnance that I let my mind go back to Lake’s camp and what we really found there, and to that other thing beyond the frightful mountain wall.”⁴⁶ From the statement, it can be assumed that the events, particularly the murder scene in the camp left the narrator in fear. It was also a common practice of Lovecraft that the narrator “keeps the actual carnage from the reader and heightens suspense.”⁴⁷ This leaves space for the graphic scenes to be also freely interpreted and at the same time, if the reader wishes so and has a vivid imagination, he can imagine the scenes in more detail to get into the skin of the narrator and other protagonists.

In these parts, it is even subtly foreshadowed that one of the crew members, Danforth, is even more struck than it seems at first glance, as the reader can notice: “Even young Danforth, with his nervous breakdown, has not flinched or babbled to his doctors, indeed, as I have said, there is one thing he thinks he alone saw which he will not tell even me, though I think it would

⁴⁵ Joshi, *Primal Sources*, 48.

⁴⁶ Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, 37.

⁴⁷ Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 156.

help his psychological state if he would consent to do so.”⁴⁸ Even though the reader does not have a clue what really happened at this point, it is quite clear that it must have heavily affected his mental condition, but I will get to that later.

The last aspect, which I would like to mention in this part is the constant fear of the unknown because it can be considered as another factor causing the downfall of the characters’ minds. Even though it may seem as a cliché and not really that important, in my view I think that it has a great impact on the story and the characters themselves, including their mental health. There is an instance of dramatic irony because the characters are constantly trying to discover something, which they have simply no idea about, and from the reader’s perspective it is an obvious matter because the reader knows that there are Shoggoths and the Old Ones in the mountains.⁴⁹ Looking at it from the characters’ perspective, the level of fear and constant anxiety must be excruciating and lowering their mental stability.

Another significant part of the book that fills the characters with fear and arguably adds to their eventual mental condition is their exploration of the city ruins in the mountains, including the catacombs and the historical findings preserved in them. Here, they unveil the most horrifying secrets of the past and present some of their survival instincts in order to survive to tell the tale. One of the discoveries are sculptures, which have a big impact on the characters as they are one of the grand revelations of the book. “Sculptured images of these shoggoths filled Danforth and me with horror and loathing. They were normally shapeless entities composed of a viscous jelly which looked like an agglutination of bubbles; and each averaged about fifteen feet in diameter when a sphere.”⁵⁰ This description should represent the immense impact this revelation had on them and it also attests the Lovecraftian element of forbidden knowledge. In this connection, it is astounding how the characters are not so easily scared at first and are driven by science and curiosity, which helps to shape the story even more because their behavior in this situation seems quite natural and vital for the story.

The previously mentioned events affected the characters of this novel immensely, especially their mental health. As with “Dagon,” I will try to identify the problems, which were

⁴⁸ Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, 60.

⁴⁹ John Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 237.

⁵⁰ Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, 66.

raised after their experiences. As far as the narrator Dyer goes, he seems to not be so heavily affected. From his overall narration, it can be observed that he must have experienced a few heavy shocks as well as constant feeling of fear during the final parts of the book. His approach towards the situations seems really brave, which is a matter that is not really that common for Lovecraft's characters. Most of the time he feels more fascinated than scared or shaken to the core, but at the same time it seems that the experiences made him to change his views on the world as it is, which can be apparent from passages such as "I am not as sceptical about old tales and fears as I used to be."⁵¹ This speaks volumes of how shocking were the events because the sentence comes from a scientist's mind. The most important effect all the situations and experiences have on him is quite different from other characters of the Lovecraft canon. It seems that he is more scared for the well-being of humanity as a whole, rather than for himself. It was also noted by Burleson, "his motive for telling the tale is one of warning against extensive exploration of the Antarctic region."⁵² The reason for his decisions could be simply that he does not want other explorers to end up like the ones in this expedition, but also from the higher perspective the real reason could be "the idea that certain revelations of life, matter, and entity as they "really" are could result in disaster, either for human civilization or for the cosmos at large."⁵³ Taking this perspective, one could argue that this even makes him quite heroic, even though it is not the usual quality that the reader can find in most of Lovecraft's characters.

The other expeditioner, Danforth, even though being a secondary character, is worth analyzing as much as Dyer. He does not take all the situations as well as Dyer and this results in mental strain on his side. As was the case with the narrator of "Dagon," it seems that Danforth suffers from PTSD. His condition was a culmination of all those previously discussed events in the book and also as was the case with "Dagon," his PTSD must have escalated with the encounter with the horrendous being near the end of the book. The reader does not receive any direct commentary from Danforth's side, only the narrator's description, and it can be seen that it was probably the worst experience of their lives: "The shock of recognising that monstrous slime and headlessness had frozen us into mute, motionless statues, and it is only through later conversations that we have learned of the complete identity of our thoughts at that moment."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, 69.

⁵² Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 179.

⁵³ Joshi, *Primal Sources*, 63.

⁵⁴ Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, 91.

