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HORRORS OF MARGINALISATION

How Contemporary Lovecraftian Fiction Generates Horror
Through Alienation and Marginalisation

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ABSTRACT

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Marginalisation and alienation have become increasingly more relevant topics in today's world, as can be seen with the rising number of marginalised authors conveying their experiences through various genres, including horror fiction. This thesis explores how contemporary works of Lovecraftian horror adapt and utilise the themes of marginalisation and alienation present in H.P. Lovecraft's original works, like for example "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", in order to generate the feeling of horror in their audience. More specifically, this thesis argues that the contemporary works of Lovecraftian fiction such as *Cthulhu* (2007) and *Lovecraft Country* (2016) generate horror through presenting the audience with marginalised characters much akin to how Lovecraft does, albeit with the key difference that the source of horror is not simply the Otherness of the marginalised characters, but rather the state of being marginalised itself and the discrimination that those characters face because of it.

This thesis finds that both *Cthulhu* and *Lovecraft Country* exploit the narrative ambiguities present in Lovecraft's original works such as "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", where the story's portrayal of its marginalised protagonist can be read as either sympathetic towards them or as demonising them, depending on whether the reader is able to sympathise with the Othered protagonist. This narrative ambiguity allows *Cthulhu* and *Lovecraft Country* to shape Lovecraftian horror to better represent marginalised voices by making their protagonists explicitly marginalised from the very beginning and changing the horror to better reflect that fact by making the primary source of horror be the various oppressive social structures responsible for the marginalisation while nonetheless still staying faithful to the conventions of the genre.

Keywords: H.P. Lovecraft, Lovecraftian horror, cosmic horror, horror fiction, horror studies, alienation, marginalisation

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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Marginalisaatio ja vieraantuminen ovat kasvavissa määrin yhä tärkeämpiä aiheita yhteiskunnassamme, mikä on nähtävissä siitä, että yhä useammat vähemmistökirjailijat ovat löytäneet äänensä erilaisten genrejen, kuten kauhukirjallisuuden, kautta. Tämä tutkielma käsittelee sitä, miten nykyiset Lovecraftilaista kauhua edustavat teokset (*Cthulhu* (2007), *Lovecraft Country* (2016)) käyttävät ja soveltavat H.P. Lovecraftin alkuperäisteoksista ("The Shadow Over Innsmouth") löytyviä vieraantumisen ja marginalisaation teemoja luodakseen kauhun tunnetta yleisöissään. Tarkemmin sanottuna tämä tutkielma väittää, että sen käsittelemät nykyaikaiset kauhuteokset pyrkivät tuottamaan kauhun tunnetta yleisössä tekemällä hahmoistaan marginalisoituja, hieman kuin Lovecraftin alkuperäisteoksissa. Nykyteokset, *Cthulhu* ja *Lovecraft Country*, kuitenkin poikkeavat "The Shadow Over Innsmouthista" siinä mielessä, että niiden kauhu pohjautuu enemmän marginalisoitujen hahmojen kohtaamaan syrjintään kuin heidän toiseuteensa.

Tämän tutkielman lopputulos on aineiston perusteella se, että nykyiset Lovecraftilaista kauhua edustavat teokset käyttävät hyväkseen Lovecraftin alkuperäisteoksista, kuten esimerkiksi "The Shadow Over Innsmouthista", löytyvää narratiivista epäselvyyttä mukauttaaksensa genren edustamaan marginalisoitujen vähemmistöjen pelkoja paremmin. Tämä narratiivinen epäselvyys johtuu pääsääntöisesti siitä, että tapa, jolla "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" esittää marginalisoituja hahmoja, on erittäin monitulkintainen, jolloin teos voidaan lukea olevan joko sympaattinen tai antagonistinen vähemmistöjä kohtaan. Näin ollen *Cthulhu* ja *Lovecraft Country* pystyvät hyödyntämään Lovecraftilaista kauhua edustamaan marginalisoitujen vähemmistöjen ongelmia siten, että ne tekevät alusta asti selväksi, että niiden päähenkilöt ovat vähemmistöjen edustajia ja tekevät sortavista yhteiskuntarakenteista niiden pääasiallisen kauhun lähteen kuitenkin siten, että nämä teokset pysyvät uskollisina genrekonventiolle.

Avainsanat: H.P. Lovecraft, Lovecraftilainen kauhu, kosminen kauhu, kauhukirjallisuus, kauhututkimus, vieraantuminen, marginalisaatio

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkistettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck –ohjelmalla.

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1. Introduction

As technological advancements such as aeroplanes and the internet have revolutionised international travel and communications and made these things easier than they have ever been in the history of human existence, so have they accelerated the rate at which different cultures move, migrate, and collide. In such a scenario, tensions between these different groups are almost an inevitability, as those who cannot integrate to their surroundings are pushed to the margins of society. At the same time, groups on the margins of society that previously existed as fractured and disparate communities have been able to find each other much more easily and organise into more cohesive wholes as they try to find their place within societies that have traditionally shunned them for their identity. Even outside of various marginalised identities, more and more people are finding themselves at the edges of society in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic ripping through the global economy, leaving many people struggling to recover from being left without jobs and social contacts for extended periods of time¹. As these groups at the edges of society begin to grow, alienation and marginalisation are becoming increasingly more mainstream problems. But more crucially, groups suffering from these societal conditions refuse to stay at the margins of society any longer and are fiercely fighting for recognition and a concrete place within society. One does not have to pay much attention to current events to notice that related phenomena like identity politics are more firmly taking their place in public discourse, and as a result marginalised voices are being heard in increasing numbers as can be seen with the emergence of popular movements like Black Lives Matter and various LGBTQ+ rights groups.

This rise in the number of marginalised voices also holds true in the sphere of literature and fiction, where marginalised people are able to convey their experiences in often innovative ways,

¹ See D’cruz and Banerjee, “‘An invisible human rights crisis’: The marginalization of older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic – An advocacy review”.

subverting and reinventing genre conventions to better serve marginalised voices². One such genre is horror, which holds a reputation of being something of a conservative genre, often heavily relying on demonising everything that cannot be considered “normal” by society at large in order to elicit a feeling of dread or horror in its reader (Donaldson 24; Carroll 199), and as such the genre can be seen as contributing towards building and reinforcing stigma against marginalised people (Elliott-Smith 1). Nonetheless, more and more marginalised people, such as African Americans and members of the LGBTQ+ community are finding their voices specifically within the genre of horror fiction, as it also offers an avenue for critically examining the repressive institutions that contributed to their marginalisation in the first place. Arguably one of the sub-genres of horror where this is the most visible is Lovecraftian horror, as it derives much of its horror from the fear of the Other (McConeghy 5), and perhaps even more crucially, Lovecraft’s writing often deals with the topic of alienation in its horror (Järvinen, 2020), which as a phenomenon is directly related to marginalisation. Thus, it is perhaps to be expected that such a genre would attract the attention of authors wanting to adapt and subvert the genre and use it to better express the horrors of marginalisation.

The study of horror literature has largely been held in a somewhat low regard as a field due to the common perception of horror fiction being something of a low-brow genre (Fabrizi 2-3). Especially neglected have been the works of H.P. Lovecraft, who despite being one of the pioneers of contemporary horror fiction and having a lasting influence on writers of the genre, has only recently received the academic recognition his works deserve (Simmons, 3). That is not to say that studies like this are completely unexplored academic territory, as there are plenty of authors who have written on Lovecraft and especially on horror fiction in general, but the subject remains as something of a niche within academia. Thus, this field of study offers a relatively untapped source of insight into the societal taboos and anxieties that prevail at the time a particular text is produced, which also

² See for example Means Coleman *Horror noire: blacks in American horror films from the 1890s to present*.

tends to be what the more influential academic texts in this field focus on. These texts tend to be concerned with analysing the mechanics of horror fiction in more general terms and try to build an overall understanding of what makes horror fiction horrifying to its readers, and which provide the theoretical backbone of this thesis (see for example Kristeva; Carroll). What comes specifically to the study of Lovecraft, previous scholars who have analysed his works have identified the persistent themes of loneliness and isolation in his writing (see for example Airaksinen; Burleson; Dziemianowicz), but their focus has mostly been either on these specific themes, or their relation to more overarching themes present in Lovecraft's writing. For example, Timo Airaksinen writes about the role of the unknowable and nothingness in Lovecraft's "The Music of Eric Zann", and in the process briefly touches upon the role of individuality in setting the characters apart from the nothingness that threatens them in the story (4). Airaksinen therefore comes close to identifying the theme of alienation and/or marginalisation present in the story (see: Järvinen) but does not explicitly engage with the topic in any detail. While both loneliness and isolation are admittedly major components of Lovecraft's writing and the fiction inspired by it, they are arguably only symptoms of the larger themes of both alienation and marginalisation, which in turn are the more prevalent overarching themes in Lovecraft's stories, as argued by this thesis. More crucially, the topic of how these themes fit into the general framework of Lovecraftian fiction has been left largely untouched by prior scholars, with only a handful of studies touching upon the matter (see for example: Järvinen; Martin; Ralickas). There is, therefore, a clear gap in our understanding of Lovecraftian fiction. As such, while many of the aforementioned studies come close to the topic of this thesis, they do not really go into detail about the role that marginalisation plays in Lovecraftian horror. Sean Martin for example correctly identifies the importance of alienation within Lovecraftian horror (74) but does not connect this with the topic marginalisation and the role that marginalised identities have in Lovecraftian horror.

This gap in how Lovecraftian fiction utilises the themes of alienation and marginalisation in order to generate the feeling of horror in its reader is precisely what I set out to address. I argue that works of contemporary Lovecraftian horror fiction use marginality as a key element of generating horror in their narratives, and that this use of marginality as a source of horror ultimately stems from the original works of Lovecraft, albeit modified and adapted to better suit marginalised voices. In order to analyse how this is achieved, the first chapter of this thesis presents a theoretical framework that utilises both general horror theory as well as theory on alienation and marginalisation to build up an understanding of how horror fiction attempts to incite the feeling of horror in its reader by presenting them with categorically contradictory monsters³. These monsters often share the qualities of alienation/marginalisation, which at its core is a contradictory state of existence as the subject is both a part of society but still separate from it in one way or another. This theoretical framework attempts to explain how horror fiction is able to turn alienated/marginalised characters horrifying, either through presenting them as monstrous or by portraying the state of being alienated/marginalised as being intrinsically horrifying. The second chapter uses this theoretical framework to examine how these concepts function in the context of Lovecraft's original writing, namely "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", to both better understand how alienation/marginalisation can be used to generate horror in the reader, and how and why the later adaptations of his works have adapted and innovated on them. This initial baseline of both theoretical and practical understanding will then be applied to examine how contemporary works of Lovecraftian fiction such as *Cthulhu* (2007) and *Lovecraft Country* (2016) use these principles to generate horror in ways that better fit anxieties more relevant to contemporary audiences. The chapter on *Cthulhu* explores how the film adapts "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" to convey the anxieties of being a gay man in a small conservative town in America by simply interpreting the themes of marginalisation present in the original text and interpreting them in a way that are

³ Explored in part in my bachelor's thesis (see Järvinen, 2020).

sympathetic towards the marginalised identity of the protagonist. This is finally followed by a chapter focusing on *Lovecraft Country*, which also similarly reinterprets the themes of marginalisation present in Lovecraft's original works. However, where *Cthulhu* reframes an existing text, *Lovecraft Country* attempts to reframe the entire sub-genre of Lovecraftian fiction by changing the race of the protagonist from the typical white protagonist of Lovecraft's text to a black American in order to criticise the racial element present in much of Lovecraft's writing.

