Between the Eldritch and the Deep Blue Sea

A Study of Ecosystemic Configurations and the Ocean in Stories by H. P. Lovecraft

Mellan det besynnerliga och det djupa blå havet:

En studie av ekosystematiska konfigurationer och havet i noveller av H.P. Lovecraft

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Abstract

This essay aims to study how two opposing perspectives on ecosystemic configurations both exist in H. P. Lovecraft's short stories. The first of these is vertical, with its roots in anthropocentrism and the theology behind the Great Chain of Being, and the other is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a multiplicitous, horizontal, and ecocentric rhizome. Then I apply these perspectives to the ocean, one of Lovecraft's most used environments. What this paper demonstrates is that whilst Lovecraft's hierarchically categorising mindset is the basis for both of the perspectives, the two still feature prominently as themes in his writing, as he derives fear from the thought of beings more supreme than humans just as much as the thought of there not being a hierarchy at all.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, Beach, Cthulhu, Ecocentrism, Ecosystem, Felix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, Great Chain of Being, Hierarchy, Horror, Howard Philips Lovecraft, Ocean, Rhizome, Science Fiction, Sea.

Sammanfattning

Denna uppsats syftar till att studera två motsatta perspektiv på ekosystematiska konfigurationer som båda finns i H.P. Lovecrafts noveller. Den första av dessa är vertikal och har sina rötter i antropocentrism och teologin bakom varandets kedja, och den andra påminner om Deleuze och Guattaris koncept om en mångfaldig, horisontell och ekocentrisk rhizom. Sedan tillämpar jag dessa perspektiv på havet, en av Lovecrafts mest använda miljöer. Vad denna uppsats visar är att även om Lovecrafts hierarkiskt kategoriserande tänkesätt är grunden för båda perspektiven, så är de båda framträdande som teman i hans författarskap, eftersom han hämtar rädsla från tanken på att varelser som är mer suveräna än människor lika mycket som från tanken att det inte finns någon hierarki alls.

Nyckelord: Antropocentrism, Cthulhu, Ekocentrism, Ekosystem, Felix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, Hav, Hierarki, Howard Philips Lovecraft, Ocean, Rhizom, Science Fiction, Skräck, Strand, Varandets kedja.

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Contents

Introduction

20th century pulp fiction writer Howard Philips Lovecraft (1890-1937) is today a distinguished, but also somewhat notorious, figure within the horror and science fiction canon. Since his premature death, he has gained ill repute for his reactionary opinions and racist language, but also praise for his imaginative monsters, which he called eldritch abominations (Harrington 33), fascinating depictions of the human psyche, as well as being ahead of his time when it comes to his existentialist and ecosystemic world-building. Lovecraft's multifaceted character is something that many critics, scholars, writers, and readers find polarising to this day. When Lovecraft sat down to write 'At The Mountains of Madness' (1936), a short story about extraterrestrials waking up from their slumber in Antarctica's ice, he probably did not envision how 50 years later his readers would fear that the same glaciers would melt. This is a similar kind of fear of nature, but one that has come to be recontextualised. The readings and the intention match up however, and the Cthulhu mythos, as Lovecraft's gathered fictional universe and cosmology is called, could be said to be a source of ecological horror. At the same time, Lovecraft is known to have had political opinions that have not aged as well as some of his core ideas. A major hurdle for many readers is the author's classism, sexism, and, perhaps most prominently, his racism, which permeates a lot of his writing. This oppressive belief in biological essentialism also includes, as Caitlin Duffy states in her article 'Lovecraftian Ecophobia', an often groundless dislike aimed at the natural world – something that of course affects Lovecraft's depiction of the environment.

Lovecraft's obsession with oceans is one thing that is rarely lost on scholars and writers. In the essay 'The Depths of our Experience: Thalassophobia and the Oceanic Horror', Seán Harrington explores the depictions of the ocean in five mythos stories and their adaptions, proposing that they aim to represent the fear of deep waters (27-41). Antonio

Alcalá González elaborates on this by examining three of Lovecraft's sea monsters and how they work to erode the idea of human supremacy (Alcalá González 85-97). Further, both Patricia MacCormack and Brian Johnson analyse Lovecraft's cosmology from a posthumanist and ecocritical perspective (Johnson 97-116 and MacCormack 199-214). Moreover, movies, video games, and pop songs that incorporate Lovecraftian themes or adapt the source material, such as *Sunless Sea*, *The Lighthouse*, *The Sinking City*, and *Underwater*, commonly include seaside settings, octopod imagery, and the fear of oceanic creatures coming to kill humans. Very specific depictions of the sea have become a prominent part of the author's legacy. Lovecraft self-diagnosed himself with a plenitude of phobias, one being the fear of the ocean (Harrington 27). As a horror writer, it would not be surprising if he directly took inspiration from what scared him about the sea and applied it to his works. The ocean is one of H. P. Lovecraft's most prolifically used settings. Excluding 'The Mysterious Ship' (1902), a pirate story he wrote as a twelve-year-old, there are eight stories written or co-written by Lovecraft that centre around the sea. Those ocean stories are, in order of publication, 'The White Ship' (1919), 'Dagon' (1919), 'The Horror at Martin's Beach' (1923), 'The Temple' (1925), 'The Call of Cthulhu', 'Till A' the Seas' (1935), 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth' (1936), and 'The Night Ocean' (1936).

This essay strives to examine two ecosystemic perspectives prevalent in Lovecraft's corpus – one vertically hierarchical and anthropocentric, and one ecocentric, horizontal, and rhizomatic. Additionally, these two perspectives will then be applied to how the author depicts oceans and oceanic life in the above-mentioned short stories. This thesis, although inspired by the works of Alcalá González, Harrington, Johnson, and MacCormack, argues that their analytical frameworks, Lovecraftian literature's depictions to the ocean and to humanity's role in the ecosystem respectively, works best when combined. I posit that it is through applying the two different ecosystemic perspectives on the ocean that we can

realistically problematise H. P. Lovecraft literary works. I will assert that Lovecraft's corpus, and these eight stories in particular, include both biologically essentialist postulates and examples of eco-fiction and that he blends these two ideas to create horror. He allows a central opposition between two perspectives and he does so because both are born out of phobic thinking. For him, it is not a philosophical current of thought that justifies this, but the search for fear. The reason why exactly the ocean is the environment I have elected to use as a case study is because of the unique position it holds within Lovecraftian fiction, but also because I hypothesise that the sea encapsulates the duality of these two perspectives. The sea, in all its vastness, can act as a reminder to humankind that we are part of something bigger, an entire biosphere, but also create an admiration easily turned into horror as it prompts one to think of how small and insignificant we are in comparison to the world around us.

The body of the essay will be divided into three analytical chapters. First, I will outline the history of the hierarchical perspective of ecosystems, which I link to Lovecraft and his work through the Great Chain of Being. In the second chapter, a similar, but this time non-hierarchical, connection will be made between the author's bibliography and the philophical concept of the rhizome. Lastly, I will apply the two theories as a lens through which to analyse Lovecraft's eight stories about the ocean and their connections to both the ecosystemic configuration.

The Horrifying Chain of Being

Before I go on analysing how Lovecraft portrays oceans and their ecosystems, it is important to clarify the author's split views on hierarchies. The one discussed in this chapter, which has been called arborescent by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari (370), ranks organisms, minerals, and even divine beings into categories and subcategories according to a determined value. Being a man of the 20th century, Lovecraft lived through and was part of

the intellectual developments of the early modernist era (Childs 1-2). This was an era where currents of philosophical thought started to gain ground and question the structures that made up nature and culture, as well as understand them, apply them, and label them (20-22); Atheism and existentialism were theorising about how one should live without the existence of a god, or with the existence of an uncaring one; and growing ideologies like socialism and fascism came packaged with their hierarchical, or non-hierarchical, ways to structure society. All these three movements can be seen entwined when in Lovecraft's cosmology and world-building. However, to recognise exactly how contemporary currents of Lovecraft's time interact with his writings, one has to first recognise the theory on hierarchies that Lovecraft adapts, parodies, and in many ways is a product of, too, the Great Chain of Being.