This description signals quite clearly that it was a horrifying event, especially when I consider how subtle the descriptions of horror from Lovecraft usually are. Another similarity to “Dagon” is that the description of the monster itself is very short and it leaves a lot of space for the reader’s interpretation. While discussing Danforth’s condition, it is worth pointing out that he has seen and experienced something, which the narrator didn’t see himself and Danforth wouldn’t tell him, but the narrator assumes that it was the final breaking point for him. The narrator then concluded that “it is very probable that the thing was a sheer delusion born of the previous stresses we had passed through, and of the actual though unrecognised mirage of the dead transmontane city experienced near Lake’s camp the day before; but it was so real to Danforth that he suffers from it still.”⁵⁵ From this part, it can be confirmed that all the previously mentioned factors were simply too much for him and the problem with his mind still continues onward. The narrator also adds that the only sound Danforth can make is the repetition of single word, which the creature they encountered produced and it confirms his madness and empowers the effect of the previously mentioned stress disorder.⁵⁶ His disorganized speech is also “a common symptom of psychosis”.⁵⁷ Overall, the PTSD does not affect the course of the novel, as it appears only near the end of the novel. The disorder rather serves as a device, which amplifies the effects that the thrilling adventure and the final horrendous encounter had on the characters as well as to emphasize these aspects to the reader.

⁵⁵ Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, 98.

⁵⁶ Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, 99.

⁵⁷ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 618.

3. The Case of Charles Dexter Ward and “The Rats in the Walls”

For the next chapter of the thesis, I decided to cover the novel *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and the short story “Rats in the Walls”. Both of these works show different kinds of qualities than the two analyzed in chapter two and they also both share different kinds of mood, characters, and settings, this time being more on the Gothic side because they lean towards the traditional gloomy and mysterious atmosphere, places that resemble medieval times, and even slightly touch topics of magic and specters.⁵⁸ These two works also include different mental disorders, such as the Antisocial Personality Disorder and Paranoid Schizophrenia.

3.1. The Case of Charles Dexter Ward

The novel *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* was written in 1927 and it is one of Lovecraft’s works, which were published posthumously in 1941. Apart from being his longest fictional work it is also his most personal one.⁵⁹ It is set in Providence, Rhode Island, to which most of Lovecraft’s life was connected. It is also one of the works, where the main character, in this case, Charles Dexter Ward, is strongly believed to be the author.⁶⁰ The first difference to the works discussed in this thesis is that there is an omniscient narrator and therefore the events of the book are more believable because there is no mental strain of the narrator in question. Even though, the narrator is omniscient, most of the book is focused on the findings of Marinus Bicknell Willet, who is Ward’s doctor and he investigates his case. This book covers various topics, including nervous disorders and other mental concerns, but it also touches on the themes of antiquarianism, black magic and occultism, but also necromancy, which deals with returning the dead from beyond. According to Joshi, this novel also deals with “the Faustian theme of questing for knowledge that will conquer death.”⁶¹ It is also important to mention that this book was written in a period, which was very difficult for Lovecraft, as he struggled with a rejection of some of his previous works, such as *At the Mountains of Madness* and also he struggled with stress.⁶² It is possible that those two aspects could influence this novel to be more

⁵⁸ Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 356.

⁵⁹ Joshi, *Lovecraft and a World in Transition*, 163.

⁶⁰ Joshi, *Primal Sources*, 65.

⁶¹ Joshi, *Primal Sources*, 67.

⁶² Joshi, *Primal Sources*, 164.

psychologically oriented and also that it is focused on very dark themes, as the previously mentioned black magic.

As the title of the book suggests, the book is mostly concerned with Charles Dexter Ward and for the purpose of this thesis, he will remain the main subject of this part. Right from the beginning of the book, it is obvious that he suffers from a kind of mental illness because the reader finds out that he escaped from a private hospital for the insane near Providence.⁶³ He was placed there by his father because he apparently suffered from a “dark mania involving both a possibility of murderous tendencies and a profound and peculiar change in the apparent contents of his mind” and that his case “presented oddities of a general physiological as well as psychological character.”⁶⁴ Right from the beginning, it is possible to observe that the description of his mental problems is executed quite professionally and it is clear that Lovecraft probably wanted to provide emphasis on the mental health of the character in the case of this book. In the other works, Lovecraft probably did not want to emphasize the diagnosis of his characters too much, so he could leave it for the readers and that he could focus on other aspects in his works. Interestingly enough, this story is also one of the few, where the characters are not really that affected by the settings and the places of the story. In the opening parts, the reader also learns that Ward’s body suffered from great physical changes, including the deterioration of his skin and the structure of his face. This phenomenon is more connected to the horror aspects of the book though as he is basically replaced by his ancestor, Joseph Curwen, whom he apparently resurrected from the dead by the use of black magic, which resulted in taking possession of Ward’s body and mind. It is almost impossible to specifically classify Ward’s disorder, as it is stated directly in the book that “This is no common case—it is a madness out of time and a horror from beyond the spheres which no police or lawyers or courts or alienists could ever fathom or grapple with.”⁶⁵ Presumably, it is a combination of multiple disorders, with which Lovecraft came into contact during his life and in his reading, but it could also be affected by the thoughts, which were spawned in his mind during this difficult period of his life.