This thesis analyses how contemporary writers of Lovecraftian horror take the themes of alienation and marginalisation present in Lovecraft's original works and how those themes are reinterpreted to better serve marginalised voices. More specifically, this thesis is interested in examining the ways in which these authors use the concepts of alienation and marginalisation to generate the feeling of horror in their readers, and how these methods relate to and evolved from the way in which they were used in Lovecraft's original works. On this front, I argue that the primary way these contemporary authors use these themes is to present the reader with marginalised characters much akin to how Lovecraft himself does, albeit with the key difference that the source of horror is not so much derived from the fact that the characters are marginalised Others, but rather from the state of being marginalised and the discrimination that they face because of it. Thus, it can be argued that on a general level these authors rely on a shift in perspective in the horror that they portray; instead of the horror being informed by the norms of the prevailing status quo in some way, horror is instead derived from how those norms discriminate against marginalised people. Therefore, due to the nature of horror fiction as a genre, this type of research presents the opportunity to examine the various societal taboos and tensions behind the concepts of alienation and marginalisation through the perspective of marginalised authors who offer a first-hand viewpoint on how societal norms discriminate against those who are unable to conform to those norms. By examining how and why these contemporary authors have chosen Lovecraftian horror as the genre to best represent their voices, this thesis attempts to understand the growing interest in

Lovecraftian horror, as can be seen in the surge of Lovecraft inspired media in the recent years (*Lovecraft Country* (2016, 2020), *Call of Cthulhu* (2018), *Annihilation* (2018), *Underwater* (2020)).

2. Horror, alienation, and marginalisation

Lovecraft famously opens his essay on the nature of horror fiction by stating that “[t]he oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (*Supernatural Horror in Literature* 1). As later studies of horror fiction have proven, this assessment by Lovecraft is still relevant today. Horror fiction tends to largely reflect whatever societal taboos and anxieties that are relevant at the time of writing. One such fear that has firmly embedded itself into the fabric of horror fiction is the fear of the Other, which is arguably where our idea of monsters originally stems from (Cohen 7). It is then perhaps no surprise that in the horror fiction of the last century or so, this fear of the Other has come to include those sections of our society who have been left at the margins, be it because of their race, sexuality, or other incompatibility with the status quo (Elliott-Smith 1). Thus, in order to build up the theoretical understanding necessary for this thesis to function, it is important to establish how exactly it is that horror fiction conjures up its monsters and how alienation and marginalisation is used in this process. This chapter provides a broad understanding of how horror fiction generates horror in its readers by presenting them with monsters that defy normalcy by being somehow categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless. Because alienated and marginalised people are by definition separate from the norm set by society, they are thus also prime candidates for being represented as monstrous in horror fiction. To build a better understanding as to why this is, the following section will also discuss alienation and marginalisation as concepts, and their relationship to each other. This thesis proposes that because the state of alienation (and thus by extension marginalisation) is characterised by the subject living in a state of relationlessness or futurelessness, this also makes them categorically contradictory and incomplete and thus monstrous.

The construction of monsters in horror fiction

Monsters and horror fiction are inseparably linked together; horror fiction cannot exist without there being something for the reader to fear – a monster. Prior research on horror fiction shows that the genre tries to elicit the feeling of horror in its readers is by presenting them with some kind of a monstrous Other, constructed through the breaking of norms one way or another⁴. That is to say that this monstrous Other is something or someone that does not conform to the prevalent societal norms. For example, Noël Carroll argues that an object or being is monstrous and thus terrifying if it is somehow “categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory, incomplete, or formless” (32). Similarly, James Adams argues that monsters are used to define our idea of the human by presenting the reader with “bodies and forces that delimit or threaten or defy that norm” (777). In practical terms then, this could be something like a vampire, which are terrifying because they drink blood instead of eating food, are undead, and cannot stand sunlight; all in opposition to how a normal human would be. Georges Canguilhem provides perhaps the broadest definition of what constitutes a monster, stating that “[t]he monster is a living being with negative value” (135), or in other words, a monster is something that stands in direct opposition to a “normal” being. Monsters are therefore not necessarily monstrous sheerly due to being either supernatural or inhuman, but because they stand in opposition to any given societal conceptions of normalcy. Thus, monsters do not even necessarily have to look monstrous for them to be considered monsters, provided that they deviate from the norm in some significant way. This means that someone like Norman Bates from Robert Bloch’s *Psycho* (1959) could be considered a monster both due to being a murderer and mentally ill, as well as the fact that he is a transvestite. He is terrifying because his behaviour and being transgress societal norms by not adhering to commonly established conceptions of morality, sanity, and gender norms of the time.

⁴While the phrasing here is admittedly vague, it is so by necessity as the consensus within horror studies is that almost any deviation from normalcy can be a potential source of monstrosity.

One could therefore characterise monsters as being highly normative constructs, as they require us to determine what is normal and safe, and what on the other hand is abnormal and terrifying. In doing so, horror fiction often taps into prevailing societal norms and taboos to generate horror; a feature the genre has inherited from the Gothic, which can be seen as the predecessor to horror fiction (Carroll 13; Wisker 7, 43). This genre lineage is an important factor to consider, as early horror authors like Lovecraft were heavily influenced by the Gothic, and as such many of the themes common in Gothic writing are also prominent in Lovecraftian horror. For example, themes present in the Gothic such as “displacement, incarceration, loss of identity, home, heritage, family, friends, and security” (Wisker 147) – or in other words the loss of normalcy – arguably play a central role in a significant portion of horror fiction, and thus also Lovecraft’s writing and subsequent Lovecraftian horror. Haefel-Thomas argues that the Gothic’s exploration of the loss of normalcy arose from a place of “deep ambivalence about how to read the multiple and changing faces of the monstrous ‘Other’ in the nineteenth century” that certain authors in the Victorian era felt, which in turn prompted them to write fiction that interrogates “ideas of what is ‘respectable’ and what is ‘normal’” (2). This attempt by the Gothic to make sense of what is normal and what is not therefore contributes significantly towards why horror fiction derives its horror from the same binary of the normal and the other. As such, with the way traditional horror constructs monsters, horror fiction has a propensity to draw parallels between marginalised groups and monsters, and thus also ends up demonising the former group in most cases due to this connection as this causes the marginal to be equated with being of negative value and thus threatening and abnormal.

Because of this fixation with normalcy, horror fiction is often described as a conservative genre (see for example: Carroll, 195-206), as it tends to rely on the status quo to provide the idea of the normal against which the monstrous other is contrasted. As such, those who do not conform to societal expectations for whatever reason, as for example various sexual and racial minorities often

do not, they are usually the first to be the subjects of this monstrous transformation. This is also the case in Lovecraft's writing, which often has clear reactionary undertones. As David McConeghy writes:

The horror Lovecraft's characters experience . . . reflects the author's own insipid fears of immigrants, unfamiliar religious communities, people of color, and women. . . . Like many works in SF and horror, Lovecraft projected these fears beyond humanity. They became proxies for the alienating and dehumanizing work of other making that remains in his portrayal of non-males, non-whites, and non-Protestants." (5)

Of course, such fears were not limited to only Lovecraft, but rather his writings reflect the larger reactionary undercurrents of the 1920's, which arose in response to rapidly changing American political and demographic landscape, caused by things like surging immigration and the increasing popularity of liberal movements such as progressivism. Thus, the era arguably had the perfect environment for the emergence of a genre of horror which heavily utilised the feelings of loss of normalcy or alienation as the aforementioned social upheavals in the 1920's had undoubtedly left certain members of the privileged American white male population feeling threatened and afraid as their position in society was threatened, and thus Lovecraft's writing was very much reflects the zeitgeist of his time. Thus, Lovecraft's fiction came to enshrine these fears in the form of various portrayals of the monstrous Other, often either attributing qualities of various racial stereotypes to monstrous entities or just simply portraying marginalised people as having some inherent connection to the monster of the text.⁵

However, horror fiction does not necessarily have to be conservative in nature, nor only reflect the fears of the majority of the population despite its often normative nature. Indeed, Carroll argues that "horrific imagery can be, and has been, used in the service of politically progressive themes within given social contexts" (198). This notion is exceedingly important when examining texts like the two pieces of contemporary Lovecraftian horror analysed in this thesis, *Cthulhu* and *Lovecraft Country*, as they function more as progressive social critique rather than as narratives that

⁵ See for example "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", "Call of Cthulhu", "The Dunwich Horror" to name a few.

reaffirm the beliefs of the status quo. McConeghy further elaborates on this topic, providing the example of contemporary science fiction, a genre adjacent to horror fiction, where the building of relationships with the Other is central to the plot, and where estrangement from the other is seen more as an obstacle to be overcome rather than a source of terror (2), or in other words, the narrative has shifted from being about horror of encountering the monstrous Other to trying to understand and build meaningful relationships with the Other. Because of this changed attitude towards the Other in contemporary narratives, the monsters in them are monstrous due to their lack of humanity or sympathetic qualities instead of the fact that they do not conform to some preconceived notion of normalcy (McConeghy 2). As might be expected, this approach to the Other is also present in the two contemporary horror texts analysed in this thesis, as their protagonists both fall into the category of the Other, since the protagonists of both texts are members of different marginalised communities; *Cthulhu's* Russ is a homosexual and *Lovecraft Country's* Atticus is an African American. In the context of these texts, the marginalised protagonists are not presented as being somehow monstrous because they do not adhere to some preconceived notion of normalcy. Rather, these texts instead flip the usual dynamic of horror fiction upside down and portray the different oppressive institutions present in them as being somehow alienating and monstrous. In fact, such a dynamic is also partially present in Lovecraft's own writing, even if the original texts aimed to elicit the feeling of horror in its readers through the Othering of its protagonist (Järvinen 10-11).

Moreover, just as horror fiction inherited a lot of its more conservative themes from the Gothic, these progressive and subversive undertones also most likely originate from it. Antonio Sanna argues that Gothic novels were able to represent themes such as “(homo)sexuality, sadomasochism, and sexual violence . . . because the Gothic genre allowed its writers to suggest or implicate controversial issues by means of its nonrealistic forms and subjects of representation, of its portrayal of supernatural phenomena, and by inviting readerly acts of interpretation” (25).

Moreover, as Haefele-Thomas argues, because Gothic narratives were able to portray these non-conformative identities so freely through the genre's exploration of what is and is not normal, this allowed these texts to "transgress monstrosity in the sense that they help interrogate the very idea of what is monstrous, opening up spaces where we can read sympathy" for marginal peoples (4-5). Thus, it can be argued that these positive or at least sympathetic explorations of the Other are already embedded into the fabric of Lovecraftian horror (and thus also the genre of horror at large) through its Gothic lineage, allowing the genre to explore these marginalised identities not only through demonising them, but also by offering a type of safe space where these kinds of identities can be explored to their fullest. Indeed, as Simmons suggests, Lovecraft's own exploration of the monstrous Other "implies an at least unconscious desire for a greater understanding of non-Western peoples and cultures, perhaps as a means of empowerment in some of Lovecraft's fiction" (19). In this way then, contemporary horror fiction draws upon a pre-existing framework of subversive themes present in the genre, instead of necessarily treading completely new ground in that regard. However, it is important to note that contemporary horror fiction tends to be far more explicit in its portrayal of such controversial or subversive themes, as can be seen with *Cthulhu* and *Lovecraft Country*, as those themes have become far more acceptable in the last few decades and thus these texts also reflect that progress.

