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# **The setting of horror in six short stories by H. P. Lovecraft**

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In this thesis I examine how the setting of horror is described and, thus, constructed in stories of weird horror fiction by H. P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft (1890–1937) is known for his attention to setting and use of adjectives. My corpus consists of six short stories from the first half of the 1920s. My focus is on the use of the chronotope and vocabulary, mostly adjectives, in the text. In addition, I am interested in the role of nature in the setting.

Using Bakhtin's chronotope I study the way time and place together create the setting and affect the story. The actions of the characters are both limited by the location and indicative of the progress of the story by what they do there. I examine the presence of nature through ecocriticism. In this I rely mostly on Tabas, Kröger, and Corstorphine as I discuss nature in horror setting. The most relevant topics are how natural elements are described and how the power of nature is presented.

The three main results of this study are the following: First, many of the places form a threshold, either literally between two places or figuratively between two purposes. Second, nature is much more powerful and grand than humans or anything they make. Third, Lovecraft's use of adjectives is ample and fitting; it creates much of the weird and horrible in his stories. It would be very interesting to expand the research to cover Lovecraft's entire oeuvre.

**Key words:** setting, H. P. Lovecraft, horror fiction, weird fiction, ecocriticism, chronotope

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## 1 Introduction

In addition to just *being*, people are always *somewhere*. Whether a person is in a particular place for a purpose or by their own choice or not does not matter, because the surroundings are there in spite of all that. In the context of narratives, then, Core (2004, 11) notes that place is more than the mere background because “place [...] is the vehicle through which action, the driving motion of the plot, is revealed”. The place, where a character is, sets certain parameters within which one can act. To put it simply, one cannot, for example, swim in a place where there is no water. I discuss this further in subchapter 4.2. Also, “setting is a central convention of the Gothic” (Hillard 2013, 112). The Gothic is, in this thesis, generalised to encompass all horror literature as well. The world is not a vacuum devoid of any kind of visual or other stimulus. We observe our surroundings all the time either consciously or unconsciously. The importance of being able to see around oneself is highlighted when it is compromised, for example, in the night. While discussing darkness, Cavallaro (2002, 21) mentions that moments of transition, like twilight, resist clear distinctions and boundaries and, therefore, they add to the scariness of the situation. Like criminals in real life, most monsters in horror fiction prefer to act during the twilight and the night.

The concept *place* is difficult to define precisely and unanimously. I adopt the definition by Malpas (2018, 35) who states that place enables people and things to be and interact. While philosophical this idea of place is all-encompassing and can be linked to how the *chronotope* works; the chronotope means the combination of the effects of *time* and *place*. Usually, the concept of *setting* actually refers to just time and place, but I add a third element to the formula: the *weather*. The necessity of considering weather in this thesis is partly due to its close relation to horror fiction (for example, stormy nights) and partly due to its relevance to the concept of *chronotope*. I will concentrate on the physical place as the setting, but time and weather are intrinsically linked to it; the latter in particular because it affects the place. The time of the events can often be unspecified in Lovecraft’s fiction (specific dates are given in three out of the six short stories). Lovecraft’s work has been published in many decades, but I limit my focus on short stories written in the first half of the 1920s. This choice is based on the desire to study Lovecraft’s earlier fiction instead of his later writings.

In the case of horror fiction, being outdoors means that horror can come from any direction and hide behind every corner. A restricted area, especially if it is a building, can provide

safety when the danger is outside and you are not; however, knowing that the cause of danger is inside with you can make the restricted area to appear doubly horrible because it is then closer. Another thing that matters is the familiarity of the place: the less we know about the place where we are, the more threatening everything seems. According to Lovecraft (2013, 17), the unknown is the most frightening element due to its unpredictable nature: it is not familiar, thus, it feels unsafe. Even though Lovecraft used this idea as a point of departure mainly in creating disturbing monster figures, it can be applied to the setting as well. Seeing something when the weather is bad, for instance foggy or rainy, results in uncertainty when it comes to describing what was seen, because certain weather conditions can cloud our vision. Tabas (2015, 17) claims that “reading weird realist writings and criticism teaches us to look for the overlooked”. Therefore this kind of reading requires attention to detail and an open mind which I hope to achieve in the analytical process.