The previously mentioned possession was caused by Ward’s general obsession with his family past, which was simply taken too far. This is quite similar to other protagonists, as in

⁶³ Howard Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (New York: Del Rey Books, 1994), 6.

⁶⁴ Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, 6.

⁶⁵ Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, 155.

“The Music of Erich Zann” and “The Rats in The Walls”. This form of obsession of various types shows a recurrent similarity between the books, as it usually marks the beginning of the mental deterioration of the characters and greatly affects the plots, as it makes them do things, which they would never do under normal circumstances. In the case of this book, the beginning of this process could be marked by Ward finding the picture of Joseph Curwen, who resembled him almost perfectly. His obsession by the resemblance goes then from innocent research to the extremes, which include digging up Curwen’s grave and taking his remains, to learning of alchemy and performing rituals. These acts could also be symptoms of Antisocial Personality Disorder, which is characterized by “impulsive behaviour and lack of remorse, and is closely linked to adult criminal behaviour.”⁶⁶ It is possible to believe that this is one part of Ward’s mental puzzle because in the book, he does not see anything wrong about his acts and progressively he also has a negative impact on people, who surround him and other residents of the town, yet he shows no remorse towards them and continues with his cause no matter the cost. All of his wrongdoings eventually lead him to an evil fate as Dr. Willet learns how to reverse the spell, which Ward used and turns him into ash. It is also important to mention that Dr. Willet is set temporarily insane by something he discovers in Ward’s laboratory and it could be something that his sensitive mind was not able to cope with.⁶⁷ It is possible to consider this as another instance of post-traumatic stress disorder in Lovecraft’s fiction, but this time it is only temporary and does not have completely devastating effects as in “Dagon” and *At the Mountains of Madness*.

The last aspect of this book, which I would like to discuss in more detail is Ward’s supposed change to Curwen. Even though this book falls into Horror fiction, and therefore matters that include spiritual possession, necromancy and black magic could be considered as normal, there is still space for interpretation that all of Ward’s doings could be a case of multiple personality disorder, also called dissociative personality disorder.⁶⁸ It can be observed that the two characters, who eventually share the same body are quite opposite to each other. The root of this thought comes once again by looking at his strong obsession with Joseph Curwen. Ward studied him quite thoroughly and sacrificed a lot of energy into his study, to that extent that he

⁶⁶ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 614.

⁶⁷ Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 190.

⁶⁸ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 618.

could become delusional and absorb Curwen's traits into his own mind, creating another alter identity, which is an "identity that develops after the onset of dissociative identity disorder", under which he would do the evil acts from the book.⁶⁹ The thought came into mind with passages such as "The final madness of Charles neither father nor doctor could attempt to explain, but they did feel sure that the mind of Joseph Curwen had come to earth again and was following its ancient morbidities."⁷⁰ Especially the final part of the quote partly implies that Curwen returned to the living realm only as a spiritual being, which would combine well with the creation of a different persona inside Ward's head. This theory is partially denied by the final use of magic by Dr. Willet though because the reversed spell wouldn't work unless the original one, which resurrected Curwen worked too, but as with other Lovecraft's works, there is also a possibility that the use of the final spell was a delusion created by partially mad Dr. Willet and supported by the omniscient narrator. This perfectly shows how Lovecraft's use of space for interpretation works and that it can allow numerous possible interpretations of his stories, even though they seem unlikely at first glance.

3.2. "The Rats in the Walls"

Another Lovecraft's work infested by madness is the 1924 short story "The Rats in the Walls." The narrator allows a restoration of The Exham Priory, which was the ancestral home of his family. The first interesting aspect of this short story is the fact that most of the people living around this place are deeply scared by it as they know about its evil past. It can be observed from statements as "They had hated it hundreds of years before, when my ancestors lived there, and they hated it now, with the moss and mould of abandonment on it."⁷¹ From the descriptions of the book, it seems that the people around the place still feel the traumatic experiences connected to it and from their perspective, the narrator can be seen as a villain for restoring the priory and also for the fact that he doesn't believe in the stories of murders, sabbaths and other evil deeds connected to The Exham Priory. As was the case with "Dagon," the narrator can be also seen as an unreliable narrator because he goes through his own delusions, which will deform his critical mind and sanity. His unhealthy relationship to the twisted past can be seen in parts as "I was much less disturbed by the vaguer tales of wails and howlings in the barren, . . .; and of the servant

⁶⁹ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 613.

⁷⁰ Lovecraft, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, 120.