Alienation and marginalisation as sources of horror

It is clear then that horror fiction has an inseparable with the Other in the form of the marginal. To better understand how exactly horror fiction utilises the themes of alienation and marginalisation to generate horror, it is necessary to lay out an understanding of what these concepts entail. It is perhaps best to note that these two concepts overlap considerably, as marginalisation can be roughly described as a sub-section of alienation. Perhaps the most comprehensive contemporary theory of

alienation is provided by Rahel Jaeggi, who describes alienation as a “relation of relationlessness”,

or

a detachment or separation from something that in fact belongs together, the loss of a connection between two things that nevertheless stand in relation to one another. Being alienated from something means having become distanced from something in which one is in fact involved or to which one is in fact related – or in any case ought to be. (25)

This detachment in turn disallows an alienated person to establish connections to the society around them, and by extension themselves, which according to Jaeggi causes an alienated person to lose their “relation to her own feelings, desires, and experiences and can no longer— even to the point of spatiotemporal disorientation— integrate them into the way she experiences her own life” (44). This disconnect or relation of relationlessness makes the “world presents itself to [alienated] individuals as insignificant and meaningless” (Jaeggi 3). Skotnicki and Nielsen expand upon Jaeggi’s definition of alienation, arguing that alienation can in essence be described as a state of futurelessness where one is “alienated from a sense that something meaningful is still possible” (838), be that “a better world for all or a personally meaningful experience or a specific image of what will come” (842). Thus, an alienated person can be conceived of as someone who is unable to participate in society in any meaningful way for one reason or another. They are stuck in a sort of limbo where they are immobilised by their environment and at the same time cannot see any meaningful way of changing their circumstances. As such, an alienated person’s relationship with the world around them can be seen as being categorically contradictory or incomplete and thus monstrous. Therefore, depending on the perspective that a narrative chooses to adopt, either the alienated person or the thing that they are alienated from could be made monstrous and thus horrifying. For example, in the case of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” the alienated person is depicted as monstrous, whereas the two contemporary Lovecraftian adaptations that this thesis is concerned with choose to portray the society responsible for the alienation of their protagonists as horrifying.

Because both alienation and marginalisation are both nebulous and multidimensional phenomena, a more nuanced understanding of it is necessary to more accurately use it as an

analytical tool. On this front, Skotnicki and Nielsen have identified four distinct types of alienation: involuntary and voluntary exclusion, as well as involuntary and voluntary inclusion. Involuntary inclusion is the result of one being forced to participate in a society or world that they cannot identify with. They illustrate this argument by stating that in order for people to live under capitalism, they are by extension forced to participate in it even if they do not want to do so and do not see a possible future for themselves in it (849-50), which in turn is deeply alienating to the subject. Involuntary inclusion could therefore be thought of as more or less “classical” alienation. Alienation through voluntary inclusion on the other hand can be described as a reaction to involuntary inclusion; when one is forced to participate in a particular system, like for example capitalism, it can become impossible to imagine any feasible alternatives to that system (856-7). Thus, the person becomes alienated because their inability to see any alternatives “implicitly foreclose on the possibility of imagining anything more than individual adaptation in or small improvements to a crisis-ridden world” (859). On the exclusionary axis, involuntary exclusion can be described as roughly corresponding with a general understanding of marginalisation. As Skotnicki and Nielsen themselves put it, involuntary exclusion is “a form of alienation in which situations of deprivation tend to eliminate senses of possibility” and where the people suffering from this type of alienation “populations exist in “the waiting-room of history” (p. 5), as neither part of the future in the capitalist imaginary nor structurally positioned to readily imagine culturally predictable trajectories for themselves” (852). Finally, alienation in the form of voluntary exclusion appears in the form of an alienated person voluntarily excluding themselves from the society that they cannot identify with. They withdraw within their own privacy, and thus also ironically work to further alienate themselves from their surrounding world (854).

Therefore, alienation and marginalisation overlap significantly with each other to the point where they can be considered a part of the same phenomenon. For example, Jaeggi argues that another important aspect of alienation is that because an alienated person has lost the connection to

themselves, their properties are more often than not instead determined by someone or something else, thus making it even harder for that person to connect with themselves and the world around them (23). According to her, “only a world that I can make “my own”—only a world that I can identify with ... is a world in which I can act in a self-determined manner” (Jaeggi 23). In other words, in addition to being unable to connect with themselves and the world around them, an alienated person lacks agency in the society that they are alienated from. In this way then, alienation is intertwined with the concept of marginalisation, as marginalised people often cannot participate in society to the extent that non-marginalised people can. Similarly, Robert J. Dunne argues that marginalised people, just like alienated ones, fail to fully integrate into or connect with the surrounding dominant societal structures, either because they are cut off from those structures (13-4) or because they simply choose not to do so (15). Janet Billson further elaborates on this topic by stating that marginalisation is “a social phenomenon characterized by unsatisfactory, conflicting, inadequate, or unstable definitions of a person’s self and/or his or her role relationships”, and that a person or a group is marginalised when they are caught between two identities but are not allowed to choose the one they prefer due to structural or societal limitations (33). Thus, a marginalised identity, just like alienation, is characterised by the person’s inability to connect with themselves and the world around them, as their preferred identity stands in opposition to the norm set by the surrounding society. Marginalisation can therefore be seen as an extension of alienation, with alienation acting as an umbrella term for a broader range of estrangement from one’s surroundings. As such, even if this relationship between the marginalised person and the surrounding society is not somehow categorically contradictory or incomplete, it does defy normalcy from the perspective of the status quo, and thus such an alienated/marginalised individual could be portrayed as monstrous by horror fiction, perhaps even more so if the marginalised person actively chooses not to conform to any given societal norms.

Due to the often-contradictory nature of alienation and marginality, Rutledge Dennis describes marginality as a paradoxical state of being. He explains that the paradoxes of marginality

relate to the fact that though many refer to those marginalized as being “outside” of the social sphere, a good case can be made that the marginalized are both “outsiders as insiders” and “insiders as outsiders.” That is, no one or no group can evade or escape from the social sphere, in the same way that Ellison’s *Invisible Man* is really not invisible, but rather is seen but simply ignored. But being ignored does not mean that you will not play a variety of roles in a society. You are ignored because with power, position, and status do not view you as important to recognize, except within limited economic political, or cultural boundaries.” (Dennis 3-4)

Therefore, a marginalised person cannot fully detach themselves from the society that has put them in a marginal position, as they are inevitably a part of said society. Thus, it can be said that a marginalised person’s relationship to the society surrounding them is an alienated one, as they are unable to identify with the society they are nonetheless a part of. However, as Dunne points out, marginality is a multidimensional phenomenon in the sense that a marginalised person may simultaneously belong and be integrated into both the dominant culture, as well as a myriad of subcultures (15), and that they might be simultaneously marginalised in one of these communities while being perfectly integrated into another (Dunne 15). This contradictory existence of marginalised people put them at a crossroads in regard to horror fiction: their status as “outsiders as insiders” makes them both prone to being portrayed as monstrous, but at the same time this same contradictory relationship also begs for readings where the society responsible for the existence of these contradictory relationships in the first place are to be deemed monstrous. In other words, a society that allows for there to be portions of it that are both a part of it and not is in itself incomplete and contradictory. As such, it is perhaps not a surprise that marginality is often used by horror narratives – be they conservative or progressive in their tone.

It is clear then that, from the perspective of horror fiction, alienated and/or marginalised people present the perfect canvas for making monsters. They are often outsiders within the societies that they live in, even if they are at least nominally integrated into them. Their sense of themselves is fragmented, incomplete, or contradictory. Their existence does not adhere to what is considered

the norm, as evidenced by the fact that there is a need to ascribe them the label in the first place. These are also all qualities that are considered to constitute something monstrous in horror studies (Järvinen 14). It is then perhaps no surprise that the texts examined in this thesis have monsters that exhibit alienated qualities. However, from the perspective of the alienated/marginalised subject, the inverse is equally true. As established, alienation stems from one's inability to meaningfully connect to their surrounding world because it appears somehow alien to them. Therefore, in narratives where the subject is themselves alienated or marginalised, the society they inhabit would by necessity appear monstrous or terrifying to them. Thus, in such narratives, the horror stems from the experience of being alienated itself, and not so much from presenting the reader a cavalcade of terrifying images. This can be seen in the texts examined in the following chapters, where alienated horrors do appear, but the main source of horror stems from the main subject of the narratives being and living in a world that is or has become alien to them. This also works to explain why Lovecraftian fiction where alienation plays a crucial role in generating the horror has found relative popularity in service of marginalised voices.

3. The seeds of marginalisation in Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth"

As one might expect, the seeds for the themes of marginalisation present in the contemporary works of Lovecraftian fiction are laid out in the original works of Lovecraft. Therefore, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" functions as a good starting point when examining how and why these later texts chose specifically Lovecraftian fiction as their genre of choice when communicating the horrors of marginalisation and alienation. This chapter argues that not only are the themes of alienation and marginalisation present in Lovecraft's original fiction, but the way in which the narrative is told the alienated/marginalised characters can be read as largely sympathetic ones, even if the original intention of the story is to frighten the reader by presenting them an alienated/marginalised protagonist. This chapter argues that these types of sympathetic readings set the stage for the later derivative works based on Lovecraft's writing that are more explicitly sympathetic towards the marginalised/alienated characters in them. This chapter also argues the way in which the narrative ultimately depicts its marginalised characters also invites a reading where the horror is not derived from presenting the reader with marginally coded characters, but rather from the repressive nature of the society that put them in a marginal position in the first place, as well as the very state of being or becoming marginalised. While the horror in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" is at its core of the conservative sort where the monstrous Other is presented as something the reader should be afraid of, the text's portrayal of its marginalised protagonist ultimately invites a reading that is more sympathetic of the monstrous Other due to the protagonist being able to fully embrace his othered identity at the end of the text. As such, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" serves as a good backdrop for laying out why and how later Lovecraftian narratives have leaned into the theme of marginality and alienation present in Lovecraft's original works.

"The Shadow Over Innsmouth" is a story told from the first-person perspective of a man who by chance ends up visiting the town of Innsmouth while trying to commute to visit his family,

intrigued by its withdrawal from the rest of the world and the local rumours about it. He is told that the town is home to a pagan cult called the Esoteric Order of Dagon led by a man called Obed Marsh, and that the townspeople are very hostile towards outsiders. Upon arriving in Innsmouth, the narrator notes the unusual look of the inhabitants of the town, the so-called "Innsmouth look", as well as the dilapidated nature of the town itself. After wandering around town for a while, the narrator meets an old alcoholic man named Zadok Allen, who is willing to tell him about the dark history of Innsmouth after the narrator plies him with a bottle of whiskey. Zadok tells the narrator that the Esoteric Order of Dagon established by Obed Marsh worship fish-like humanoid monsters called the Deep Ones in return for the creatures bringing wealth to the town, a practice that Marsh had brought there from his voyages in the Pacific Islands. Zadok reveals that the townspeople were forced to join the Order or be killed, and the members were made to breed with the Deep Ones to produce hybrid offspring who upon maturation would migrate to the underwater city of Y'ha-nthlei off the coast of Innsmouth, and that these Deep Ones would one day rise to conquer the Earth. He finishes by telling the narrator to leave the town immediately, but the narrator brushes this off as the ravings of a drunken lunatic and the two part ways. The narrator then discovers that the bus he was supposed to take from Innsmouth to his destination has broken down and he must stay overnight and thus he books a room in the local hotel. During the night, someone tries to force their way into the narrator's room, and he decides to try to escape with the entire town now trying to hunt him down. He then encounters one of the Deep Ones and faints, but somehow wakes up the next morning unharmed and alone. Upon getting back home, he discovers that he is in fact related by blood to Obed Marsh and shortly after begins noticing himself turning into one of the Deep Ones. He initially becomes suicidal because of this revelation, but persistent dreams of him living underwater with his Deep One kin cause him to embrace his fate and Deep One identity, vowing to run away with his cousin to Y'ha-nthlei.