Lovecraft is known for his horror fiction which includes mainly short stories; the most famous short stories explore the fictional mythology of Cthulhu. Nevertheless, the rest of Lovecraft’s work is not unworthy of attention and therefore I have chosen to focus on short stories separate from the Cthulhu mythology. Even though Lovecraft (1937, 1) defines his fiction as ‘weird’, I mainly use the concept of *horror* or *weird horror* in reference to his short stories that I study in this thesis, because a literary genre can be characterised by its mood (Chamberlain & Thompson 1998, 2) which, here, is horror. Morgan (1998, 60) proposes that weird, Gothic and horror fiction all fit into the same category because they share so many features, and I follow his definition. Bloom (2012, 211) shares similar thoughts, grouping together ghost stories, horror fiction, terror romance, and Gothic stories while admitting that these styles do not share every feature. However, all these stories have something horrible in them.

As Lovecraft is often referred to as an author of weird (horror) fiction, my purpose is to examine the different settings he uses in his short stories in order to show how much they correspond to settings in classic and Gothic horror fiction and how much they feature elements which do not appear in most other works of horror fiction. Therefore, the first research question that I pose here is this: What are the similarities and differences between the setting in Lovecraft’s weird horror and the setting in classic or Gothic horror fiction? I want to find out how much the two types of settings of horror differ from each other. Lovecraft was familiar with all kinds of horror fiction of his time and earlier works. His 1927 essay “Supernatural Horror in Literature” is considered one of the first and most extensive

overviews of horror fiction written so far (Bloom 2012, 214). The essay includes some remarks on the horror genre in general in addition to introducing an extensive list of authors and their works.

I am also interested in how *nature* is presented in the setting in Lovecraft's short stories. My second research question is this: What is the role of nature in the setting of Lovecraft's short stories? I approach this from the point of view of *literary ecology* and *ecocriticism*: the significance of every small detail on the subject of environment and, furthermore, the significance of the environment to all actions (Waldron 2013, 15). In the short stories that I analyse, the setting is composed of the environment where the characters are. Alongside the setting and nature in it, my interest lies in what is revealed of the setting and how. Thus my third research question is this: How is setting described? Therefore I will also study the lexis of the short stories to some extent.

To summarise, I will study the setting of horrific events in six of Lovecraft's short stories by concentrating on the place, the time, and the weather in this thesis. First, I introduce Lovecraft as an author in chapter two. In addition to that, I briefly describe the short stories in chronological order, i.e., the order in which they have been written. Second, in chapter three, I introduce the theoretical bases of my analysis; each theoretical point will be elaborated on in the corresponding analytical subchapter. Third, I will examine the setting starting with brief introductions to the setting of each short story. Then I study the use of the chronotope, continuing with the ecocritical approach, and finishing my analysis with a subchapter on places with or between two purposes, such as *thresholds*. I will conclude my thesis with a summary of the analysis and some general reflections of the topic.

## 2 H. P. Lovecraft and his short stories

American author Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890–1937) wrote stories already as a child, but he was most productive during the last years of his life. His work has received posthumous appreciation among a limited group of readers and researchers which is partly due to the marginal subgenre of weird fiction. Airaksinen (1999, 3) states that Lovecraft’s stories create a new world which mixes “science, myth, and magic, so that he can be classified among the most difficult authors to understand”. Many of Lovecraft’s short stories appeared in the *Weird Tales* which was a magazine filled with stories about pulp horror and fantasy (Davies 2009, 264). Tabas (2015, 7) makes a note of how extremely careful and attentive Lovecraft is when it comes to where his stories take place, his attention to detail and to the description of the setting. He always does this, whether the setting is fictional or not. The weird in Lovecraft’s writing often reaches further than what is limited by our reality and, as such, is “disrupting our normal sense of being at home in the world” (ibid.). In this thesis, several examples will clarify this in chapter 4.