The Great Chain of Being was a theological idea from medieval Europe attempting to systematise all entities, both divine and earthly, into the neat organisational structure of a top-down hierarchy (Lovejoy 59). In this structure, God is predictably at its top, followed by a multitude of different categories of angels. The earthly creatures, which are ranked below the angels, have humans first, then animals, plants, and lastly rocks. Whilst for theologians the concept of a great chain created opportunities for discourse about the rankings of angels (Aquinas 1189-1191), today's scholars have observed it for other reasons – one of these being the chain's philosophy of ecology (Rigato and Minelli).

There is no doubt that the Great Chain of Being, also known as Scala Naturae, is intrinsically linked to the way Westerners view the natural world in a way that we today can say is scientifically imperfect. To begin with, the concept is rooted in anthropocentrism, which is a belief where humanity is put at the centre of the universe ('Anthropocentric' def. 1 and 2.). This statement might seem wrong as there are categories above humans, but humanity is still the centre of Christianity. God created the earth as humanity's dominion and in his image according to the Bible (Psalm 115:16). Every link in the chain also contains

further subranks when it comes to the earthly categories. This rank is dependent on one part of the entity's perceived divinity, as diamond and gold are the highest minerals, but also their usefulness to humans, as bees are ranked higher than other insects for their use in honey production (Lovejoy 56-58, 65).

Apart from Christian cosmology, the Scala Naturae has had a massive impact on biology as a field. When Carl Linnaeus categorised the natural world, the three primary kingdoms followed the Great Chain directly by labelling them the kingdoms of animals, plants, and minerals (Quammen 6). The chain's influence can be seen once more in modern misconceptions of evolution. When one hears the term 'a missing link', it refers to the idea that one can imagine that there are stages between species, for example how Homo Erectus evolved from Homo Habilis and into Homo Sapiens (Kundu 7-8). However, this is not how evolution works. Evolution is a gradual process of mutation in organisms that slowly and randomly is inherited (Hall and Hallgrimsson 4-6). There are no missing links in that process as there are no links (Kundu 1), only the impression of them because of, for example, gaps in the fossil record (8). Further, the chain, through its anthropocentrism, also implies a teleological evolution. A conclusion could be drawn from Scala Naturae that evolution is directed in a way so that it will create better organisms (180). This is often, but not always, connected to the human supremacist thought that since humans are the centre of the ecosphere, that means that the universe or some creator must have designed the laws of nature exactly as they are for man to come into being (9). In reality, evolution has no goal and humans are not inherently more favoured by nature (10). The anthropocentric hypothesis of a teleological evolution is merely the result of adding value to a taxonomic system that does not necessarily have values associated with it. To clarify, there is a scientific basis for categorising the world into levels of organisation. For example, there is a hierarchy of size, since an anthill for example exists on a smaller level than the entire biosphere of planet Earth.

The problem arises when the steps are assigned value from human perspectives, not from the convenience of merely categorising and studying. In summary, the great chain of being is an unscientific and anthropocentric idea of linearly hierarchical structures that have been hugely influential for how we perceive the world around us.

To H. P. Lovecraft, value-based hierarchies were not a foreign concept. Born in Providence, Rhode Island in 1890 to parents with aristocratic backgrounds but who were quickly growing poorer, Lovecraft struggled with his position in society for his whole life (Joshi, *Providence* 16). This struggle did not only extend to his thoughts on class. A common surprise for new Lovecraft readers in the 21st century is the author's blatant racism. According to S. T. Joshi, one of the world's leading Lovecraft scholars, Lovecraft's opinions on race were not uncommon in the early 1900s USA (Joshi, 'Michel Houellebecq' 43-50). In *I Am Providence*, Joshi's biography on Lovecraft, he writes: 'This view was by no means uncommon in the 1920s, and many leading American biologists and psychologists wrote forebodingly about the possibility that racial intermixture could lead to biological abnormalities' (*Providence* 936). Here Joshi argues that Lovecraft racist bias was not more severe than the average person's racism, despite his writing often coming across that way today and Lovecraft's praising of fascism and Adolf Hitler (Joshi, *A Dreamer* 360-361). French writer Michel Houellebecq delves deeper into the subject of Lovecraft's racism in his book *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*. There Houellebecq traces Lovecraft's overt racism to the time he lived in the slums of New York City. 'His stay in New York's underbelly, in its slums, would change [Lovecraft mild racism]. The foreign creatures became competitors, enemies, who were close by and whose brute strength far surpassed his. It was then, in a progressive delirium of masochism and terror, that came his call to massacre' (Houellebecq 24). Houellebecq continues by stating that Lovecraft, whether or not he was any worse than his contemporaries, uses his condescending opinion of social minorities in his

writing by evoking what is at the core of his ideology, namely fear (3). Lovecraft was a firm believer in biological essentialisms and the structuring of the world in hierarchies, and his writings were often affected by this.

In his writings, Lovecraft creates a world inspired by his ideals, where hierarchies are rigid and natural. In many ways, Lovecraft's cosmology mirrors and parodies the one of the medieval Christian church, perhaps even intentionally since he was openly atheist (Joshi, *Dreamer* 40). Whilst the Christian hierarchy goes from God to angels and then the corporeal beings ranging from humans to animals and plants to minerals, in the Cthulhu mythos, the hierarchy is topped by the Outer Gods, most notable of these is Azathoth, the blind idiot god, who is the reason for the universe's existence, since he is unwittingly dreaming it into reality (Lovecraft, 'Witch-house' 366). This is a Lovecraftian twist on the cosmogony presented in many religions. Lovecraft derives fear and anxiety in positing that, in a very existentialist way, God knows as little as we do about why the universe was created. After the Outer Gods come the Great Old Ones, then the Old Ones, which are creatures who, like the Outer Gods, are often compared to deities. Below the Lovecraftian deities is every other species in an unspecified order, including a diverse group of different interdimensional aliens (364). What makes this notable is not that there are hierarchies, but that they differ from the traditional anthropocentric perspective on nature's hierarchies that exist outside of Lovecraft's fiction.

The cosmology of the Cthulhu mythos makes it clear that humans are not apex beings in the Great Chain. There are beings above us that mere humans cannot begin to comprehend. This is meant to comment on humans' insignificance to a larger universe, but also to put humanity into perspective (Joshi, *Dreamer* 130-133). In his correspondence, Lovecraft writes, 'Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large' (Lovecraft, *Selected Letters II* 150). To a human, an animal can be seen as a tool or a pet

companion, in the case of cows or dogs; dangerous predators that should be avoided but that we have come to dominate through technology, like tigers that humans hunt using rifles and guns; or insignificant, like how many Westerners view insects. In all these instances, animals are below us in the hierarchy. Here, Lovecraft posits that there are beings above white people, men, or even humans in general that see humans the way humans see nonhuman animals. From this Lovecraft derives both a fear of what might be above us and of something coming from below to replace us.