As a narrative, “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” relies heavily on the themes of marginality and alienation in its horror. This can be seen on almost all the levels of its narrative, from the setting all the way to the characters involved in the story. For example, the town of Innsmouth could be characterised as a marginal community in several different ways. Firstly, the town itself is secluded enough where it is described as “a town not shown on common maps or listed in recent guide books” (506). This is not necessarily because of the town’s insignificance, but rather because of the neighbouring communities’ dislike of the town and its people. In fact, Innsmouth is reviled enough among its neighbours that people with any sort of prior connection to the town actively try to hide said connection (506). This hatred of the people of Innsmouth is mostly fuelled by both the town’s history of being a diverse and multi-racial community where the different people freely mix with each other (507), as well as because of the town being home to a religious sect called the Esoteric Order of Dagon, described as “a debased, quasi-pagan thing imported from the East” (511). Therefore, the text goes to great lengths to describe how Other the town is and actively signals that these qualities are undesirable by the “normal” society outside of Innsmouth. While the text still considers them as more or less American, it sets the townspeople as being a type of “insiders as outsiders”; they might be considered American by nationality, but they are thoroughly foreign in their acceptance of the Other and their now Othered culture. In this way then the town of Innsmouth plays an important role in setting up the atmosphere of marginalisation and alienation present in the story by being both a marginalised community, as well as an intrinsically alienating one to anyone outside of the town. As such, the setting itself enables the story to examine marginalisation and alienation from both the perspective of someone observing a marginalised community and someone in a marginal position themselves. In other words, the story derives its horror from both the fear of the Other as well as the act of becoming Othered, which is achieved through both the setting and the narrative structure of the story.

One of the major components of why the town of Innsmouth is so alienating to its visitors is its Otherness, caused by both its racial composition and the fact that the town's inhabitants freely mix with the foreigners. Therefore, the text exhibits a clear anxiety over the perceived dangers of cultural and racial miscegenation, one that is arguably rooted in fears of having one's culture and identity become either repressed or completely wiped away, or in other words, a fear of becoming marginalised. Indeed, Rebecca Janicker argues that "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" reflects Lovecraft's own concerns over immigrants, especially the ones that had already settled in America, who he saw as a threat leading to "the corruption and downfall of a once-pure Western stronghold, here embodied by New England" (68-9). In fact, this anxiety is explicitly brought up in the story itself, when a person telling the narrator about Innsmouth draws a direct comparison between the people of Innsmouth and communities of foreigners who had migrated to the US via ships conducting international trade:

But the real thing behind the way folks feel is simply race prejudice ... I s'pose you know ... what a lot of our New England ships used to have to do with queer ports in Africa, Asia, the South Seas, and everywhere else, and what queer kinds of people they sometimes brought back with 'em. You've probably heard about the Salem man that come home with a Chinese wife, and maybe you know there's still a bunch of Fiji Islanders somewhere around Cape Cod. Well, there must be something like that back of the Innsmouth people. (507)

This explicitly paints the people of Innsmouth as an outgroup even though they are – at least on the surface – white Americans. This is in keeping with Dennis' idea of the paradoxicality of marginalisation, as the residents of Innsmouth are very much "insiders as outsiders". That is, while the Innsmouthians are a part of the wider American society, they are nonetheless separate from it by the virtue of being "diluted" by the influences of the monstrous Other, in this case represented by the Deep Ones with whom the Innsmouthians have intermingled with over the years. In doing so, they become both categorically contradictory and incomplete and thus, at least the point of view of a more conservative reader, monstrous.

But Innsmouth is not only an alienated community, but an alienating one as well. Outsiders are treated with hostility by the town's population, to the point where some visitors are implied to

have been killed by the locals (517). The protagonist even explicitly describes the town as a “city of alienage” (521), which can be understood as either referring to the town’s status as an alienated or alien community, or the feelings of alienation experienced by the narrator due to the strangeness of the town. This hostility can be understood in at least two different ways. Firstly, it can be seen as an aggressive form of voluntary exclusion, where the townspeople are trying to maintain their own withdrawn space by any means necessary. Any outsiders as presumed members of the wider American society pose a threat to the parallel world that the people of Innsmouth have created within the confines of the town. This is alluded towards in the text by the narrator, who claims that the people of Innsmouth “seemed sullenly banded together in some sort of fellowship and understanding – despising the world as if they had had access to other and preferable spheres of entity” (518), referring to the underwater city of the Deep Ones where the Innsmouthians would recede to when their transformation into their amphibious form would eventually be complete. This serves as another example of Innsmouth’s role as both a source of alienation as well as being alienated from the rest of the world. This contradictoriness of their condition – existing within the boundaries of American society but at the same time yearning for their own, alien ideals of existence – is what makes the Innsmouthians horrifying to people who subscribe to the idea that the Other should be either assimilated or expelled to maintain societal cohesion and homogeneity. The aggressive alienation of the Innsmouthians is meant to generate the feeling of horror in its reader; to a representative of the white American status quo, a marginalised community that had carved out its own niche in the world would prove to be an alienating experience⁶, and thus also horrifying due to its norm breaking nature of not wanting to conform to the wider American identity and society. More crucially, the text also explicitly states that the Deep Ones plan to spread to other cities across America (553), meaning that their Otherness does not only threaten Innsmouth and its neighbours,

⁶ This is of course a gross generalisation but is likely in keeping with the sentiment Lovecraft originally intended to convey with the story.

but rather the Deep Ones represent a threat of futurelessness for the entirety of America through their want to assimilate them into their fold, placing the entirety of American culture under a direct existential threat by a simultaneously alienated and alienating force.

Despite its marked Otherness, the alienating nature of Innsmouth can also be seen as a microcosmic representation of the oppressive structures present in the wider American society. This type of reading is what in the end sows the seeds for the later adaptations of Lovecraft's works which follow a similar narrative outline from the perspective of a conventionally marginalised character, like in the two other texts examined in this thesis. While the people of Innsmouth are most certainly coded to be (racial) minorities through the text likening them to other racially marginalised groups (507) despite their immediate outward appearance only being described as broadly "alien" with the narrator speculating the features to be because of "biological degeneration" rather than miscegenation (513), and as such their representation leaves plenty of room for interpretation. The repressive way in which the townspeople treat outsiders can very well be read as mirroring the treatment of minorities by the 1920's American society. Indeed, Innsmouth's isolation—both physically and culturally—from the rest of society serves to create a status quo of its own, separate from the overarching American one, and to put anyone from outside that community into a marginal position. The narrative is therefore free to explore alienation/marginalisation in a setting where the effects and consequences of these phenomena are felt at a personal level and where people who would not necessarily otherwise be considered marginalised are now just that. The aforementioned hostility towards strangers that the Innsmouthians exhibit can therefore be interpreted as being reflective of wider society's treatment of marginalised people. We see in the story that this treatment is limited to those who refuse to assimilate to ways of the Esoteric Order of Dagon. Those people are either shunned or killed, as exemplified by the drunk Zadok, who has been left at the margins of society simply because he refuses to fully accept the Esoteric Order's beliefs. In essence then the Esoteric Order serves as a

source of involuntary alienation to the people who do not belong to the in-group of the Order. Such a system of mandatory inclusion of course very much mirrors similar governing systems of mandatory inclusion like the wider American society, where participation and assimilation into the system is necessary in order to survive, and where any deviance from that norm could lead to either death or at the very least diminished possibilities for oneself.

The Deep Ones and their underwater city of Y'ha-nthlei follow this same pattern of representing both alienated and alienating structures. They represent the alien Other in the literal sense of the word. They are the alienated/marginal made explicitly monstrous. In essence their purpose is to act as a foil to the "normal" American society, or as Tracy Bealer argues,

The foreignness of the aliens themselves, both in terms of their extra-terrestrial origin and their previous residence in the Indies, renders their interactions with humans a neat encapsulation of interracial contact. They are, for all intents and purposes, racially marked immigrants overtaking and, according to the initial response of the narrator, polluting and degrading Innsmouth's Anglo Saxon stock, sapping the citizenry's humanity in both appearance and behavior. (31)

The people of Innsmouth therefore represent a sort of cultural hybridity, or a frontier or buffer zone between "normal" and the "abnormal" Other (Wöll, 238). But the Deep Ones are not only an external force, but also an internal one. While most of the Innsmouthians are destined to eventually transform into Deep Ones themselves, the text implies that this fate is perhaps avoidable. For example, the character of Zadok Allen reveals to the narrator that he refused to ever fully be ordained into the Esoteric Order, which is implied to have prevented him from transforming to one of the Deep Ones (530-1). Therefore, the act of becoming a Deep One is not an automatic one, but rather a wilful act of submission to the system, even if that assimilation is coerced. This in turn arguably makes the Deep Ones represent a more complex and wider type of alienation than just simply the being a monstrous form of the racialised Other. Rather, the racial subtext in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" can be seen as serving the larger theme of alienation by tying its central concepts to the more concrete idea of interracial contact where that contact is perceived as being a threat to the continuation of one's pre-existing racial identity. In other words, the text considers any

kind of cultural and/or racial hybridity as imposing a threat of futurelessness onto its subjects, and thus as a result considers them monstrous.

Most crucially this pattern of both alienated and alienating entities is repeated with the protagonist of the story, in particular during the twist at the end of the story. While depicting any kind of cultural and/or racial hybridity as monstrous was likely the effect that Lovecraft intended for, there is also a degree of irony here, as by lumping together all of these different peoples from practically all over the globe under the label of just “queer kinds of people” (507), the larger American society portrayed in the text becomes just as guilty of the type alienating erasure of identity that they themselves appear to be afraid of. Of course, while bigotry is not beyond hypocrisy, the contradiction presented by this fact causes a significant amount of conflict within the text as it highlights the alienating nature of the societal norms that in the end informs the horror of the story. This contradiction is also arguably called into question by the text itself during the ending of the story where it is revealed that the protagonist is a descendant of Obed Marsh and is thus irreversibly linked to the Deep Ones. In its original context, the ending is undoubtedly intended to horrify the reader by revealing the hidden monstrous identity of the protagonist and especially his ready acceptance of this newfound identity later on in the text. However, reading from a contemporary point of view, it is hard not to read the ending as being somewhat sympathetic towards the protagonist’s monstrous identity and thus by extension the Deep Ones and the Innsmouthians, even if the ending is not without conflict. For example, while the protagonist is initially horrified and alienated by his discovery of his true identity (551), going as far as contemplating suicide in the face of it before being dissuaded by dreams of his now Deep One relatives (553). More crucially these dreams help to show that the Deep Ones have their own complex culture and society, albeit one that is characteristically alien and Other, but one that is

nonetheless able to provide a meaningful existence for the protagonist⁷. Therefore, whether the reader perceives the ending as horrific or not is critically tied to the reader's tolerance for the Other, and it is this narrative ambiguity of whether the reader is able to relate to the Other from which the later, more progressive Lovecraft adaptations arguably draw their influence from.

To further explore this narrative ambiguity presented by the ending, the twist of the protagonist being revealed to be a monster can be seen as further leaning into the conservative aspects of the horror genre, as the ending can be seen as an attempt to alienate the reader from the protagonist causing them to become a source of horror. The protagonist is arguably someone the reader is supposed to identify with, as the narrative, being told from a first-person perspective, places the reader into the position of protagonist. As such, the tension and horror of the story only really work if the reader is able to relate to the feelings being relayed to them through the protagonist of the story (Carroll 89-90). Therefore, the protagonist's sudden acceptance of his alien identity works to sever this tie and horrify the reader by making the protagonist categorically contradictory by virtue of being both the protagonist and the monster at the same time, an effect further strengthened by the fact that the entirety of the rest of the story works to condition the reader into believing that the Deep Ones are something that they should be afraid of, describing them as "inhuman" (548), "repulsive" (551), and "evil" (553) among other things. The effect here is twofold; while the protagonist comes to terms with their newfound marginal identity and seemingly overcomes their alienation, they also work to alienate the reader in doing so. This alienation of the reader is reinforced by the nature of the Deep One city being deep beneath the sea, remaining

⁷ In fact, this type of narrative device is also used in Lovecraft's "The Outsider" where the horror is similarly generated by revealing that the protagonist is a monster, and who is later able to find his place in a similar community of monstrous Others (Järvinen 10-11).

physically out of reach of everyone who is not capable of living underwater and painted even further foreign by its alien sounding name of Y'ha-nthlei⁸.