⁷¹ Howard Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls* (Floyd: Positronic Publishing, 2014), 6.

who had gone mad at what he saw in the priory in the full light of day. These things were hackneyed spectral lore, and I was at that time a pronounced sceptic.”⁷² This lack of respect and the over-attachment to his own needs and goals will eventually result in his own madness and an evil fate, which I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

The first really interesting motif of this story is the one, which the short-story bears its name after, rats in the walls. It bears a major significance to the story as it marks the slow deterioration of the narrator’s mind. It starts quite innocent, as it mostly affects only the cats, which are “restless, creeping and scratching.”⁷³ This presents that the phenomenon could be indeed true and not only a delusion of the narrator himself, but there is still a possibility that it could only be a part of his delusional excuse from what he does at the end of the story. Before the matter of rats dawns on the narrator himself, the reader can observe a foreshadowing, which feels quite inspired by Poe as there was “a suspicion of aurora in the sky,” which would paint the atmosphere for the upcoming events.⁷⁴ Shortly after that the narrator experiences bad dreams and as was the case in “Dagon,” it can be assumed that it marks the turning point of the story, once again for worse. Then the phenomenon begins for the narrator as well, “Whether the arras actually moved I cannot say. I think it did, very slightly. But what I can swear to is that behind it I heard a low, distinct scurrying as of rats or mice.”⁷⁵

This annoyance will continue for almost the entirety of the book and it will slowly result in quite a few negative effects on the character. He cannot sleep, he constantly feels stressed and is heavily annoyed by the constant sound. And when he eventually falls asleep from his tiredness, he is always disturbed by more nightmares, which are vividly described, such as “I seemed to be looking down from an immense height upon a twilit grotto, knee-deep with filth, where a white-bearded daemon swineherd drove about with his staff a flock of fungous, flabby beasts whose appearance filled me with unutterable loathing.”⁷⁶ Overall, the rats in the walls combined with the horrifying dreams have an effect on him, which has the result of a slow progressive loss of his healthy senses and his sleep deprivation even shadows his judgement of reality, which also causes nervousness. His decaying mentality has another effect on the events

⁷² Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*, 9.

⁷³ Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*, 11.

⁷⁴ Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*, 12.

⁷⁵ Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*, 13.

⁷⁶ Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*, 13.

in the story and that is that he spreads this panic among his servants in the house, who will help him to seek the source of those sounds, even though only he and the cats can apparently hear the sounds.

At the later parts of the book, it can be observed that the narrator started to be even more paranoid, even to the extent that it resembles Paranoid Schizophrenia, which is “A sub-type of schizophrenia characterized by the presence of delusions of persecution.”⁷⁷ This could clarify his constant need of uncovering the source of the sounds no matter the cost, even though he boldly considered himself a skeptic at the start of the book. Due to this possible condition, it is possible that he connected the weird behavior of his cats and the sounds to a single unit, even though both of the phenomena can be completely independent on each other and thus making his condition even worse. His obsession escalates even more after he and a secondary character, Captain Norrys, uncover remnants of ancient Roman architecture in the cellar. From this point on the previously mentioned theme of forbidden knowledge takes more important role and it is even empowered by his schizophrenic urges. This longing for omniscience motivates him to form a group with other six men to explore the ancient cellar. Once again, there is a slight similarity to another work mentioned in this thesis, *At the Mountains of Madness*, but this time the exploration is not driven by science, but more by an obsessive individual goal to uncover the truth behind something, which is probably only in the narrator’s mind.

The final parts of the book start with a discovery, which shakes all of the men to the core. They find “a ghastly array of human or semi-human bones. Those which retained their collocation as skeletons shewed attitudes of panic fear, and over all were the marks of rodent gnawing” and it has a great empowering effect on the horror atmosphere of this short-story.⁷⁸ Another aspect, which has a similar effect is the discovery of “the twilight grotto,” which would take appearance in the narrator’s nightmares and it gives the story a slight feel of a cycle because the events of the book start with it and now when it is close to the climax, the cave reappears in a physical form.⁷⁹ Further discovery unveils that the remains are possibly after some cannibalistic rites of the ancestors. After a short while, the narrator gets divided from the group along with Captain Norrys and at one moment their electric torch stops working, leaving them in complete

⁷⁷ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 624.

⁷⁸ Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*, 19.

⁷⁹ Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*, 16.

darkness. Then, from the greater depths, the narrator hears “voices, and howls, and echoes” and tries to escape from here.⁸⁰ At this point, it can be assumed that he went completely mad and that the last discovery was the final piece of the puzzle for it, as the reader also gets a mention of Nyarlathotep, who is told to be “a messenger or harbinger of Azathoth, almost an Antichrist who brings fatal knowledge of the end of all things to those unwise enough to summon him or seek him out.”⁸¹ As is the common case with these encounters in Lovecraft’s works, the reader does not get much from the description, except that it is “the mad faceless god.”⁸² After the encounter the narrator is found in complete blackness with the body of Captain Norrys and apparently, some parts of the body were eaten. The narrator only mutters about rats and that it is their fault and it leaves two possible interpretations. One is that the narrator got so consumed by his fears and paranoia, that the darkness empowered the effects, which they all had on him, resulting in the killing of Norrys, or it was the act of the powerful entity. Whether the eaten body is the work of the protagonist is not known, as it wasn’t explicitly stated. If the parts of the body were indeed eaten by him, it would be a rare instance of cannibalism represented in Lovecraft’s work. The narrator and one of the other characters from the group were placed in a mental institution and there the story ends, leaving for many possible further interpretations and one of them of course being that this is yet another work of Lovecraft’s fiction, which is heavily infested by madness and that it illustrates the darkest parts of the human mind.

⁸⁰ Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*, 22.

⁸¹ Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 272.

⁸² Lovecraft, *The Rats in the Walls*, 23.