This idea of a society threatened by replacement is an ideologically driven one, as Lovecraft in his correspondence admits that he thinks civilization, and then especially the West, is in a state of rapid decline (St. Armand 131). This belief stems from Lovecraft's observations of politics, science, economics, art and immigration (132). According to Joshi, the author's conviction of the decline of Western society is the connecting node that ties all of Lovecraft's writing and personal life together (Joshi, *Decline* 314–320). It is easy to draw a parallel between Lovecraft's views and those presented in Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, a philosophical manuscript interested in the structure of historical civilisations. Spengler, like Lovecraft, was worried about the decadence of Western society and thought of the progressivism and technophilia of their time as blinding (Spengler vol.1 15). However, where they differ is on how race plays into this proposed decline. Spengler was an active critic of fascism and argued against essentialist differences between so-called races in *The Decline of the West* (vol.2 125). Lovecraft on the other hand believes in some white nationalist conspiracy theories. For example, there is the replacement theory, which posits that Western decadence leads to a drop in birth rates, which in turn leads to immigrant groups taking advantage of this to 'outbreed' white populations. While widely rejected and disproven (MacKellar), the connection between this conspiracy theory and Lovecraft's beliefs highlights his fear of being replaced at the top of the hierarchy, whether it is by other people,

or by other beings. This could be seen in moments where narrators or characters express disgust toward non-white people, but also in how alien races are referred to.

Nowhere is this more explicit than in the Yithians, an insect-like species which is called ‘The Great Race’ in the story ‘The Shadow Out of Time’ (1936). In that story, it is explained that the Yithians are a fascist race of time travellers that can telepathically transfer their minds into the bodies of other organisms, such as humans (Lovecraft, ‘Out of Time’ 570-571). The fear of the Yithians could thus be recognised as a fear of the ethnic Other coming to invade not only the territories of white Americans but their minds as well. The fact that the Yithians share their ideology with their author further reveals something about this fear that is clear when viewed from the top-down perspective of the Scala Naturae. A believer in strict hierarchies, especially racist or fascist hierarchies, would have to ask themselves whether or not their struggle is in vain when encountering the Yithians. Here is this militaristic race (581), seeking to assert themselves over other races, just like many human nations at that time, that can easily do so without utilising their armed forces. More than just being superior to humanity, at least to someone that measures value through the power to dominate, there is the fact that the Yithians themselves are not the greatest. The Yithians are still portrayed as thoughtful, insightful and peaceful, only using their military in defensive contexts when protagonist Nathaniel Peaslee encounters them. At the end of ‘The Shadow Out of Time’, it is revealed that the Yithiansians were physically wiped from existence by another race, the flying polyps, and by the time the story takes place only exist as body swappers, hopping from host to host (580). There is no longer an empire, as the Yithians are reduced to non-physical vagrants, in a way analogous to a human identifying with a nation that has been conquered by foreign powers. The Yithiansians in general could be said to act as a metaphor for aggressive human nationalist countries. Their superior power, hubris, and

ultimate demise all play on the fears that matter most to readers with a similar worldview to the Yithians.

These themes of invaders from above and below fighting for status in the Great Chain show up again and again in the author's novellas. Asenath Waite in 'The Thing on the Doorstep' (1937) is an alien body swapper switching bodies and leaving their old host dying, exemplifying Lovecraft's views that the Other, whether racial or alien, is parasitic and invasive (647). The Elder Things from 'At the Mountains of Madness' (1936) were part of the first civilization to conquer earth, but now only remnants remain (472-473). What overthrew them was the shoggoths, their creations that they treated as subservient slaves and pets, but who eventually came to replace the Elder Things in the hierarchy (473). It is an ongoing fact in the Cthulhu mythos that humans are insignificant. Even the creatures that could be considered superior to humans in a dominance hierarchy are insignificant to some other creature, if not to the universe itself.

On how Lovecraft's humans cope with the realisation of their insignificance, MacCormack notes:

> Lovecraft's tales teach us two lessons: all order is chaos, and chaos is gracious in the gifts it offers in allowing us to combine its wondrous expressions into orderings. Our 'little spheres' and 'ornamental fruits of perspective' [...] are nothing more than coping mechanisms for a teeming universe that will always be too much for human apprehension. (MacCormack)

To some extent, the madness that his characters often experience is, according to Lovecraft, humanity's way of coming to terms with the fact that we are not on top of what we might perceive as the hierarchy of nature. Moreover, part of what is creating the madness is the realisation that nature is something other than what most humans thought, to begin with. It is quite evident that there are underlying systems, structures and mechanics to how Lovecraft's

universe works. The cosmos of the Cthulhu mythos is not meant to work for anyone other than the mechanics that the author set in place. Joshi writes that realism is 'not a goal but a function in Lovecraft; it facilitates the perception that "something which could not possibly happen" is happening' (Joshi, *Epicure* 33). Yet while there are systems in place, they do not necessarily follow human logic. There are colours that humans cannot comprehend in 'The Colour Out of Space' (1927) and several accounts of non-Euclidean geometry set in practice (Lovecraft, 'Witch-house' 358). Ultimately, the core to the fear and madness of hierarchies lie in the implication that there are natural laws and systems behind the universe, but never allowing the readers or characters to fully understand. Lovecraft uses science, or at least scientific wording, to make Gods into powerful extraterrestrials and a divine chain of being into an incomprehensible, but a mechanical universe that is indifferent to human existence.

The Rhizome from Yuggoth and Beyond

In contrast to looking at the world anthropocentrically, through dominance hierarchies placing humanity at the material top, one can also take an ecocentric perspective. This is a term used in ecocriticism and environmental philosophy that refers to a system of thought, values, and actions that place nature on the same level as the human (*Purdue Writing Lab*). In fact, according to ecocentrism, there is no separation between the human and nature; we are all equally part of the physical world.

One major step in ecocriticism was taken in 1980 by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, two philosophers that emphasize the interconnectedness of culture and nature. In their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari outline, among many others, their ideas on the structures and systems of spaces like society and the environment. Here, in the introductory chapter they put forward the concept of the rhizome, writing that 'unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions,

with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines' (Deleuze and Guattari 21). The concept, whose name is derived from the root system of plants like gingers and some grasses, is meant to challenge the idea of binary and hierarchical categorisation, instead emphasizing relations between connections (what would be called ranks in hierarchical perspectives) as horizontal and of a multiplicitous nature (4). Rhizomatic connections are vast networks. One way to exemplify what Deleuze and Guattari mean by such a network is by imagining a map with several points that are connected through lines. These points represent individuals, regardless of species, and every line is their relation to one another. Every point is then in turn related to other points. This is meant to illustrate how societies and ecosystems work internally, how they interact, and how they are irreversibly interlinked (10). Such a network might have different centres, or plateaus, but in a rhizomatic system they cannot break free from the system; there are no enclaves when everything is connected (9). Every organism on earth is through this network connected in some sense to every other organism and the biosphere, the planet and its environment.

Deleuze and Guattari use the example of orchids and the wasp to demonstrate how rhizomatic relationships between organisms work in practice. The bee orchid is a type of orchid that has evolved petals that imitate the size, colour, and pattern of a bee or a wasp. The wasp acts as a pollinator to the orchid, flying from flower to flower whilst inadvertently delivering the means of the orchids' reproduction as the wasps themselves are tricked into believing that they are copulating with a partner. Meanwhile, the orchids produce compounds that give off a floral scent that the wasps have evolved to enjoy. The more a wasp smells of orchid, the more it seems fertile to other wasps. Thus, despite the two species belonging to entirely different environments, they are indubitably linked as their reproductive systems interact and they to some degree need it to stay that way for their species' continued survival

(10). Both the flower and the wasp in this example have co-evolved into a symbiotic relationship that they both serve to gain from, i.e. a mutualist one (10, 238). While there are symbioses that are commensalistic, in other words neutral, or parasitic, where one organism serves to gain from harming another, they are always an example of rhizomatic systems (10, 238). Every living being has evolved to help, compete with, harm, mimic or just co-exist with other beings and the environment. In short, rhizomatic connections might be vague, hard to trace, lack a clear beginning and end, constantly intermingle, and expand into multitudes. In other words, encountering and having to come to terms with the fact that the world works through these principles would be a nightmare for someone who wants an organised and well-outlined system of ecology.