However, the ending can also be read as being sympathetic or at least ambivalent towards marginalised people, as the portrayal of the narrator's own feelings towards his newfound identity can be described as being overwhelmingly positive as he is able to fully come to terms with who he is. In fact, the story paints any alternatives as being drastically worse outcomes for the protagonist, as his options seem to be either to commit suicide, or to live in fear of being locked up in a sanatorium by his father like his cousin was (553). In contrast to these negative outcomes of rejecting his identity, the protagonist describes his future life in Y'ha-nthlei as largely positive. He is warmly welcomed by his grandmother to the city (553) and states that his new life under the sea will be one of "wonder and glory for ever" (554). Thus, if the reader is able to identify or see past the Otherness of the protagonist's identity, the effect of the ending is drastically altered as the protagonist being able to come to terms with his identity and essentially defeating his alienation, as he overcomes the initial feelings of futurelessness brought about by the discovery of his real identity. This alternative reading of the story where the protagonist's embracing of his Othered identity is seen as a positive thing instead of something to be horrified of that later Lovecraft adaptations such as *Cthulhu* exploit in their subversion of the genre. That is, while the identity that the protagonist embraces is still unquestionably monstrous or monster-like, whether or not this is seen as a source of horror is entirely dependent on the reader's attitude towards the Other. Moreover, if the reader chooses to accept the protagonist's Othered identity, the source of horror arguably changes to be the societal institutions that seek to prohibit the protagonist from accepting his identity in the first place, as these institutions essentially threaten the protagonist with a sense of

⁸ As a further note, Steffen Wöll argues that the almost unpronounceable language of the Deep Ones is meant to paint them as having a non-meaningful identity, as opposed to the meaningful (white) American identity (Wöll 2020).

futurelessness, be that either in the form of compelling him to commit suicide or being committed into a mental hospital for the rest of his life.

Therefore, “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” can be seen as relying heavily on the themes of alienation and marginalisation in how the story attempts to generate the feeling of horror in its reader. More specifically, this horror is generated primarily through the cultural and racial hybridity of the inhabitants of Innsmouth, which the text presents as being a threat to the continuity of the surrounding white Anglo-Saxon identity. Moreover, this fear of cultural and/or racial hybridity is further reinforced by the ending of the story, which attempts to alienate the reader from the text’s protagonist by revealing that he has been monstrous the entire time, and more crucially by the fact that the protagonist fully embraces this Othered identity in the end. However, more importantly regarding the two contemporary works of Lovecraftian fiction examined in this thesis, the ending itself presents a point of narrative ambiguity, as the meaning of the ending drastically changes depending on whether the reader is able to identify with the Other. Thus, if the reader is able to identify with and Othered identity, the ending of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” becomes more about coming to terms with one’s marginalised identity. This reading is what enables the more progressive interpretations of Lovecraftian horror to easily subvert the genre to better serve marginalised voices without necessarily changing the narrative and its tools all too much, as Lovecraft’s original writing already enables readings that are largely sympathetic towards marginalised peoples.

4. Lovecraft, adapted: *Cthulhu* and sexual marginalisation

This thesis has established that there is at least a trend within some of Lovecraft's writing where the themes of alienation and marginalisation play a crucial part in how the text generates the feeling of horror in its reader. Moreover, the way in which narratives like "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" use marginalisation can be read as being at least somewhat sympathetic towards marginalised peoples. This chapter argues that it is this kind of reading that Dan Gildark's film adaptation of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", *Cthulhu*, relies and innovates upon in its reinterpretation of the original Lovecraft story. In the case of *Cthulhu*, these innovations mainly come in the form of an explicitly marginalised character in contrast to the protagonist of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" whose marginalisation is more implicit and only becomes apparent in the final few pages of the story. Thus, the narrative itself is also much more clearly reliant on marginalisation as the source of its horror, specifically relying on the horror of being marginalised rather than equating marginalised people with monstrosity. As such, the film is also far more human centric than Lovecraft's original text, with the monstrous Deep Ones and the supernatural in general being largely left as footnotes than as integral parts of the story. Therefore, this chapter argues that the horror in the film is also largely borne out of the interactions between the film's characters rather than monstrous beings, with most of the focus being placed on the protagonist's homosexuality and how it conflicts with his conservative family and the people of his hometown.

While *Cthulhu* shares much of the general plot structure of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", it also deviates from the original text to a significant degree. The film follows a history professor called Russ Marsh, who learns that his mother has passed away, and that he is needed to execute her estate. He therefore returns to his hometown of Rivermouth where he reconnects with his estranged family—including his father who is the leader of a local cult—as well as his old friend Mike. That night he has a nightmare where he is given a black stone cudgel with strange writing on it, and to

his surprise he wakes up with the cudgel in hand. The next day, Russ is invited to dinner with his family, although it all ends in an argument as Russ' father insists that Russ should settle down and have children, but he refuses as he is gay. Later, while he is at a bar with Mike discussing the stone cudgel, the town drunk Zadok overhears them and promises to tell Russ what its purpose is if he buys him alcohol. Russ obliges, and while at a gas station to buy beer, the clerk hands him a note suggesting that he should leave the town. Russ ignores this and goes to the pier to meet Zadok, who tells Russ that the cudgel is for sacrificing people to the gods of Russ' father's cult. Zadok is then startled by something moving in the sea, and the pair part ways. Russ then confronts the gas station clerk about the note she had given him, and she reveals that her little brother has been taken by the cult and asks Russ to find him. Looking for answers, he visits an old schoolmate whose husband allegedly has a book that might shed light on the nature of the stone cudgel. However, this turns out to be a ruse, and Russ is drugged and raped. Waking up in his motel room, Russ scrambles to find out everything he can about the strange events in the town and finds out the town has been plagued by a string of disappearances. He finally finds the gas station clerk's brother in an abandoned house, and the child leads him into the basement where he promptly disappears. The basement connects to a vast tunnel network, where Russ encounters amphibious monsters. Escaping the tunnels, Russ ends up at Mike's home where they embrace their teenage feelings for each other and have sex. The next morning, they discover the gas station clerk's brother killed and dumped at Mike's doorstep. The police then arrest Russ as a suspect for the boy's murder, and Russ is locked up in a holding cell. That night chaos breaks loose in the town as the Deep Ones rise from the sea. Russ uses the chaos to escape with Mike, and the two go off to rescue Russ' sister. However, at the house he is greeted by his father and his cult who warmly welcome him to the house and show him the baby that was produced as the result of his rape. He is taken to the seashore where his father tells him to sacrifice Mike with the stone cudgel in exchange for acceptance and an eternal life. The film ends

with Russ readying himself to strike someone with the cudgel, but the film ends before it is revealed whether he killed Mike or his father.

Perhaps the most important way in which Dan Gildark's *Cthulhu* changes the narrative of Lovecraft's original text is by bringing the protagonist even more to the forefront, further highlighting his status as a marginalised person. While this is arguably a necessity of the adaptation's transition from text to film due to "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" mostly consisting of the narrator describing the town of Innsmouth and its people, this change affects the narrative drastically. While the protagonist of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" is essentially nothing more than a passive observer who only gains real agency at the end of the story, the protagonist of *Cthulhu* takes centre stage in the plot, with the plot revolving around him and his marginalised identity from the very start. For example, Russ' homosexuality is established in the opening scene of the movie by showing him waking up from next to a naked man (1:25-3:25), with his homosexuality driving much of the plot throughout the film, as it for example fuels the conflict between him and his father as well as his relationship with Mike. He also has a distinct past with the town, he has a social life and friends and family, which clearly illustrate his place in society and how he interacts with it; all things which are not really obvious with the anonymous narrator of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth". Therefore, unlike "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" where the narrative relies on the reader to inject their own values onto the relatively blank canvas of the narrator (as can be seen with the ambiguity of the ending for example), *Cthulhu* more directly steers the viewer to be able to sympathise with Russ more easily, even if they themselves might not have any prior experiences with marginalisation and helps them to identify with the horrors that marginalisation entails more vividly. The viewer being able to sympathise with Russ' character is important from the perspective of generating horror, as horror fiction can only really generate the feeling of horror in its audience if they are able to relate to the feelings of the protagonist (Carroll 91). Therefore, *Cthulhu* fully leans into the implications of marginality present in Lovecraft's

original text and brings them to the forefront in order to exploit them for generating horror in the viewer.

With the focus shifted to the protagonist and his status as a queer person, the horror also becomes queer in its nature. Russ' homosexuality places him at odds with the conservative small-town population and especially his father and his cult, who wish to groom him into his father's heir. As such, the horror of *Cthulhu* stems largely from society's wish to enforce heterosexuality upon queer people, or as Mark Hain argues "The horror conveyed in some of Lovecraft's stories and film adaptations over wilfully degenerate forms of procreation, including inbreeding and humans mating with non-humans, is transferred in *Cthulhu* to the horror of being forced to procreate" (6). In this way then the protagonist's status as a member of the queer community – as well as the marginalisation and alienation that are associated with said identity – fuel the horror of the film. Thus, Russ is trapped in something of a catch-22 situation: he either has to conform to the societal expectation of heterosexuality and procreation at the expense of denying his identity or embrace his queer identity and be shunned by his family and community and be left an outsider. This draws a parallel with the dilemma that the protagonist in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" faces at the end of the story – to stay in the normal world and be ostracised or embrace his monstrous identity and be free – but this time this dilemma is superimposed onto the very real struggle of marginalised groups trying to live in the societies that they exist in, with their identities conflicting with the heteronormative expectations often imposed upon them, like for example expecting them to establish a family. In other words, in order to exist in the community of Rivermouth, Russ has to choose between alienation in the form of either voluntary inclusion (joining his father's cult and engaging in a heterosexual relationship) or involuntary exclusion (becoming a social outcast shunned by his family for being homosexual). The movie hints at Russ' potential future (or perhaps more aptly the lack thereof) were he to accept either of these two options through two of the influential characters in Russ' life: his friend/lover Mike and his father. The film stresses this link

between these characters via visual means, specifically by having Russ mirror the appearance of these characters as his relationship with these characters changes and evolves, with Russ initially looking like Mike and progressively adopting more and more of the visual style of his father like wearing purple and shaving his head (see fig. 1) after Russ is disillusioned by Mike's performative heterosexuality.