4. “The Music of Erich Zann” (1922)

For the fourth chapter of the thesis, I decided to cover “The Music of Erich Zann.” It is “the only Lovecraft story to use music as a major motif, and the only one set in France.”⁸³ The motif of music carries throughout most of the story and it creates a perfect setting for the various events occurring in the short story. The main protagonist, who is once again the main narrator is another educated character among Lovecraft’s work as he studies metaphysics. In this short story, obsession connected to the Obsessive-compulsive Disorder takes a major role once again, as the narrator searches for the street of Rue d’Auseil, where he was living during his university years and where the important events of the work took place. The matter of OCD is also deeply connected to the character of Erich Zann. His search for this street is connected to another fascination and that is the music of Erich Zann, which caused most of the disturbance in the story and it also left a mark on the narrator’s mental health in a form of his own case of OCD and presumably an instance of a slight trauma.

Right from the beginning, the reader learns that the narrator’s memory is “broken,” his physical and mental health was “gravely disturbed” during his time around Rue d’Auseil.⁸⁴ Once again, this confession about mental health makes space for taking the narrator as unreliable, but in this story Lovecraft slightly balanced it by making the character educated, thus making him a bit more believable than the narrators in stories such as “The Rats in the Walls” and “Dagon.” The street is apparently shrouded in mystery, as no one can usually find it and nobody speaks about and this kind of setting accompanies the story really well, as it adds a more mystical atmosphere to the situations. Keeping this setting in mind, the narrator apparently lived in a very old apartment building and most of the building was inhabited by old people and the overall place had a big impact on the narrator himself, as it made him even more curious and fascinated. His curiosity heightened up when he discovered that an old mute German violinist lives in the same building. This character, Erich Zann, has the biggest impact on the actions in the story, and he also heavily influences the narrator, who describes him as “a small, lean, bent person, with shabby clothes, blue eyes, grotesque, satyr-like face, and nearly bald head.”⁸⁵ Apart from that,

⁸³ Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 91.

⁸⁴ Howard Lovecraft, *The Music of Eric Zann* (Scotts Valley: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 6.

⁸⁵ Lovecraft, *The Music of Erich Zann*, 7.

the character also seems not friendly at all. Even an ordinary description of this character makes the reader feel something odd about him and it adds to the atmosphere of the story as well. The narrator really wants to hear him play the violin and Erich Zann eventually agrees to it, so he invites him to his apartment. The setting of his apartment also adds to the strange feeling of the story, as it is bare and neglected, only with old furniture and with “sheets of music were piled in disorder about the floor.”⁸⁶

When Erich Zann plays for the first time, the narrator immediately feels captivated by the music he is producing, which is also described as “haunting” and not only it has an apparent effect on his mentality from the first listen, it also seems like the Eric’s manner shifts with the music as well because he loses his angry temperament and turns into a calmer person.⁸⁷ From these parts of the story it seems that Zann has also some kind of paranoia connected the window in his room, as he constantly watches it, as if he would expect some kind of invader. This paranoia is also connected with his odd behavior because when the narrator wants to take a look from the window, in the moment, in which he would draw the curtain, Zann would violently drag him from the apartment. Eric Zann’s behavior seems as an instance of Paranoid personality disorder, which is characterized by an enduring pattern of distrust and suspiciousness of others.⁸⁸ This also escalates into wanting the narrator to move to lower floors so he can’t hear him play. This would also clarify his change of moods, when he plays his music, as it could relieve the symptoms of the disease because his brain would have enough stimuli to block out the effects of the constant distrust and suspiciousness and to lower his nervousity.

Erich Zann’s mentality is also heavily affected by the previously mentioned Obsessive-compulsive Disorder, or also OCD, which is “a disorder characterized either by obsessions or by ritualized behaviour patterns that the individual feels driven to perform in order to prevent some negative outcome happening.”⁸⁹ This would clarify the strange patterns connected to the music that Zann does and it is safe to assume that his ritualized behavior is connected to the phenomenon hidden behind the window, which apparently fills Zann with fear and need to behave in such way.

⁸⁶ Lovecraft, *The Music of Erich Zann*, 8.

⁸⁷ Lovecraft, *The Music of Erich Zann*, 8.

⁸⁸ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 624.

⁸⁹ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 624.

Throughout the story, both of them eventually grow more fond of each other and they both confess that they suffer from nervous disorders.⁹⁰ Sadly enough, there is no further explanation from both of them, only that Eric Zann is “lonely” and “affected with strange fears,” which perfectly fits the characteristic of the previously mentioned Paranoid personality disorder.⁹¹ Connected to these traits, there is also more that is worth mentioning and that is his evasive nature and the fact that he was mostly awake through the night and sleeping throughout the day, which could also be a small autobiographical element.