So, how does an ecocentric, rhizomatic perspective fit into Lovecraft's work when the author is, as earlier discussed, so focused on hierarchies? To begin with, Deleuze and Guattari discuss Lovecraft at several points in *A Thousand Plateaus*. They hold up Lovecraft's depiction of the recurring character Randolph Carter as someone who experiences fear of and fascination with the multiplicity of the rhizome during his travels through the Dreamlands (240). For one, Carter experiences both himself and other organisms as outside of categorisation. Part of the fear in Lovecraft is not only the previously discussed impossibility of understanding the unknown but also the fact that neither mind nor language can place the horrors the characters meet (248). This is evident in 'At the Mountains of Madness'. Here, a group of Antarctic researchers retell their experiences of finding the remnants of an ancient alien civilisation and the horrors still lurking in the ruins (473-475). The scientific language and bright minds contrast with the madness and indescribability of a more complicated reality that they meet on their expedition. Whilst this in a way can be read as a critique of science, as it shows the reader the limits of human understanding and the consequences in seeking out information about the universe we cannot handle, it also indirectly questions dogmatic belief

in anthropocentrism and our constructed categories. Instead of specifying or directly categorising, Lovecraft famously uses the term ‘outsider’ to describe a lot of the extraterrestrial or strange phenomena the human characters encounter, especially when the individual seems to be somewhere between human and non-human. Most notably this happens in the story ‘The Outsider’ (1926) where a ghoul has to come to terms with his identity as an undead when he assumes the premise that he is human. In ‘The Outsider’, the ghoul first scares a group of merrymakers and then himself when he sees his reflection. Eventually, he learns that the thing he saw in the mirror was himself and set off, rather unhappy, to live with a group of other outsiders in Egypt (Lovecraft, ‘Outsider’ 147). This could be read as an individual encountering the rhizome, the fact that there are few clear lines and categories in the real world and that the universe is filled with diverse multiplicities, and slowly having to come to terms with the fact that their old worldview was incorrect.

Moreover, Lovecraft can be read in Deleuzian ways other than what is brought up in *Thousand Plateaus*. Indeed, it is not unusual that Lovecraft’s mythos is studied through a Deleuzian interpretation. MacCormack does the same to argue for Lovecraft’s position in science fiction canon, as well as his value within feminist and post-colonial studies. There seems to be an overlap in the Deleuzian and Lovecraftian philosophies when it comes to thinking outside of the predicates set by anthropocentrism.

Conversely, Deleuze and Guattari published *A Thousand Plateaus* almost fifty years after Lovecraft’s passing, so while the philosophers were deeply aware of Lovecraft, the author had no idea of either the concept of the rhizome or the theoretical field of poststructuralism. One could therefore argue that ideas of non-hierarchy, interconnectedness, transspeciesism and multiplicities have to be read into Lovecraft’s corpus, instead of out of it as one can in the case of hierarchical perspectives.

However, Lovecraft was heavily influenced by other non-hierarchical currents, like the alternative religious movements at the time. One of these was spiritualism. The spiritualists were, and still is, a group of practising occultists that believe in communication with the dead through ritual means (Gutierrez 237). This movement, although often dismissed as quackery, has been cited among theologists like Cathy Gutierrez as a sort of democratising force for Christianity. Through séances, many people began believing in a heaven anyone could reach, as allegedly they encountered their dead loved ones who told them about the afterlife and sometimes ascended into God's realm. They also came in contact with their old pets, which led many to believe that animals had souls that might reach heaven too (237-238). Throughout history, many indigenous groups has also practised a kind of ecological living that is closely related to their spiritual beliefs. So, although Deleuze and Guattari formalised the concept of the rhizome in 1980, the world-view that de-emphasizes the role of vertical hierarchies, both after and during life, as well as the multiplicity inherent in nature has been in circulation for over a hundred if not thousands of years at that point, thus probably being older than the hierarchical perspective. Cults and the occult play a prevalent role in many of Lovecraft's short stories. Take for instance the Starry Wisdom cult in 'The Haunter of the Dark' (1936), the Esoteric Order of Dagon from 'The Shadow over Innsmouth', and the albino witch Lavinia Whateley from 'The Dunwich Horror' (1929). These cultists usually strive to help their respective Elder God to enter into our dimension because of reasons that are kept vague. Sometimes, there is the implication that the cultists know something the protagonist does not and at other times they might just be tricked into it through the god's manipulation. This is part of Lovecraft's criticism of all theism. In his correspondence, Lovecraft wrote 'Spiritualism, whose adherents now number many former men of science who should know better, is a frank surrender of judgment to vague subjective impressions. [...] yet the sober thinker can see further than the spiritualist' (Lovecraft,

‘Merlinus’ 4-5). Nevertheless, alternative religions are part of Lovecraft’s time and impacted his writings to a degree that one simply should not overlook the occult influences in many of his stories.

So the non-hierarchical and rhizomatic perspective probably had a great influence on Lovecraft, which can be seen for example in how a keey feature of the Cthulhu mythos is that dimensions interact. Creatures like the Dimensional Shambler actively travel through dimensions to hunt prey (Lovecraft ‘Museum’ 216). Beyond this, there is Randolph Carter, other human dimensional travellers, and even Cthulhu and the other Elder Gods could all be considered to be extradimensional (Deleuze and Guattari 240). These dimensions are all connected through some unknown means and could thus be compared to, if not analogous to, ecosystems. The travel to and settling of our dimension by eldritch creatures has even been compared to invasive species clashing with the indigenous inhabitants of an ecosystem (Lubnow). Lovecraft, by portraying a multiplicity of possible worlds, lets the reader peek behind the curtain of the cosmos and see the rhizome and that all of the universe is one complicated, interwoven ecosystem.

Also when looked at on a smaller level, the creatures of the mythos invoke the concept of the rhizome. Take, for instance, Shub-Niggurath, which is perhaps the closest being from the mythos to a fertility goddess. This is a creature that is of an ever-changing form, with protruding tendrils that are either dropped and transformed into a new creature or absorbed into the body of Shub-Niggurath. Shub-Niggurath has been compared to a wildfire in the way that she spreads, engulfs, and produces, in contrast to the destructive force of a fire, all seemingly without control or even knowing that she does it (Lovecraft ‘Mound’ 97-98). What is conveyed through Shub-Niggurath, and Azathoth for that matter, is clear – divine creation works from the same principles as evolution. It is without intent, purpose, and order, but what Shub-Niggurath is is systematic. In her constant splitting, which is in essence

similar to the asexual reproduction of fungi or cell division, and subsequent ingesting of some of her offspring, she is creating her own ecosystem in a microcosm which, despite her being the controlling and most essential part, is still complex and interwoven. The spawn would not exist without Shub-Niggurath and positing that Shub-Niggurath functions in a way humans could understand, which she might not, she would not be able to sustain herself, just as a fire needs kindling.