Figure 1. Stills from Gilldark, *Cthulhu* (17:23; 1:44:52)

The film represents the concept of voluntary inclusion in the form of Mike, Russ' childhood friend and subsequent lover, who in an effort to fit into the conservative society has opted for what can only be called performative heterosexuality. Mike reveals that since him and Russ last met, he has married and subsequently divorced a woman and even had a child (18:00-18:30), although it is implied that this was borne out of a desire to conform societal expectations, as Mike probes whether Russ was faking his brief relationship with a woman in his formative years (20:05). Mike's alienated relationship with his sexuality is made even clearer when he tells Russ that their time as teenagers masturbating together in the town net shed was the only time in his life that made sense to him, equating their teenage relationship, their now-renewed romance as well as his time in the closet to how the protagonists in C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* enjoy a fulfilling life in the fantasy world inside of a closet only to later return to the grim realities of the real world (1:15:40-1:18:35). While

the two end up embracing their relationship and sexuality by the end of the film, before this turning point Mike essentially represents the idea of alienation through voluntary inclusion and what might have come of Russ if he had decided to stay in Rivermouth. As already briefly touched upon above, this bond between the two characters is something that is also established through visual means, as the two initially have very similar haircuts that both of them have retained since their teenage years. The film intentionally draws the viewer's attention to this fact by including a prolonged scene of Russ cutting his hair after their initial reunion (20:53-21:53). The haircut is clearly meaningful to Russ as he has maintained it for at least a decade after leaving Rivermouth, likely reminding him of his relationship with Mike. Thus, Russ cutting his hair signals a break from him being able to identify with Mike because at this point in the narrative Mike has essentially come to signify everything that Russ ran away from; a point made even stronger by the fact that after their initial meetup Russ has a nightmare where he transforms into his conservative father. This is arguably where a lot of the anxiety that fuels the horror of the narrative arises from; the contradictory state of being a queer person who is forced to act straight in order to fit in.

While Mike represents the horror of being a repressed minority, Russ' father represents various repressive societal structures, as he embodies both conservative religious institutions and the heteronormative family values enforced by them, and as such comes to also represent alienation through involuntary exclusion. His relationship is not one of straightforward contempt for Russ, as he offers Russ immortality if he joins his cult, as shown in a video tape Russ' mother made for her son before her death (1:37:20-1:38:10), as well as being willing to murder a pair of police officers that threaten to re-arrest Russ after he escapes from jail at the end of the movie (1:43:30-1:44:00). However, his love is not unconditional since it is shown that he is only willing to accept Russ if he suppresses his homosexuality and "converts" into a heterosexual so that he may have children. This is especially evident from the ending of the movie, where Russ' father uncharacteristically warmly welcomes Russ home, smiling and holding his hand (1:44:11), compared to his prior cold treatment

of Russ during their first meeting where both his physical demeanour (serious and menacing) and the composition of the shot (see fig. 2) making him appear distant from Russ (28:19). Arguably the biggest contributor towards this change in attitude is his assumed perception that Russ has turned straight due to him fathering a child, despite the fact that Russ was raped by the mother. Of course, to Russ' father this fact is largely irrelevant, as Russ' personal happiness or even willingness to conform are secondary to his wish to make Russ conform to heteronormative ideals of the man as the head of the nuclear family. Thus, Russ' father embodies the heteronormative and alienating nature of the conservative American institutions that *Cthulhu* appears to criticise by displaying them as deeply alienating. This heteronormativity is intrinsically connected to the horror of *Cthulhu* by presenting Russ' father (and by extension the institutions he represents) as a very contradictory in his treatment of Russ: both accepting and at the same time not, as well as being cruelly indifferent to the suffering the ideals he upholds inflicts on those that are unable to conform to those ideals.



Figure 2. Still from Gilldark, *Cthulhu* (28:19)

This contradictoriness of heteronormative attitudes truly come to a head in the character of Russ' aunt Josie, who Russ visits at the mental hospital where she is being taken care of. While she is a relatively minor character, she showcases the damaging and contradictory, even borderline schizophrenic nature of heteronormative thinking. During Russ' encounter with her, she constantly

switches between being warm and helpful to being openly hostile towards Russ. In this regard, perhaps one of the more revealing lines she speaks is “I know you don’t talk to people much because you being a fag and all, but I don’t care because some of my best friends were fags” (27:30-28:00). Her overall tone is caring and warm, but that tone is vastly overshadowed by the liberal use of slurs targeted at Russ and the use of the common deflection of “some of my best friends are X”. This contradictoriness makes it exceedingly difficult to discern her true feelings, making her seem threatening, duplicitous, and most importantly alienating as a character due to her character being difficult to identify with because of said contradictoriness. This can be seen as being representative of the relationship marginalised people have with the usually heteronormative societies they inhabit, even if that relationship is friendly on the surface. By definition, the relationship between the marginalised and the surrounding “normal” society is an alienated one, as the marginalised exist solely due to the societal norms set by the status quo that set them apart in the first place. As a result, people who belong to and upkeep the said status quo who nonetheless try to be accommodating to marginalised people come across as deeply alienating, as they are more or less attempting to indoctrinate them into a system that on a fundamental level also rejects them, as if to say that the marginalised should accept their position as an “insider as an outsider”, i.e., someone who both belongs and does not belong. Therefore, in the framework of horror fiction such individuals or institutions would be construed as monstrous due to their inherent contradictoriness and inability or unwillingness to fully accommodate marginalised people, which in the case of *Cthulhu* is exhibited by the split personality disorder that Josie suffers from, which also works to mark the institutions embodied by Josie as monstrously Other.

Therefore, in the context of *Cthulhu*, monstrosity (and thus the horror) largely stems from the status quo’s inability to accommodate marginalised people in a meaningful way. More specifically, *Cthulhu* explores the role of the nuclear family in enforcing the heteronormative standards of the conservative American status quo. The movie does this through Russ’ father’s cult,

which places a lot of emphasis on the role of the family. In fact, the movie portrays the cult and the family as being largely synonymous institutions with Russ' family being essentially a miniaturised version of his father's cult. The movie therefore tries to establish a concrete connection between monstrosity and the heteronormative nature of the nuclear family. In essence, the movie establishing this connection is a play on the horror that permeates through a lot of Lovecraft's literature including "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" — the horror of one's family history containing dark, unspeakable secrets; revealing a horrible truth about the character's identity, leading them to inevitable ruin — that *Cthulhu* recontextualises and transforms into anxiety over one's known queer identity making any kind of positive future seem impossible. In other words, while Lovecraft is more concerned with fears over the past and the continuation of one's cultural identity as can be seen with the threat imposed by the Deep Ones in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", *Cthulhu* instead draws its horror from the present state of things for LGBTQ+ people and wondering if queer identities truly have a future. Therefore, the movie is almost a complete reversal of the story it is based on, while at the same time maintaining the essence of the original narrative. As such, *Cthulhu* draws heavily on the feeling of marginalisation and alienation, as at its core it is a movie about the fear of futurelessness in a world that does not wish for marginalised people to have a (meaningful) future. This theme of futurelessness permeates the narrative so strongly that even the main monster of the story, i.e. Russ' father, is driven by a fear of futurelessness regarding the continuation of his family, which is in line with the similarly conservative feelings of futurelessness that are felt in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", even if those feelings are more racially motivated.

Nowhere is this theme of futurelessness more evident than in the ending of the movie. This effect of futurelessness stems from the ultimatum Russ is presented with: to embrace is homosexuality and live in a world where the possibility of a positive future is growing more and more impossible, or choose a future that he cannot truly identify with. This differs greatly from the ending of Lovecraft's original text, which presents a more hopeful image of the future, where the

main character is able to achieve something of a utopian future for themselves of being able to live eternally in an environment which wholeheartedly accepts him for who he really is despite his “monstrous” self. Of course, the key difference here is that the ending of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” was meant to be horrifying to the people reading the story at the time of publication, even if from a contemporary perspective it can be interpreted as being something of a happy ending. However, a progressive adaptation that would try to achieve the same effect of horror would likely therefore have to adopt a different strategy, just as *Cthulhu* does. While the movie could just as well end with a clear-cut ending where Russ chooses alienating conformity by killing Mike, it instead opts for ambiguity which is arguably a far more powerful way of creating the feeling of futurelessness in the viewer. The open-endedness of the ending means that the viewer themselves is left clueless and wondering what the future of the characters will bring, if anything. Any kind of concrete conclusion to the story would in itself imply the existence of at least some kind of a future, but instead the story cuts just short of this, leaving only the possibility of speculation. Therefore, the ending of *Cthulhu* leans into the ambiguity found in the ending of “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”, with the key difference of the ending of *Cthulhu* being intentionally ambiguous instead of being borne out of two different, conflicting readings. Thus, the ending of *Cthulhu* works to leave the viewer feeling alienated and uncertain about the future, creating a feeling of futurelessness in the viewer, which in turn helps to create and amplify the feeling of horror.

Cthulhu's reliance on the feeling of futurelessness as a way to generate horror leaves “traditional” supernatural monstrosity that is based on the Other in the backseat in favour of exploring the horrors of marginalisation in a way that is more based on reality rather than fiction. Indeed, unlike in “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”, the role of the supernatural in generating horror is minimal to the point where it could feasibly have been completely left out by the creators without impacting the narrative in any concrete manner. While Lovecraft's original text relies on the supernatural to convey the sense of alienation, here the alienation is achieved through the more

grounded approach of having the marginalisation of the protagonist be the main source of horror. This more grounded approach to horror is a unifying trait between the two works of contemporary Lovecraftian horror examined in this thesis, as this is also the case with *Lovecraft Country* as much as it is with *Cthulhu*. *Cthulhu*'s especially subdued use of the supernatural is central to how it decides to portray marginalisation. It steers clear of the horror genre's pre-established connection between the marginal and the monstrous, and instead chooses to sever this connection in order to build up horror that is more queer kind of horror; one that wholeheartedly rejects marginal identities as being something Other and a thing to be scared of, and instead portrays the real horror as being the oppression that people from these backgrounds face. Indeed, even the few supernatural elements that are present in the movie are directly linked to such oppressive institutions, as they are shown as being subservient to Russ' father's cult and help to spread the cult's influence all over America by taking over the country (1:47:30-1:47:45). Thus, even this supernatural element can be seen as being more about the fear of small-town American religious conservatism spreading its values over to the rest of the country. As such, the ending of *Cthulhu* also mirrors the fears expressed in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" of the racial Other spreading outside the confines of Innsmouth, although here replaced with a fear of heteronormative conservative values.

The horror of *Cthulhu* adopts Lovecraft's original text in a way that highlights the marginalised nature of its characters, especially that of its protagonist. While this is in keeping with the use of marginalisation to generate horror present in the ending of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", *Cthulhu* goes a step further in bringing marginalisation as a theme to the forefront by having the protagonist be from a marginalised background and having the state of being marginalised a more persistent source of horror throughout the entire movie, instead of just being confined to the ending like in Lovecraft's original text. This shows that contemporary works of Lovecraftian fiction recognise alienation and marginalisation as an intrinsic element within the genre, while also transforming those themes to better suit a more contemporary narrative. As such,

Cthulhu is at the same time subversive and true to its source material. In essence, what *Cthulhu* does bring to the table is a strong sense of futurelessness that is intrinsic to marginalisation and uses that to generate the feeling of horror in its viewer. The horror has therefore shifted from simply the fear of becoming marginalised to the horror of actually *being* marginalised. All in all, *Cthulhu*'s use of the narrative outline of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" to represent the struggles of marginalised people with only a few changes to that outline goes to show how integral those themes are to at least a portion of Lovecraftian horror. Thus, Lovecraftian horror seems to be a particularly attractive genre when it comes to exploring marginalisation, as this is also true of *Lovecraft Country*, even if its usage of marginalisation is more focused on the racial elements present in Lovecraft's original works.

5. Something completely new: *Lovecraft Country* and racial marginalisation

As established in the previous chapter, the ambiguous nature in which Lovecraft's original works portray marginalised people allows adaptations like *Cthulhu* to readily exploit this ambiguity in order to subvert the genre to better reflect the experiences of marginalised people by making the horror be about the experience of being marginalised rather than presenting marginalised people as being somehow inherently horrifying. While marginalisation and alienation are important themes throughout *Lovecraft Country*, I will mainly focus on the titular first short story of the book⁹, as it most strongly correlates with the narratives of both "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" and *Cthulhu* in both setting and rough narrative outline, despite not being directly related to either narrative. This chapter argues that Matt Ruff's *Lovecraft Country* uses the general framework of Lovecraftian horror to highlight the persecution of African Americans and other racially marginalised minorities, especially focusing on their limited access to space, both in the physical sense as well as in more abstract ways, such as their access to certain literary genres. Moreover, the way in which *Lovecraft Country* uses the themes of alienation and racial marginalisation is arguably also a significant factor in what makes the narrative feel authentically Lovecraftian, despite the text being wholly original in its contents, and not directly relying on the established canon of Lovecraft's own fiction as tends to be the case with the vast majority of Lovecraftian fiction.