As the story progresses, the narrator secretly listens to Zann’s playing and it fills him with “an indefinable dread—the dread of vague wonder and brooding mystery” and describes the sound as otherworldly, or even cosmic.⁹² The narrator’s curiosity progressively rises and it could be really considered as an obsession because he cannot stop, even though it mostly fills him with negative emotions, including fear and this could also progressively and negatively affect his ongoing mental condition. It is possible to assume that the narrator forms his own case of OCD, which eventually affects his behavior in a similar way as in the case of Erich Zann. Everything turns to worse for both of them when they hear a low musical note from somewhere else, presumably another neighboring house or from the window, into which the narrator is not able to look. Zann’s playing then turns to an even more horrifying nature and the playing at this point is even considered as “mad” by the narrator.⁹³ In these parts, Erich Zann collapses and the narrator takes a look from the window, only to see “the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance to anything on earth.”⁹⁴ This could be caused by two possible things, first of them being the fact that the narrator confessed that he lost his memory and thus does not remember what he actually saw, or the second one, that this could be a result of a possible trauma because it is possible that he has seen something terrible in the window, which wouldn’t be really surprising in a Lovecraft’s story. Also, this short story is yet another one, where “Lovecraft experiments with the themes of forbidden knowledge” and it would be possible that the narrator wasn’t able to cope with the knowledge, which he had seen in

⁹⁰ Lovecraft, *The Music of Erich Zann*, 9.

⁹¹ Lovecraft, *The Music of Erich Zann*, 9.

⁹² Lovecraft, *The Music of Erich Zann*, 10.

⁹³ Lovecraft, *The Music of Erich Zann*, 10.

⁹⁴ Lovecraft, *The Music of Erich Zann*, 11.

the window.⁹⁵ The story is then closed in cyclical way and that is the narrator is still searching for the Rue d'Auseil, meaning that he is still captured in the cycle of his obsession with Erich Zann's music and his own nervous disorder. The closure of this story also confirms Donald Tyson's point that in Lovecraft's view, sanity and the stability of mind is secured only through ignorance and knowledge leads to chaos.⁹⁶ This can be applied to a vast number of other Lovecraft's stories, including "Dagon," *At the Mountains of Madness* and "The Colour Out of Space."

⁹⁵ Schultz, *An Epicure in the Terrible*, 136.

⁹⁶ Donald Tyson, *The Dream World of H.P. Lovecraft: His Life, His Demons, His Universe* (Portland: Llewellyn Publications, 2010), 96.

5. “The Colour Out of Space” (1927)

“The Colour Out of Space” was written in the same year closely after *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and it is considered as “one of his stylistically and conceptually finest short stories.”⁹⁷ For the purposes of this thesis, it is really important as well, as it carries many motifs of insanity.

The first interesting aspect is how the story is told. Once again, it is told from the first-person perspective by a nameless narrator, which is quite a usual phenomenon in Lovecraft’s fiction. “The first-person narrator is a surveyor—Lovecraft in his mature works often gives his narrators fairly prosaic and level-headed occupations, with the effect that they have enhanced credibility and an aura of realism.”⁹⁸ This would not be anything special, but the narration is quickly shifted towards the character Ammi Pierce and abruptly changes the style of the book into a narration within narration, which is quite an unusual form of story-telling for Lovecraft. Ammi then becomes the secondary (embedded) narrator of the book and tells the story about the Gardner family affair, but it immediately creates tension because the credibility of the narrator is now gone, as Ammi is considered as mad by the townspeople.⁹⁹ It can be found right in the first parts of the book, where the original narrator states “Often I had to recall the speaker from ramblings, piece out scientific points which he knew only by a fading parrot memory of professors’ talk, or bridge over gaps where his sense of logic and continuity broke down. When he was done I did not wonder that his mind had snapped a trifle, or that the folk of Arkham would not speak much of the blasted heath.”¹⁰⁰ From this part, it can also be observed that the narration of this book is a combination of these two narrators combined together and it also presents a clash of credibility and non-credibility, as the narrator tries to clear up Ammi’s utterance from the effects of his mental strain throughout the entirety of the book.

Before analyzing the madness of the characters in the book, it is worth starting with the probable cause of it. In short, a meteorite falls onto the property of the Gardner family and creates a big fuss around the townsfolk. Scientists come to inspect it from around the state to find

⁹⁷ Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 114.

⁹⁸ Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 115.

⁹⁹ Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Howard Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space* (Scotts Valley: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 8.

out that the meteorite is “soft” and that it produces color “unlike any known colours of the normal spectrum.”¹⁰¹ The effect the color creates is very unique to Lovecraft, as it changes the colours of the surrounding landscape to grey, makes the fruits tasteless and in later parts it also apparently poisons the underground water. This would not be really important to the thesis, but it also creates a kind of collective madness because most of the people in the surrounding places experience psychological changes, including animals. It seems that the mental state of the people is connected to the landscape in this story because it seems the deterioration of the minds progresses with the changes in the surroundings, which is also quite unique phenomenon in Lovecraft’s works. This view is supported by Burleson, who states that “Lovecraft exquisitely pursues the imagery of progressive decay; the vegetation, which successively has displayed strange colours and has turned grey and brittle, crumbles to a “greyish powder” by autumn.”¹⁰² To this it is worth noting that most of the mental strain of the characters escalates right in the mentioned autumn. As it could be expected, the most affected are of course the Gardners as they live closest to the source of the strange color.