Shub-Niggurath is then in turn worshipped by a great number of different species. One of these many species is the Mi-Go, also known as the fungi of Yuggoth (Lovecraft 'Whisperer' 302). This epithet is what makes these creatures fascinating for two reasons. For one, they are not described as looking like what we typically would recognise as fungoid on Earth. The Mi-Go are winged and have several antennae and appendages, thus looking more like a crustacean or insect (299, 306). This acts as a reminder that the creatures of Lovecraft's literary work cannot easily be measured by anthropocentric or earth-centric perspectives, especially as it is stated that besides being fungoid, the Mi-Go are made from some matter that is alien to earth and therefore cannot be photographed (307-310). Secondly, the fact that these creatures are fungi brings rhizomes to mind as many fungi share a similarly interesting root system, the mycelium. This could be a reference to the specific role the Mi-Go fill in the universe, as they are part of a substantial brain-harvesting scheme across several galaxies for unexplained reasons. What is known is that they have some connections to the Great Old Ones, as the Mi-go seem to admire or even revere them as deities in 'The Whisperer in Darkness'. Their mycelium is not physical, but figurative as the Mi-Go could be said to, fungi-like, exist in an intricate web between several life forms they ceaselessly exploit, but also whose survival they are both dependent on for reasons humans have yet to decipher.

A mycelium that is less metaphorical can be found in 'The Shunned House' (1936). This is one of Lovecraft's takes on the classic horror trope of haunted houses. However,

instead of a spirit residing in a mansion and scaring the owners, this story centres on a normal house in New England that the narrator and his uncle, Dr Elihu Whipple want to rid of a type of bioluminescent fungi that has been killing the house's inhabitants for generations. What they discover is that the fungi are not just fungi. Strange weeds, mould, pale-looking grass, and barren, but seemingly still living trees growing on the grounds appear to be connected to the fungous growth. The narrator does make it clear to the reader that he considers the house to be malign and in a state of decay (239), but this is only from a narrow, anthropocentric perspective. The terraforming happening in 'The Shunned House' could be read for its similarities to a normal mould sanitation procedure or garden weeding, which some ecocritics might argue are cases of man asserting power over nature, trying to shape it to adhere to human interests and conceptions of beauty.

This house is perhaps Lovecraft's plainest depiction of an ecosystem and even a healthy one at that. These plants and fungi live in symbiosis with each other, around what the narrator finds out is a dead, probably extraterrestrial creature buried deep under the house. The pair begins by investigating and trying to kill populations separately. It is not until the narrator and main character starts acidifying the soil around the creature that the weeds and fungi die off, destroying the ecosystem by making the environment uninhabitable (252-253). To a Deleuzian, it might be evident that the fact that the plants could not be killed until the habitat was made inhospitable, as a rhizome's interconnected nature makes it hard to destroy by targeting its parts (Deleuze and Guattari 9). Further, one can draw parallels to the organisms surrounding this creature to any other plants, bacteria, fungi, necrophages or algae that live off of carcasses and are a natural part of decomposition after an organism has died here on earth. Seen through an ecocritical lens, the remains of the alien behemoth serve to remind the reader that all creatures are part of the same life cycle, despite perceived hierarchies. Even eldritch beings who are worshipped like deities are just material

extraterrestrial organisms in the Cthulhu mythos. They eventually die and become nutrients to their surroundings. Though, this begs the question – if these microorganisms are just part of a unique but healthy ecosystem, could the characters trying to exterminate them and terraform the area for human living be the real invasive species?

The notion that every being has its place and should not stray from it is prevalent all over Lovecraft's writing. One example is from 'The Dunwich Horror' where the titular creature is teleported into the realm of his father, the ancient god Yog-Sothoth, by a spell with only the vague explanation:

> It has been split up into what it was originally made of, and can never exist again. It was an impossibility in a normal world. Only the least fraction was really matter in any sense we know. It was like its father—and most of it has gone back to him in some vague realm or dimension outside our material universe; some vague abyss out of which only the most accursed rites of human blasphemy could ever have called him for a moment on the hills. (Lovecraft 'Dunwich' 296-297)

The Dunwich horror is here confronted by a sense of being out of place. He is the Other, both in a corporeal sense and a spatial one. He exists in a place he should not and is consequently placed back where he belongs. This thinking permeates Lovecraft's ideology, especially when it comes to hierarchies. To Lovecraft, fear is found when things are out of place and do not align with his anthropocentric, racist worldview. In addition to Lovecraft's earlier discussed agreements with replacement theory, we see this kind of thinking in the author's stories. In 'The Horror at Red Hook' (1927), immigrants are described as a contagion, Dr Muñoz is a rotting horror artificially held alive by the AC unit in his New York apartment in 'Cool Air' (1928), showing that he does not fit in that environment, and the ecosystem in 'The Shunned House' is treated as if it is an invasive species for killing the inhabitants of the house. These are just some examples of immigrants and organisms invading spaces in Lovecraft's oeuvre

belonging to white people or humans. In reality, diversity is not a sign of decay, neither in society nor in ecosystems. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, a complex world, entwined with itself, and rhizomatic in structure is a natural one (Deleuze and Guattari 6). Just like when the illusion that humans have a special place in a chain of being is being broken, the application of hierarchies on a world that does not naturally have any also creates horror in Lovecraft's corpus.

A Chartless, Resistless Sea

Lovecraft's disposition to the ocean is arguably best represented by this passage he wrote in a letter, 'To be bitter is to attribute intent and personality to the formless, infinite, unchanging and unchangeable void. We drift on a chartless, resistless sea. Let us sing when we can, and forget the rest' (Lovecraft *Selected Letters I*). In this quote, Lovecraft expresses a kind of existentialist sensibility by using the sea as a metaphor. The universe is uncaring of human life, and so is the rest of nature, the sea included. However, the sea as a metaphor is heavily influenced by the presuppositions of the speaker and audience, and thus makes the intended meaning behind the message more complicated and less obvious. This is especially the case in Lovecraft's horror stories as they are further complicated by the hierarchical and anthropocentric, contra the rhizomatic and ecocentric perspective on ecosystemic hierarchies. This makes one wonder how they interact with his ocean writing.

Historically, the ocean has been used tirelessly in literature to symbolise different concepts. Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas* (1869-1870) depicts an ocean that represents the freedom of movement and freedom from colonial oppression to Captain Nemo. Meanwhile, in African diasporic literature in the Americas, such as *Homegoing* (2016) by Yaa Gyasi, the sea is instead a symbol of tyranny and death as Europeans forcefully transported African people to use as slaves in the triangular trade, many

of which died on the journey. Horror narratives usually stress the vastness of the sea, how it could be hiding any type of monstrosity, and how inhospitable it is to the transgressions of human explorers or castaways. In Dan Simmons' alternative history horror novel *The Terror* (2007), the sea represent oppressive forces fighting against human imperial exploration (Lanone 28-43). Idiomatically, maritime language is often invoked, which brings to mind travel, exploration, and war. In sayings like 'below the surface', the ocean's ability to hide creatures and shipwrecks from someone above the surface creates a boundary between land and sea. There is the seen and the hidden, the below and the above. Even in eco-literature, which strives to depict organisms and environments from a non-anthropocentric perspective, the sea never seems to be only the sea, as it is already a symbol ingrained in the brains of the readers.

More than just the sea, the beach is also used allegorically in storytelling. In 'The Beach as a Liminal Space', Robert Preston-Whyte writes:

> The beach is a place of strong magic. As a material space it is a boundary zone where the hint of celestial forces is whispered by the ebb and flow of tides, a space that is neither land nor sea, a zone of uncertainty that resonates with the sound of everchanging seas, a setting that is, by turns, calm, tranquil, and soothing or agitated, unruly, and frightening. (349)

Here, beaches are described as liminal spaces – thresholds between destinations (340-349). Physically they make up loose and unclear lines marking the border between land and water. Yet, beaches also act symbolically due to their liminal properties. They are places where humans go for recreation or as a retreat, at least in the Western world, where the notion of time, otherwise so important in capitalism, does not matter as much (349). They are spaces where we can suspend our lives and exist in liminality safely, which might be why many horror authors such as Lovecraft use beaches as settings, reminding the readers that beaches

are not entirely harmless. In *Döden på stranden*, Swedish historian Per Högselius speculates about humankind's relationship to the beach as a place related to death, tragedy, and horror. He writes that beyond the safe space we have made the beaches into is a borderland where modern civility dissipates and gives way to darker forces (Högselius 38). For instance, Högselius brings up historical beach murderers (32), natural disasters (103), and shipwrecks (53). Beaches are places where humans come face to face with the horrors of the sea.