Lovecraft Country takes place in Jim Crow era America and follows a black Korean war veteran named Atticus Turner, who receives a letter from his estranged father, Montrose. His father informs him that he has finally found new information about the ancestry of Atticus's dead mother – something that Montrose has been obsessed over forever – specifically where her family was originally from. Montrose invites Atticus to join him on a trip to this village, called Ardham, where ac-

⁹ For clarification, the book itself consists of several separate, largely self-contained short stories that build towards an overarching plot, mimicking the feel and structure of an anthology.

According to Montrose Atticus will be able to claim a secret inheritance that has been kept from him. When Atticus eventually tries to go see his father, he finds out that Montrose has gone missing. He surmises that Montrose has gone to Ardham on his own and decides to go look for him with his uncle George and his childhood friend Letitia. On their way to Ardham, they narrowly evade being lynched after being cornered by white supremacists at a diner, which leads to them being chased by the local sheriff. They are briefly captured by the sheriff and his deputies but are saved after some unseen monster attacks the sheriff and his men. The trio then finally reach Ardham and their destination; a manor house called the Ardham Lodge. There, they are welcomed by the owner of the manor, Samuel Braithwhite and his son Caleb. They reveal to Atticus that he is in fact descended from the Lodge's founder on his mother's side, which makes Atticus a leading member of the lodge, much to the chagrin of its conservative members. Samuel tells Atticus that the lodge members are in essence sorcerers, and that Atticus's heritage also makes him essential for a ritual the lodge is trying to perform. Later, Atticus finds his father locked in the cellar of one of the buildings in the village. Freeing his father, Atticus and his entourage attempt to flee Ardham, but are promptly stopped by Caleb who takes them back to the mansion for the ritual. Before the ritual takes place, Caleb gives Atticus a note containing a spell which he later uses to disrupt the ritual and kill all the lodge members. With the lodge now gone (bar Caleb), Atticus and his friends are free to go home. The rest of *Lovecraft Country* focuses on various members of Atticus's extended family getting entangled with Caleb Braithwhite in some way or another, with the book finally culminating in Atticus cursing Caleb so that he is unable to approach Atticus's family in any way or perform any magic.

Where *Cthulhu* reframes the themes of alienation from one's family present Lovecraft's writing in the context of sexual marginalisation, *Lovecraft Country* instead opts to embrace the

overtly racial and racist elements often present in Lovecraft's fiction¹⁰, as is the case with "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" for example. Of course, as is perhaps to be expected of a piece of progressive contemporary writing, the underlying racial dynamics are challenged and subverted. In the case of *Lovecraft Country*, this is achieved simply by flipping the viewpoint from the traditionally WASP protagonists of Lovecraft's writing to instead portraying the story from the perspective of a person of colour. However, the narrative retains and even highlights the racism of the original texts in order to provide commentary on both the marginalisation of black Americans, as well as the genre of Lovecraftian horror itself. While this may seem like a relatively unsurprising subversion of the genre, this simple change has drastic effects on how horror is generated in the book. Indeed, *Lovecraft Country* explicitly probes the genre of so-called "weird fiction", a genre that S.T Joshi describes as a loose amalgamation of "fantasy, supernatural horror, non-supernatural horror, and quasi science fiction" (12) that emerged at the turn of the 20th century and from which Lovecraft's writing stems from. Because of this probing, *Lovecraft Country* can be described as being at its core thoroughly metatextual, as may be evident from the name of the book alone. As such, the book invites the reader to think of the story specifically in terms of Lovecraft's original works, despite not overtly relying on the Lovecraftian mythos in its narrative. The book achieves this through focusing on the characters discussing the racism present in works of so-called "weird fiction" and the often contradictory and complex relationship that people of colour (and arguably by extension other marginalised people as well) have with the genre. For example, this can be seen with Earl, an elderly black mechanic who helps out Atticus when his car breaks down on his way to see his father, who states that he had loved Tom Swift novels when he was young "but which embarrassed him now, both for the books' depiction of Negroes and for the fact that as a boy he hadn't noticed it, despite his father's repeated attempts to point it out to him" (5). This experience is also shared by Atticus,

¹⁰ See for example Simmons (2013) for a more thorough exploration of the racial and racist elements in Lovecraftian fiction.

whose father similarly chastised him for the racist contents of the books that he was reading, including (and highlighting) the works of Lovecraft in an effort to make “Atticus think about what he read, rather than imbibing it mindlessly” (13). All of this therefore helps to set the stage for the rest of the book and to direct the reader to critically examine the genre tropes being utilised and subverted by the book.

More than anything, by inviting the reader to critically examine the genre of horror fiction, *Lovecraft Country* also challenges the notion that it is a solely white genre. Of course, horror is not unique in this sense, as historically speaking much of Western literature up until very recently has been written by white people, with marginalised voices struggling to have their voices heard, especially in the sphere of literature. However, what does set horror fiction apart is its reliance on societal norms to inform what is considered horrifying and what is not, and thus it also follows that any discriminatory notions about race would be emphasised even more in this genre over others, and as such the genre would logically perhaps seem deeply alienating to readers coming from marginalised backgrounds. Indeed, this notion is portrayed in *Lovecraft Country* when a police officer is convinced that Atticus has stolen the car he is driving simply because there are science fiction books in his trunk (8), displaying that, at least from the perspective of the white police officer, it is impossible or at least very unlikely for a black person to read science fiction, and as such suggests that science fiction is an exclusively white genre. Of course, things are rarely this straightforward and the book goes to great lengths to prove that such sentiments are based on nothing but prejudice. For example, Atticus is far from the only black character in the book who enjoys reading so-called white genres of fiction like horror, as this is also shown to be the case with Earl, Uncle George, and Atticus’s 12-year-old cousin Horace. The latter of the three is even shown to engage in creating his own science fiction stories starring black characters (11). This crucially ties into *Lovecraft Country*’s attempts to defy previously established lines of perceived racial segregation within fiction that would perhaps normally be considered alienating to any given marginalised demographic. That is to

say that the book in essence suggests that it is not necessarily the genre and its conventions that make it alienating to certain groups, but more the societal norms that inform the contents of those genres.

On this front, *Lovecraft Country* tries to break away from some of the tropes set by its source of inspiration through its portrayal of the supernatural. For example, in both “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” and *Cthulhu*, the supernatural is an unquestionably malicious and evil force, even if the latter derives most of its horror from the oppressiveness of heteronormative ideas of family that society upholds. Similar to *Cthulhu*, *Lovecraft Country* also shares this theme of moving away from the Other as a source of horror and also takes a step further in this regard by making oppressive institutions and racism the only real source of horror in the book, and in turn depicts the supernatural as a persistently neutral or even sometimes benevolent force, as can be seen with the unseen monster that saves Atticus from being killed by the sheriff (54-5), for example. This drastically differs from the treatment that the supernatural gets in *Cthulhu*, as in that case the supernatural serves as an extension of the oppressive status quo, rather than as a wholly separate entity, and thus relies on it to be a source of horror in itself. In this way then, *Lovecraft Country*’s portrayal of the supernatural is in essence a more thorough subversion of its role in horror fiction, in contrast to the reimagining that *Cthulhu* offers. This is very much in keeping with *Lovecraft Country*’s explicit wish for its readers to consume literature critically rather than passively, as this forces the reader to rethink their preconceived notions of the supernatural in the context of horror fiction. This is especially important because the supernatural often serves as an analogue for the marginalised and monstrous Other, as can be seen in “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” where the monstrous Deep Ones are essentially intended to represent people of mixed racial origin. As such, if the horror genre is to truly break free from its discriminatory origins, there needs to be concrete steps like this to bring into question how we view the Other in popular media, monstrous or otherwise, which is what *Lovecraft Country* attempts to achieve through its portrayal of the supernatural in more neutral

terms that allows for the reader to reevaluate what the function of the supernatural, and thus the Other, is within horror fiction.

Lovecraft Country actively draws a parallel between marginalised people and the supernatural. While this is also true of Lovecraft's original writings, the connection there is almost always done in an effort to demonise marginalised people by having them have some kind of inherent link to the monstrous, as for example is the case in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", where people of colour are portrayed as having a connection with the monstrous Deep Ones. However, *Lovecraft Country* depicts this connection as being the result of marginalisation driving marginalised people to occupy the same spaces as monsters do, rather than being the result of the Other having some sort of affinity for the monstrous. Because marginalised people are often either have limited access to or are even completely barred from the same spaces as the general population is, they are driven to the margins of society; a space that has traditionally in the genre of horror fiction been occupied by monsters (Carroll, 34-5). In contrast to more traditional pieces of horror fiction as for example "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" where the protagonist ends up in these marginal spaces due to their own free will, the marginalised protagonists of *Lovecraft Country* end up in these spaces because they have simply been pushed there out of necessity. For example, in the second short story of *Lovecraft Country*, "Dreams of the Which [sic] House", Letitia ends up buying a haunted house simply because it is the only house that she can acquire due to her race (112-118), and similarly in the first short story Atticus ends up having an encounter with a monster in the woods because he is trying to evade people trying to lynch him. While more typical horror narratives also require their characters to be forced into the same spaces as the supernatural, the key difference here is that those characters usually end up there not out of necessity, but rather out of their own volition. The book thus reframes and reimagines familiar horror fiction tropes, recentring the focus of the narrative to the marginality of its characters by highlighting the difference between how marginalised and non-marginalised people are able to move within spaces. With this comes a

completely new way in which the narrative treats space and its relation to both the supernatural and the marginal, and the relationship those two typically have within the genre.

Through this reimagining of the horror trope of having the character end up in spaces at the edges of society, *Lovecraft Country* also has an explicit focus on space and the relationship marginalised people have with space. This is not only limited to marginalised spaces as logically marginalised people often occupy — at least partially — the same spaces as the general population. However, how these people interact with these spaces are significantly different. In the case of *Lovecraft Country*, this comes in the form of reversing the roles that marginalised and non-marginalised spaces have within horror fiction. That is to say that while *Lovecraft Country* at least partially maintains the traditional connection horror fiction has between marginalised people and marginalised spaces, the book instead opts to portray “normal”, non-marginalised spaces as more horrifying for its marginalised characters. This type of reversal of roles is in keeping with what can be seen in certain works of contemporary horror fiction as for example *Cthulhu*, where the oppressive “normal” or the status quo is made to be the primary source of horror, as is the case with both *Cthulhu* and *Lovecraft Country*. For example, during the events of the first short story in *Lovecraft Country*, Atticus is at a significantly higher risk of danger outside of Ardham than he is within the village that genre conventions would otherwise dictate to be the home of the horrifying elements, as is the case with Innsmouth and Rivermouth in both “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” and *Cthulhu* respectively. Of course, this is perhaps the logical conclusion of the type of subversion of genre conventions that *Lovecraft Country* aims for, as it helps to disassociate the marginal from being a source of horror and instead relegating this role to the spaces that are at the root of what creates the conditions for marginalised people to be marginalised in the first place.