The fate of the Gardner family is indeed horrendous, in fact it is one of the worst fates of characters that I came across during the reading of Lovecraft’s fiction. The downfall of the family begins when the school closes for the summer holidays and Nahum, the father, slowly isolates his family from the rest of the world. The only person who maintains contact with the family is in fact the subnarrator Ammi. To this point, the family seemed to have a good spirit and the affection by the color started slowly. After a while in the isolation, the reader finds out that “They were failing curiously both physically and mentally, and no one was surprised when the news of Mrs. Gardner’s madness stole around.”¹⁰³ Her mental state suffers greatly as “the poor woman screamed about things in the air which she could not describe” and “things moved and changed and fluttered, and ears tingled to impulses which were not wholly sounds.”¹⁰⁴ From this, it seems that she started to suffer from auditory and visual hallucinations, which is “a sensory experience in which a person can see, hear, smell, taste or feel something that isn’t there” and her state gets progressively worse.¹⁰⁵ Instead of seeking help, Nahum lets her to wander around the

¹⁰¹ Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*, 9.

¹⁰² Burleson, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study*, 119.

¹⁰³ Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*, 16.

¹⁰⁵ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 621.

house, but he eventually locks her up in the attic, when she starts to make faces and scares one of the three sons, Thaddeus, who even almost faints from the horror. The fact that he isolates her even more by locking her up results in the further deterioration of her mental health to that point she even crawls on all four limbs. It is worth noting that her own disorder results in the whole family being in “a constant state of nervous tension.”¹⁰⁶ It is hard to classify this as a real disease because it seems that it is a combination of multiple various symptoms, which do not feel really connected. It can be some form of a hybrid disorder, which is “a disorder that contains elements of a number of different disorders.”¹⁰⁷ It can be a form of psychosis, but it is more probable, that it is an unrealistic disorder crafted by the author from multiple pieces to intensify the effect of the short story.

A similar fate happens to one of the three sons, Thaddeus, who was affected by the state of his mother. In the book, it is stated that “Thaddeus went mad in September after a visit to the well. He had gone with a pail and had come back empty-handed, shrieking and waving his arms, and sometimes lapsing into an inane titter or a whisper about the moving colours down there” and right from the initial description, it is obvious that he shows the initial symptom of the same disease as his mother.¹⁰⁸ Even the approach of Nahum is quite similar to the first case, as he lets him run around the house until he injures himself and eventually locks him up in the attic in a room across from her mother’s. This results in one of the most terrifying scenes from Lovecraft’s fiction, which is surprisingly explicitly specified considering the author’s standards. The two scream at each other through the closed doors in terrible way that it even resembles “some terrible language that was not of earth.”¹⁰⁹ The two remaining sons disappear for the rest of the story, only to be found by Ammi dead in the previously mentioned well. Thaddeus eventually dies as well and the mother is killed by Ammi. Nahum is then left alone and then dies in the collapsing house, which slightly resembles the ending of “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe.

As to the state of the subnarrator Ammi, it can be assumed that he suffers from a similar form of a disease as was the narrator in “Dagon” or Danforth in *At the Mountains of Madness*.

¹⁰⁶ Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Davey, *Psychopathology*, 621.

¹⁰⁸ Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*, 18.

¹⁰⁹ Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*, 18.

He simply experienced too much to be able to cope with it, which resulted in a trauma, which slowly worsened throughout the long years since the incidents. Not only that he had to kill Mrs. Gardner, which must have been a gruesome experience, though not stated by the author, he also found the bodies of the two sons in the well in combination with dead animals, but he also saw something, which no other person in the book saw, the color shooting from the well towards the sky with something so shocking that he did not wish to specify it. The experience also affected him with bad dreams to this day and he still fears to enter the surroundings to this day. This short story is heavily affected by insanity and even though it may not seem so at first, it could be considered as a basic building block of “The Colour Out of Space.”

Conclusion

The study of biographical material reveals that Lovecraft lived a unique way of life, which was also at the same time a difficult one. He suffered a great loss on multiple occasions, he was vulnerable and prone to depression and mental breakdowns and he also did not live a very social life. He projected this misery into his characters and works in general, which eventually shaped his whole literary legacy.

The analyses of Lovecraft's works "Dagon," *At the Mountains of Madness*, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, "The Rats in the Walls," "The Music of Erich Zann," and "The Colour Out of Space" have proved that mental disorders and insanity are actually common elements that affect the characters through Lovecraft's whole canon. These mental problems influence greatly the decision-making of the characters as well as their perception of situations, in which they all appear. The various disorders presented in the thesis also have an impact on the characters' behavior towards other people, namely it makes them odd as well as being unable to communicate effectively, like was the case in "The Music of Erich Zann" and "The Colour Out of Space" and the disorders combined with traumas often make them incapable to return to normal society, as was the case with Danforth from *At the Mountains of Madness*. In some cases, the mental problems make them to end up in mental asylums, like was the case in "The Rats in the Walls", and sometimes, it even leads them to their death, as in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, and presumably "Dagon". I have classified some of the possible disorders presented on the characters, such as PTSD, Psychosis, Paranoid Personality Disorder, and Antisocial Personality Disorder.