The properties of the beaches that Högselius describes can be seen in Lovecraftian narratives like 'The Horror at Martin's Beach' and 'The Night Ocean'. In 'The Horror at Martin's Beach', written by Lovecraft together with his wife Sonia Greene, a giant sea monster is killed and displayed as a trophy by the greedy Captain Orne. When the captain decides to go to Martin's beach, the creature's mother arrives and kills several beachgoers (Lovecraft and Greene 9). It then proceeds to hypnotise the Captain and some others, who are then drawn into the water. A similar deadly beach can be found in 'The Night Ocean', which is a prose poem by Barlow and Lovecraft about a man's observations outside the small coastal community of Ellston. One day, people suddenly begin to go missing and swimmers start washing up on the beach. After a storm, he discovers some half-eaten human remains along the coast, and then the creatures responsible. However, he never finds out exactly what these creatures are. Some readers argue that it could be the Deep Ones from other Lovecraft stories, some kind of ghoul, or a new mysterious monster with no intertextual connections (*The H.P. Lovecraft Wiki*). However, this does not take into consideration how the beach blurs borders, even when it comes to categorisation. What the narrator finds that day, at a location which is neither land nor sea, is a creature which is neither wholly aquatic nor land-dwelling and neither dead nor alive, and which is thereby all at the same time. Importantly, in both of these stories, the sea and its creatures surface to attack, in some cases even in revenge. This is a symbolic act where the ocean is striking back against the land, something which the ocean

could be said to do in reality as waves hit coastlines, sometimes with devastating results. This comparison is even directly made in 'The Night Ocean' as the narrator thinks of the waves like the ocean taking a 'stride upon the land' (Barlow and Lovecraft, 'Night Ocean' 432).

But 'The Night Ocean' also makes a point about the ocean, one that shares many similarities with Lovecraft's views on the universe. The last paragraph of the short story begins by the narrator stating '[v]ast and lonely is the ocean, and even as all things came from it, so shall they return thereto' (442). This indicates that the ocean is characterised by a cyclical nature in Lovecraft's corpus, which arguably is key to what makes it horrific. A lot of time is spent following the narrator's ponderings about life and the ocean over several seasons. Generally, he finds the water monotonous, predictable, and calming. The story is in many ways concerned with the narrator's mental state, which he only refers to as a 'weary mind' (430), and alienation from nature, as well as his attempts to, in a Romantic sense, find rest and satisfaction through discovering that the world is greater than himself (430). After a while, the narrator starts realising that the greatness of the water hides a lot from surface dwellers, and soon the sea just becomes a reminder of how cold the world is. The narrator laments that 'I felt, in brief agonies of disillusionment, the gigantic blackness of this overwhelming universe, in which my days and the days of my race were as nothing to the shattered stars; a universe in which each action is vain and even the emotion of grief a wasted thing' (439). The sea is to him what the universe is on a large scale in the Cthulhu mythos. Ultimately, what Lovecraft's last story leaves the reader with is a reverent fear of the ocean, for it is, to the narrator, the unknown, the uncaring, and the unending.

Lovecraft's sea, like the cosmos in general, is not really partaking in the Anthropocene as we traditionally think of it, as actors are shaping it in secret. Take the town of Innsmouth for example. There, islanders, and later sailors, make human sacrifices to the Deep Ones, which are described as amphibian humanoids connected to Dagon (Lovecraft,

‘Innsmouth’ 529, 532) and Cthulhu (554). In return, the Deep Ones supply them with fish. This exchange turns malign when the Deep Ones and the tribespeople start producing offspring that are more aggressive in their pursuit of making humans join them. Lovecraft uses the Deep Ones and the fate of the townspeople to criticise racial mixing (Frye 248). The tribesmen of Kanak intermix with individuals of another race or species and the result is violence and the disturbance of normal life in the predominantly white countryside. However, beyond this interpretation is an example of a symbiosis turning dysfunctional. One might describe the relationship between the islanders and the Deep Ones as a kind of mutualist symbiosis, meaning that both parties gain an advantage from cooperating (Lovecraft ‘Innsmouth’ 525-526). In this case, they both get food. This quickly turns bad however as the Deep Ones take more and more control over the humans the more people join this partnership. When the protagonist of ‘The Shadow Over Innsmouth’, Robert Olmstead, enters the story, the Deep Ones are deified by the humans of Innsmouth and use the townspeople as breeding stock to populate the underwater city of Y'ha-nthlei (525-529). Whether this was the plan of the Deep Ones all along or if they saw an opportunity they could take advantage of ultimately comes down to whether the reader sees them as inherently malign or not. The important point is that the underwater race of the Deep Ones actually can function in a mutualist ecosystem with other populations, and whether they planned their turn to the parasitic all along is another question entirely.

The vague, multiplicitous nature of the sea can further be seen mirrored in how it is unclear whether the Deep Ones of Innsmouth are a race or a separate species. To define the rather informal and in many human cases racist concept of race, this essay uses the term as a synonym for breed or subspecies (Hoff). The main difference between individuals of different races is that they can help produce fertile offspring and share a closer evolutionary relation, whereas this is not the case where they belong to different species. At first glance, the Deep

Ones seem to be just a different race. They can produce fertile offspring together that can reproduce with humans and probably other Deep Ones, as explained by Zadok and Olmstead when finding out about Olmstead's heritage in 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth' (553). They are also anthropoid in the fact that they mostly walk on their hind legs, speak sign language and verbally, and live close to human settlements, as evidenced by 'The Night Ocean' and 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth'. This would imply a relationship that could either be co-evolutionary or a recent split. At the same time, there is no direct indication that the Deep Ones are evolutionarily related to humans or could be considered belonging to the genus *Homo*. Rather, they seem to have their origin in Dagon and another creature called Hydra, since they are sometimes given the epithets 'father' and 'mother' (530). They are also superficially similar to the humanoid amphibian looks of Dagon (5-9). That is where a biologist would find the Deep Ones odd. On Earth, we have yet to find an example of a case where organisms that are so far separated, or even wholly unrelated, can mix. Thus, the Deep Ones could be seen as either an otherworldly threat to humankind or outsider that have adapted to an environment they did not originally come from and are just as natural as other migratory organisms. Whether this is a result of Lovecraft's early 20th century understanding of biology, an intentional element to make the monsters seem unnatural, or a way to suggest that the ocean works in ways breaking our conceptions of science and categorisation is ultimately unclear.