Lovecraft Country further stresses the importance of space in the creation of horror by explicitly drawing the reader’s attention to how marginalised people perceive spaces. Perhaps the clearest example of this is when how the reader is introduced to the travel guide published by Uncle

George, *The Safe Negro Travel Guide*, which as its name would suggest aims to provide black Americans to safely navigate the country. This introduction to the Guide comes in the form of description of a copy illustrated by Horace:

It was a road atlas, the same edition as the one upstairs, only this copy had been extensively illustrated with brightly coloured drawings. ... Major Negro population centers like Chicago's South Side were represented as shining fortresses. Smaller neighbourhoods and enclaves were marked with towers or oases. ... Less friendly parts of the country were populated by ogres and trolls, vampires and werewolves, wild beasts, ghosts, evil sorcerers, and hooded white knights. In Oklahoma, a great white dragon coiled around Tulsa, breathing fire onto the neighborhood where Atticus's father and Uncle George had been born. (20)

Outside of the obvious separation between safe and unsafe areas being represented with the safety of friendly fortifications and the danger posed by various monstrous creatures, *Lovecraft Country* works to visualise the relationship marginalised people have with space by representing America in the style of a Medieval or Early Modern sea map, including the marginalia portraying various monsters lurking at the edges of the world that often decorated these types of maps. This is far from an insignificant detail, as maps have historically shaped our understanding of the world and the people in it, or as Surekha Davies argues, these illustrations “made epistemological claims about the proper way to make ethnographic knowledge, and ontological ones about ... the boundaries between humans and monstrous peoples. The maps’ illustrations emblemized what a region’s people had in common and what made them distinguishable from those of other regions” (3). The idea of monstrous peoples is of special note here as it helps to explain how the book treats monstrosity in general. As a concept, John Block Friedman states that the monstrous peoples and races¹¹ of the Medieval imagination were not strictly speaking monstrous, but that they “simply differed in physical appearance and social practices from the person describing them. ... Even the most bizarre, however, were not supernatural or infernal creatures, but varieties of men, whose chief distinction from the men of Europe was one of geography” (1). This, as stated, is much in keeping with *Lovecraft Coun-*

¹¹ For the sake of clarity, it is perhaps important to note that Friedman uses these terms (monstrous people; monstrous races) interchangeably in his book.

try portraying racist institutions and people as the real monsters of the story. Like their Medieval counterparts, these people are monstrous due to their values and practices rather than them being supernatural creatures, even if the Christian values that informed the judgements of those early explorers are exchanged for values that are more relevant to contemporary audiences.

With this focus on space that is shown with the map — and by extension the Guide as a whole — *Lovecraft Country* introduces a general focus on travel and especially the horror of travelling as a marginalised person. Through its choice to represent the map in the style of a Medieval sea map, the book draws a parallel with the dangers and many unknown variables that came with early ocean exploration. While travel is a component in all of the narratives examined in this thesis, it is not given too much focus in either “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” or *Cthulhu*. Instead, both texts portray travel as near instantaneous and effortless, essentially only serving as a means to an end for the characters to end up where the plot needs them to be, and as such receives little to no focus. However, in the case of *Lovecraft Country*, great attention is drawn to the act of travelling itself, with about half of the first short story taking place outside of Ardham, following the protagonists on their way there. Travel is shown to require planning and deliberate navigation to avoid any areas of the world that might be hostile towards them; a concern that does not arise in either of the texts with white protagonists. For example, the opening pages of *Lovecraft Country* are dedicated to showing the type of planning required for Atticus’s voyage through the American countryside, with him having to stock food and drink in order to drive 450 miles to his destination without stopping (1). Indeed, as already stated above, most of the direct danger that Atticus faces comes during this time spent travelling, as travelling means that he must leave the safety of the fortresses and oases of black communities that dot the country and risk crossing paths with the monstrous people that occupy the spaces in between those sanctuaries. In other words, as *Lovecraft Country* portrays the situation, the dangers that would normally be confined within small villages and remote corners of the world in traditional horror narratives have now expanded to span much of America. This is even

alluded to in the very title of the book, *Lovecraft Country*, which normally only refers to New England where a large portion of Lovecraft's fiction takes place, is instead intended to mean the whole of the country of the United States; something that Lovecraft himself would have approved of considering he wished for Jim Crow laws to be enforced all across the country and not just in the South (Kneale, 115).

This idea of travel as a source of horror is further corroborated by the quote from the Safe Negro Travel Guide that opens the book, describing a unit of measurement called the "Jim Crow mile". The book describes the Jim Crow mile as being "A unit of measurement, peculiar to colored motorists, comprising both physical distance and random helpings of fear, paranoia, frustration, and outrage. Its amorphous nature makes exact travel times impossible to calculate, and its violence puts the traveler's good health and sanity constantly at hazard" (1). By prefacing the first chapter, and thus the entirety of the book with this quote, *Lovecraft Country* sets the overarching tone that it takes when talking about marginalised spaces and travel and the horror associated with them. The Jim Crow mile is described in terms that in ordinary works of Lovecraftian fiction would be reserved for monsters, being described as indescribable, inconsistent, and formless, and as such the unit is in keeping with the qualities of a monster as described by Noël Carroll. The use of the word "amorphous" to describe the Jim Crow mile is also of especial note, as it connects the Jim Crow mile to the stereotypical Lovecraftian monster that is both formless and indescribable, inspired largely by the Shoggoths that appear in several of his stories, described as "normally shapeless entities composed of viscous jelly" and having a "constantly shifting shape and volume" in Lovecraft's "At the Mountains of Madness" (473). Therefore, *Lovecraft Country* implies that for marginalised people space itself can be monstrous, as it too can work antagonistically towards them in an intolerant society just like more conventional monsters do.

In conclusion then, *Lovecraft Country* breaks away from established conventions of Lovecraftian horror while at the same time staying true to the core elements of the genre. It answers the

question of what Lovecraftian horror would be like if written from the perspective of black America by exploiting the already existent fixation on race within Lovecraft's writing. With this change in perspective, the horror of marginalisation rises to the forefront of the narrative and with it several aspects of the genre get highlighted that otherwise take the backseat. As with *Cthulhu*, *Lovecraft Country*'s horror is more focused on making the oppressive institutions behind their marginalisation the source of horror rather than the supernatural. Moreover, this is not the only way that marginalisation contributes to the overall horror of the book. Marginalised peoples' access to space differs greatly to that of non-marginalised ones, especially so in cases where the person cannot hide their identity, as is the case with the black characters of *Lovecraft Country* living during the Jim Crow era where their access to space would have been physically (and often violently) limited. This leads the book to innovate on how space itself is portrayed in horror fiction, making it monstrous through its alienating qualities.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has shown that there is a trend within contemporary Lovecraftian fiction that capitalises on the themes of alienation and marginalisation present in Lovecraft's original writings. While the genre itself might at first glance seem like it would make a poor fit for marginalised voices due to the deep-seated prejudices embedded into the fabric of the genre, they have found effective ways of appropriating the genre for themselves, showing that the usually conservative genre of horror fiction is only as oppressive as the values that inform the horror within it. For example, as we see with the usage of monsters in both *Cthulhu* and *Lovecraft Country*, neither of the two works rely on the monstrous Other to generate horror, instead opting to have the source of horror be the marginal status of their protagonists. Perhaps such a change is to be expected, as the genre would arguably not have seen the kind of resurgence in the past couple of years if it had truly been stuck in the early to mid-1900's, especially among minority authors. However, even Lovecraft's own writing (despite its often heavy-handed use of racist tropes and imagery) proves to be a source of identification for marginalised people. As seen with "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", the narrative relies on the reader's ability to sympathise with a marginalised character in order to generate horror, or maybe more accurately with someone who becomes marginalised during the story. While the original intentions behind why this should be seen as horrifying remain outdated, it is hard not to read the story as having at least some modicum of sympathy for its marginalised characters, especially since the main source of horror in the story seems to be the act of becoming Othered. For certain contemporary adaptations like *Cthulhu* and *Lovecraft Country* this certainly rings true, although for these narratives the horror stems not so much from becoming marginalised, but rather from the state of *being* marginalised. We can see this with how *Cthulhu* transforms the narrative ambiguity present in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" concerning its protagonist's marginality and brings that to the forefront of the story by making the character of Russ explicitly marginalised. In the case of *Lovecraft Country*, the book takes an actively critical stance on what makes horror horrifying in the

first place, and challenges preconceived notions on how the genre ought to work at least according to general horror studies by refusing to make the Other explicitly monstrous, and instead presenting the Other as either positive or ambivalent in nature. Therefore, this thesis observes that there is a clear transfer of a certain horror-filled sentiment towards becoming or being marginalised—or in other words the fear of having one's potential for a meaningful future be stripped away—that is present all the way across from Lovecraft's original works, to direct adaptations such as *Cthulhu*, and finally wholly original works of fiction like *Lovecraft Country* that only rely on the general conventions of the sub-genre.

The regrettable fact is that this thesis can only scratch the surface of the overall topic of marginalisation and alienation in horror fiction. While horror studies are becoming increasingly popular, the interaction between horror and alienation remains somewhat of a niche subject. However, more and more research is taking either a queer (Church; Elliott-Smith; Hain) or a racial (Simmons; Wöll) perspective in examining horror fiction, providing important insight into the relationship marginalised people have with horror fiction and vice versa by exploring how marginalised people are represented within the genre, as is also the case with this thesis. However, these studies tend to focus solely on either racial or sexual marginalisation, which is the gap that I hope to bridge by taking a more general approach to marginalisation and examining its role in Lovecraftian horror across both Lovecraft's original texts as well as later, derivative works. While Lovecraftian horror is admittedly only a relatively small sub-genre in the entirety of horror fiction, the study of Lovecraft and those directly influenced by him is arguably a very fruitful way of examining the genre as a whole due to the immense influence that Lovecraft has had on the genre. As a result, the findings presented in this thesis are more than likely broadly applicable to other forms of horror fiction due to said influence Lovecraft has had as an author, which in itself presents an avenue for further research. This is the case even more so with contemporary writers of Lovecraftian fiction like the two examined here, as they continue to innovate and redefine the

landscape of the genre and how we as readers consume it, which is also a point that *Lovecraft Country* explicitly raises in how it chooses to portray the sub-genre of Lovecraftian fiction. That is to say that these contemporary reinterpretations of Lovecraft's works impact how we as the audience interpret the original texts of Lovecraft by offering a new perspective on them. Therefore, by examining how and why these writers utilise Lovecraftian horror as a genre, this thesis helps to peer into what makes horror fiction so attractive to marginalised people and contemporary audiences alike by identifying the anxieties and taboos presented in these works.

This thesis shows that because horror fiction is informed by the anxieties and fears of the society it is written in and thus by extension its author, it proves to be a highly malleable genre in how it functions. Therefore, while there might be a temptation to classify horror fiction as something of a conservative genre due to its propensity to demonise the Other and portraying it as monstrous, this is entirely dependent on the author choosing to depict the Other in such a way. As shown in the previous chapters, by adapting either already familiar stories like *Cthulhu* does with "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" or even just the tropes and narrative forms that constitute the genre, authors from marginalised backgrounds can familiarise audiences that would perhaps not have had any kind of prior contact with the struggles of marginalised peoples and break the stigma surrounding the Other, especially within the context of horror fiction. Because horror is a universal feeling, it has the power to unify people from all kinds of social backgrounds, not only because of the feeling of horror they elicit in the reader despite their background, but also because it offers an opportunity for marginalised people to convey how it feels to be marginalised in a particularly evocative way. Perhaps there is an avenue of future research looking into how these types of narratives affect the popular conception of marginalised people. Of course, marginalised people do not only write for the wider masses, as arguably their primary target audience is other marginalised people who might find solace in finding ways of dealing with their trauma through fiction. While Lovecraft himself famously argued that the fear of the unknown was the oldest and strongest kind

of fear, perhaps marginalised authors may yet overcome that fear by making their stories heard to the wider masses.

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