Another aspect that this thesis examined in a greater detail was the reliability of the individual narrators. The findings have shown that a vast portion of Lovecraft's narrators is indeed unreliable mainly due to their deteriorated mental condition. This fact opens many new possibilities of perception and interpretation of Lovecraft's fiction.

The thesis also analyzed various kinds of settings presented in the works and also the various situations the protagonists were put into. Most of Lovecraft's characters are placed into very stressful environments, which also eventually affect their mental conditions and shape the stories in a unique way.

Resumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce je zkoumat prvky šílenství, mentálních poruch a snů v dílech Howarda Phillipse Lovecrafta. Pomocí analýzy jednotlivých děl práce zjišťuje, jak tyto prvky ovlivňují dotčené postavy a samotný děj. Odhaluje také způsob, jakým se jednotlivé poruchy, či šílenství u daných postav rozvíjely.

První kapitola za pomoci sekundární literatury stručně analyzuje Lovecraftův život, zejména různé traumatické události a jeho vlastní duševní problémy. Mimo jiné se tato kapitola také zabývá oblíbenými tématy autora a také stručně zmiňuje jeho literární vlivy.

Vlastní analýza se ve druhé kapitole věnuje povídce “Dagon” a románu *V horách šílenství*. Kapitola se zabývá jednotlivými traumatizujícími událostmi a nevysvětlitelnými jevy, které negativně působí na protagonisty těchto děl. Zahrnuje i rozbor jednotlivých prostředí, která postavy psychicky ovlivňuje, zejména tedy polární končiny ztvárněny v románu *V horách šílenství*. Tato kapitola odhaluje konkrétní výskyty posttraumatické stresové poruchy a také závislosti na opiátech.

Třetí kapitola se zabývá románem *Případ Charlese Dextera Warda* a povídkou “Krysy ve zdech.” Kapitola poukazuje na podobné jevy jako u předešlých děl a analyzuje rozličné paranormální prvky, okultismus a magii. Dále se zabývá také postupným rozkladem osobností hlavních protagonistů a poukazuje na výskyt dalších mentálních poruch, jako je paranoia a disociální porucha osobnosti.

Závěrečné dvě kapitoly zkoumají povídky “Hudba Ericha Zanna” a “Barva z kosmu.” Kapitoly opět sledují jednotlivá prostředí, ale také znázornění hudby v první jmenované povídce a prvky science fiction v “Barva z kosmu.” Jsou odhaleny další výskyty posttraumatické stresové poruchy, ale i přítomnost audiovizuálních halucinací a paranoidní poruchy osobnosti. V případě povídky “Barva z kosmu” je odhalena nespecifikovatelná porucha osobnosti způsobená jevem barvy z kosmu.

Závěrem práce je, že mentální poruchy, šílenství a sny jsou častým jevem Lovecraftovy tvorby. Tyto jevy se projevují v jednotlivých zápletkách a rovněž značně zkreslují důvěryhodnost jednotlivých vypravěčů. Poruchy zmíněné v této práci také znázorňují důsledky, které byly způsobeny různými situacemi, jimiž si jednotlivé postavy či vypravěči prošli. Jsou to

například fenomény, které pro obvyčejného člověka představují těžce pochopitelné situace, či také setkání s nadpřirozenými bytostmi. Práce poukazuje také na fakt, že Lovecraft často využíval šílenství k vytváření vlastního pojetí hororu a science fiction a mohl touto formou zesilovat účinek strachu a tísně na čtenáře.

Abstract

Name: Karel Zeiner

Faculty and Department: Faculty of Arts, Department of English and American Studies

Title: Boundaries of Reality: The Effects of Madness, Psychological Disorders, and Dreams in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft

Thesis Supervisor: prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr.

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Keywords: Lovecraft, Horror, Madness, Dreams, Psychological Disorders, Gothic, Fiction, Weird fiction, American literature.

The thesis focuses on madness, dreams and various psychological disorders presented in the works of H.P. Lovecraft. It analyses Lovecraft's fiction, such as "Dagon", *At the Mountains of Madness*, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, "The Rats in the Walls," and others in order to see how such motifs affect the plot and characters. The thesis also analyzes other aspects such as the reliability of the narrators, settings, and other themes, but it also provides a relevant information about the author's life.

Anotace

Jméno a příjmení: Karel Zeiner

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Klíčová slova: Lovecraft, Horor, šílenství, sny, mentální poruchy, Gotika, fikce, americká literatura.

Tato práce je zaměřená na motivy šílenství, mentálních poruch a snů v dílech H.P. Lovecrafta. Prostřednictvím analýzy románů *V horách šílenství*, *Případ Charlese Dextera Warda* a povídek “Dagon”, “Barva z kosmu”, “Krysy ve zdech” a dalších se práce snaží najít tyto motivy, zjistit jak ovlivňují postavy těchto děl a poukázat na to, že jsou tyto prvky nedílnou součástí Lovecraftovy tvorby. Mimo již zmíněné prvky tato práce také zkoumá věrohodnost jednotlivých vypravěčů, analyzuje jednotlivá témata těchto děl a také se stručně zabývá životem autora samotného.

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