Furthermore, the topic of ancestry is brought up later in 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth', which ends with Olmstead finding out that he has Deep One ancestry and is slowly turning into one, just like the inhabitants of Innsmouth (553). Hybridity, the cross between two different races, is a common theme in many of Lovecraft's stories, and is often, as discussed earlier, used as an analogy for interracial breeding. What distinguishes 'Innsmouth' from another Lovecraftian race narrative like 'Facts Concerning the Late Arthur

Jermyn and His Family', where protagonist Arthur Jermyn discovers his biological connection to an ape deity, is that Olmstead's ancestry is not wholly negative to him (553). After he learns that his uncle committed suicide after discovering their family's connection to the Deep Ones, and whilst Robert at first was planning to do the same, he instead waits and gives in to his non-human side (553-554). This could be a case of Lovecraftian madness as discussed earlier, but since Olmstead's cousin is put in a mental asylum for exhibiting the same behaviour it is safer to assert Olmstead's mental degradation as part of his transformation (553). In the short story, there is a parallel drawn between decay of the physical kind, turning into eldritch creatures, and the moral kind of which the race-mixing inhabitants of Innsmouth represent. To emphasise this, the Deep One hybrids are referred to as carrying a taint (518), a plague (530), or being contagious (505). After regarding the villagers of Innsmouth with disdain for the majority of the story, Olmstead not only finds himself accepting his part of the contagion, he is empowered by his new role as a deviant.

Apart from Lovecraft's conspiratorial convictions on the fall of the West, this paralell between physical and moral decay also says something about the Lovecraftian view on human nature if read not as an allegory for white contra non-white, but for human contra nature. The Deep One hybrids become gradually more alienated from humans with age as they also become less and less human. Even in human-monster hybrids, the two halves are not compatible, something which arguably could make them appear unnatural. Still, this does not necessarily make Lovecraftian horrors humanist. On Lovecraft's views on humanism, MacCormack writes, 'For Lovecraft, monsters are not aberrant versions of the human. They are monstrous, that is, not in form, but on the levels of perception and possibility. What emerges in Lovecraft is that the human is a vague, strategic myth for ensuring sanity [...]' (MacCormack). So rather than the fear being concentrated on the Deep One part of Olmstead and how horrific it is, one could argue that their contrast to the human, the blurring of the

lines, is what elicits horror in Lovecraftian literature. It is here, where sea and land meet in the hybridity between human and Deep One, that the anthropocentric and ecocentric do so too. These two currents of ideas are both present in contemporary ecological discourse. What 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth' brings to light through Olmstead is that we are still not finished deciding if we as humans are part of nature or a separate category from it.

Readers are not only shown how they are part of the rhizome through the inhabitants of the sea, but also through 'The White Ship', a somewhat anthropocentrically angled story, that still manages to problematise whether the sea is a space or a place. 'The White Ship' is a story that is part of the so-called Dream Cycle, which is a group of stories from the Cthulhu mythos set in the alternate, but still earth-like, dimension known as the Dreamlands. What characterises the Dream Cycle is an emphasis on interdimensional travel when the narrator is asleep, leaving the characters to ponder if it happened or if it was just a lucid dream. Of course, it is always the former. The stories of previously mentioned Randolph Carter are all part of the Dream Cycle (Lovecraft, *Dream Cycle*). This may lead one to assume that all of the stories in the Dream Cycle are equally Deleuzian as the stories about Randolph Carter, as they are about discovering the rhizome, but 'The White Ship' deviates from this through Lovecraft's use of the ocean. It is about isolated lighthouse keeper Basil Elton, who imagines a white ship that will take him on an adventure. One day the ship arrives and they visit several mysterious islands (Lovecraft, 'White Ship' 3). So here we see the same pattern as in the other stories of the Dream Cycle, but Lovecraft uses the medium of the ocean here to first set up Elton's wanderlust and then to use it as a symbolic parallel. The ocean is depicted as a medium for human travel, a liminal and transitional space between worlds and cultures, instead of a place and host to a rich collection of innumerable ecosystems. Whilst Lovecraft's use of the ocean is based on anthropocentric practises of reducing the sea to a symbol and literary commodity, he achieves through it a portrayal of a rhizomatic web of possible worlds

and dimensions interacting with each other, which shows directly a duality and complexity that exist in the way the author uses this environment.

The perhaps most famous properties Lovecraft ascribes to some environments is non-Euclidian. This is a term from geometry, referring to geometries that do not work according to Euclid's fifth postulate, which leads to perspectives and angles that function differently from how humans usually perceive them to work on Earth (Manning 79). Except for a passing remark about ‘non-Euclidean calculus’ in ‘The Dreams of the Witch House’ (358), a rather odd phrase by Lovecraft as calculus was invented hundreds of years after the death of Euclid, the most notable example of Lovecraft’s infamous use of non-Euclidean geometry is in ‘The Call of Cthulhu’. Here it is used to describe the underwater city of R'lyeh, where Cthulhu sleeps, waiting for the stars to align just right (225). When first encountering the city the seamen question its existence and its mechanics, with the *Alert*’s captain Johansen afterwards stating ‘the geometry of the place was all wrong’ (223) and at least one sailor makes a misstep and walks through one of these angles, never to be seen again (224). R'lyeh is a representative of the aliens invading the terrestrial with their own rules. The city’s mere existence it is implied that there is a vast unknown humanity does not nor perhaps ever will know, just like how the sea in large is an unknown to humankind. R’lyeh is a sunken city (222, 553), which means that it represents the submerged that, once the sailors of the *Alert* reach it, has surfaced. With its discovery comes many realisations about the ocean – there are things that humanity cannot understand and therefore should not have to deal with. The fear is also related to an idea of hidden civilisations, and the fear grounded in Lovecraft’s racist alarmism about unknown outsiders coming to topple civilised society. Further, R'lyeh represents the ocean in its manipulation of space and time. Not only in a real sense, as time passes slower on sea level than atop a mountain, but also as many sailors experience time differently when sailing on the open ocean. Nobody even knows for

sure where the city is located, if it even is tethered to a single point in space. All that is known is that it is encountered at around the coordinates 47°9′S 126°43′W in the pacific ocean, surrounded by nothing other than water (222). The sailor mentioned before gets swallowed up by the city the same way one would be by the ocean. All this indicates that R'lyeh symbolically is just as unforgiving, confusing, and vague as the ocean surrounding it.

'The Call of Cthulhu' is not the only story that contains a sunken, mysterious city with strange properties. The aforementioned Deep One city of Y'ha-nthlei and the ruins of Atlantis explored by the WW1 U-boat in 'The Temple' are two other examples (7, 553). Lovecraft seems to have a fascination with exploring the idea of what happens to the urban when submerged. The sea can be interpreted as representing the historical past. It is in the primordial oceans life began on Earth, and it is from them the first land-living organisms crawled. A settlement inhabited by humanoids under the surface of the sea is then a counter to anthropocentric thoughts of teleological evolution and human progress (Dobraszczyk 879). Once more, something is put out of its perceived natural place. A city, especially one lived in, should not be underwater, as to many Westerners there should be a clear border between nature and culture (873). But in the same way as the inside and outside are imaginary borders, so is the urban, rural, and nature. Even though it might not seem that way, humans are still participating in nature even when in the middle of a city, something which is brought to focus when water covers avenues and buildings as it does in 'The Temple'. However, the cities also act as sources of fear. Both R'lyeh and Atlantis are cities of the dead. Cthulhu is described as both sleeping and dead, meaning that he experiences a state that is beyond what any human will experience, and Atlantis was once a great civilisation before it sank and its inhabitants died. This serves once more as a representation of the ruinous power of the sea. Lovecraft's message is clear – society will face a destructive threat from the sea.

Nevertheless, Lovecraft did not only write narratives driven by a fear for the ocean. In ‘Till A’ the Seas’, Lovecraft provides a take on the ocean that is more concerned with its necessity for survival. The first part of the story retells the events of an apocalyptic disaster where the sun makes the Earth warm up to the degree that the oceans start evaporating and dry up (Barlow and Lovecraft, ‘Seas’ 2). Most of the planet gets depopulated and the only survivors have to live in primitive conditions at either pole or in one of the few villages that discovered how to extract moisture from deep in the ground (3). This is an early science fiction version of a climate crisis, but whilst the results of global warming do not align with Barlow and Lovecraft’s predictions, the possible catastrophes derived from a warmer Earth is a fear that is more real today than ever (Thompson).

However, just because 'Till A’ the Seas’ is a piece of ecological horror does not mean that it is free from Lovecraft’s anthropocentric premises. For instance, the first countries to fall and experience mass emigration after the drying of the oceans are all in the Western hemisphere (Barlow and Lovecraft, ‘Seas’ 2). This is an example of Lovecraft’s belief in the fall of the West due to its degeneracy. What differentiates the kind of degeneracy Lovecraft critiques in this story from what he usually finds degenerate with his contemporary society is that it is not based on the sociological, political, or economic, but on values. 'Till A’ the Seas’ is a result of Lovecraft’s observations of how 1920s optimism gave way to the depression of the 30s, and warns that similar pride precedes falls also when it comes to ecology. At the end of the first part of the story, he writes, ‘For man has always thought himself the immortal master of natural things’ (4). Here it is a natural event, not a conquering, powerful other race, that suddenly forces Western populations out of their cities. In the second part of 'Till A’ the Seas’, the narrative focuses on Ull, the last human on earth in his desperate attempt to find freshwater. When he goes the well close to his dying home village, grabs a bucket, and finds it dry, Lovecraft compares his outcry to that of a tortured animal (6). It is ambiguous whether

the scream signifies that humankind has been reduced to just an animal in this unforgiving world or if our true nature are that of an animal all along. In the end, the central idea driving 'Till A' the Seas' forward is the erasure of the ambiguity between humans and the natural world around them. Human survival depends on the survival of our ecosystem, just as it does for any other organism, and if we forget that and mismanage it or even just forget our role in it, extinction is not far away. Even though 'Till A' the Seas' suffers from some of Lovecraft's anthropocentric suppositions about ecology, and his racist thoughts on Western society, one can still read it as ultimately arguing against the postulations of the Anthropocene. The story proposes that humankind is not the main shaper of the world, but only part of the rhizome, and perhaps only something larger than us can remind us of that.

In many ways, we encounter the same fear in 2021 as Lovecraft did 100 years ago. More than economic crises, invasions by foreign powers, or if Lovecraft should be believed, the degenerate behaviour of people, societal collapse could be caused by natural disasters ('Lovecraftian Ecophobia'). Nature has traditionally been central in canonical American literature. In many of these cases, it has also been portrayed as hostile to the inhabitants of the land. Literary researchers Andrew Smith and William Hughes writes, 'Nature becomes an avenging force – or, even more monstrous, an alien entity utterly indifferent to the fate of humanity. Just as our modern societies have appeared to disavow any necessary connection to nature, the natural world seems to reject humanity as expendable' (11). The natural catastrophes and climate crises are manifested in the Cthulhu mythos as actual avenging forces. We find the oceans, whether in the shape of a fish-human hybrid, or an elder god reclaiming territory, and derive anxiety from the seas in the same way as we feel anxiety when faced with the thought of rising sea levels and global warming (Thompson). It is in Lovecraft's ocean that the fear of what is below the human in an anthropocentric sense, nature, and the realisation that we are part of and impact the ecosystems around us meet and

clash. It is when the ocean disappears that we fully see how dependent we are on our rhizome with it. It is ultimately up to the reader to decide if they find fear in that fact, or if they are horrified with the forces that have the power to make it disappear in the first place.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analysed two different perspectives on ecosystemic configurations prevalent in Lovecraft's literary works, and then studied how they apply to his depictions of the sea. By establishing what ideas flowed through society during the early 20th century and how they influenced the stories by H. P. Lovecraft, I have made clear that the Cthulhu mythos has a history that is ideologically intertwined with both anthropocentric and ecocentric schools of thought.

In the first two chapters, ecosystemic perspectives are examined. First, there is the vertical hierarchy, which has its roots in Christian theology concerning the Great Chain of Being. Lovecraft critiques the Great Chain for its religious connotations whilst at the same time buying into it through his belief in fascism, and his fear of replacement. This is seen in the Yithians, a race of fascist conquerors that is left as only husks and memories when encountering an even more powerful race. Nevertheless, from a rhizomatic perspective, these are just organisms and ecosystems interacting on a large scale. In the second chapter, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome from *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* was applied to show how the cosmic entities in the mythos all interact non-hierarchically in ecosystems. For example, Shub-Niggurath's creation of her own feeding and reproductive cycle, the Mi-Gos' complex, parasitic, interspecies web of exploiting and harvesting brains, and 'The Shunned House' healthy and biodiverse, but to humans strange, mutualist habitat. There seem to be currents of hierarchical and rhizomatic ideas all over the Cthulhu mythos, fluctuating back and forth throughout Lovecraft's career. He derives fear

both from there being something greater than ourselves and from the notion that the concept of ‘greater’ might not exist at all – two opposite conclusions that come from the same anthropocentric premise that there is or should be a natural hierarchy. However, as long as the stories are set on land every story keeps to one or the other, something that cannot be said when it comes to his stories about the sea.

When reading the stories which centre around the sea, the two perspectives become unclear. The stance fluctuates from hierarchical to rhizomatic between stories and often within the same work. This essay has argued that this is because of an ambiguity that is inherent to the ocean as it has innumerable cultural meanings, interpretations, stages, ecosystems, histories, and fears connected to it, for it has had a significance to life on Earth since its beginning.

The Deep Ones of ‘The Shadow Over Innsmouth’, ‘Dagon’, and possibly also ‘The Night Ocean’ exemplify ecological, symbiotic relations between species that eventually turn more parasitic. They also prove to be the point where Lovecraft’s rigorous categorisation of the world meets the ambiguity of the ocean and non-fictional science as to whether the Deep Ones are a race or a different species from humans is kept rather vague. The Deep Ones are characterised by hybridity, most clearly seen in Olmstead when he starts transforming and the border between humanity and nature becomes blurry in a way evocative of Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome. Furthermore, ‘The Night Ocean’ and ‘The Horror at Martin’s Beach’ are stories where life and death meet where land and water do too. They are about horrors crawling up on land to take revenge for human greed and cruelty, or just to be equally cruel themselves, as a metaphor for a kind of karmic determinism and Darwinian evolution where nature is just as uncaring and malign as humans can be. Though using the sea merely as a symbol for travel and exploration, ‘The White Ship’ is still a typical example of a character delving into and discovering their part in the rhizome, to the degree that the main character is

brought up as an example of this in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The underwater cities of R'lyeh, Y'ha-nthlei, and Atlantis act as omens for a future plagued by ecological disaster just as much as they play on the fears of the urban being part of nature, thus showing the characters and the reader that the hierarchies they thought existed are all made up, whilst at the same time alluding to a replacement within the said hierarchy in a rather contradictory way typical of Lovecraft's ocean writing. Lastly, 'Till A' the Seas' proves to be Lovecraft's most straightforward climate change narrative that, although it has its racist and Western biases, directly counter the othering in 'Martin's Beach' and 'The Night Ocean' by reminding the readers of how dependent humankind is of water and the seas.

To truly test this theoretical approach though, I invite further research relating to how H. P. Lovecraft depicts environments. For example, I believe that one can look at how he represents rural areas in a classist and possibly anti-pastoral manner in stories such as 'The Dunwich Horror' and 'The Colour out of Space'. Another area that deserves academic attention is how Lovecraft's ecophobia has been adapted since his passing, as the Cthulhu mythos has reached a cult following across different mediums. Especially since we today are in the middle of a climate crisis, it would be highly interesting to find out how readers and writers living through said crisis react or even relate to the seas, and its Deep Ones, reclaiming the land.

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