Despite his known horror stories, Lovecraft was not only an author of fiction. He wrote several philosophical and scientific works in which he discussed the topics of, for instance, materialism and astronomy. Moreover, he was a productive poet. According to Carroll (1990, 115), many of Lovecraft’s horror stories represent the basic horror story plot which he calls the discovery plot; the narrator describes the events they have experienced when they found out or somehow realised that a terrible being exists in the human world. Four of the six short stories in this thesis follow this plot structure clearly; however, as the setting is not strongly related to the plot structure, I will not examine this aspect any further. Kneale (2006, 113) states that “Lovecraft’s fiction is explicitly concerned with thresholds”. Kneale’s statement is intrinsically linked to setting and I elaborate on thresholds in subchapter 4.4.

For my study, I have chosen six short stories of varying length. They represent Lovecraft’s literary production in the first half of the 1920s: the stories are written between 1920 and 1925. During these years he wrote about thirty short stories (Joshi 1996, 9). This amount represents nearly half of the total of his short stories (Biography.com Editors [2014] 2020). The first one is also one of Lovecraft’s personal favourites (Joshi 1996, 79). In 1920, he wrote the short story “The Cats of Ulthar” (henceforth referred to as Ulthar). It tells the story of a couple who kills all cats that enter their property in the village of Ulthar. One day, a group of travellers stops in Ulthar and the cat of a young boy from this group disappears. When the boy



hears about the couple's ways, he prays to the sky causing strange cloud formations to appear. After the group has left the village, the cat-killing couple meets their end.

Another one of Lovecraft's favourites was written in the following year (Joshi 2001, 153). "The Music of Erich Zann" (1921; henceforth referred to as Music) describes the story told by a person about something that happened to them earlier in their life. The protagonist-narrator moved into a new flat and heard the violist who lived in the flat above play a strange melody. Interested, they acquaint themselves with the violist and, one evening, experience the full frenzy of the violist's playing which actually reveals the presence of an unidentified horror. This causes the protagonist-narrator to run out of the building horrified. What bothers them most afterwards is that they cannot find the place again. According to Joshi (1996, 88), this short story is one of the best early works of Lovecraft due to "its sustained atmosphere of incomprehensible weirdness, its evocative capturing of the sense of *bizarrie* latent in ancient places". Lovecraft's later works often contain elements that are difficult to understand. The sex of the protagonist-narrator is not stated explicitly so I will be referring to this person as 'they'.

"The Lurking Fear" (1922; henceforth referred to as Fear) tells the story of a strange monstrosity which dwells in the region of Tempest Mountain where an ancient mansion stands alone and which makes itself known during the frequent, local thunderstorms. The protagonist-narrator once refers to himself as "the middle man" (Fear, 73); thus I refer to this person as 'he'. In Fear, he and his helpers – most of whom end up dead – search the mansion and its surrounding areas interested in the 'lurking fear'. In the end, the protagonist discovers that the monster is a group of "dwarfed, deformed hairy devils or apes" (Fear, 81) which seem to be related to the old Martense family who used to live in the mansion.

The short story "The Unnamable" (henceforth referred to as Unnamable) was written in 1923. In this short story, the protagonist-narrator, Carter, sits on a tomb with his friend, Manton, recounting a story about an unnameable monstrosity lurking in an abandoned house and in the end, this secret but terrible monster attacks them from the old house nearby. The Carter of this story is mostly believed to be Randolph Carter, a character from some other of Lovecraft's stories, but some think it is a fictional version of Lovecraft himself; in any case, I use the pronoun 'he' to refer to this person as both alleged persons are male.

Before visiting Elizabeth, New Jersey, which inspired Lovecraft to write "The Shunned House" (henceforth referred to as House) in 1924, there was an eight-month break in creating

stories (Joshi 2001, 208-209). When the protagonist-narrator of *House* explains the history of his interest in the house, he refers to himself as ‘boy’ so I will refer to this person as ‘he’. *House* presents a story about an old, deserted house whose history has a lot of seemingly natural deaths in it. The protagonist-narrator gives a detailed description of the past of this shunned house before recounting the horrible event which caused the loss of his uncle’s life; in this short story, the life-sucking monstrosity is revealed to be the lingering spirit of a long-ago buried tenant whose grave is found in the cellar.

The sixth short story that I have chosen – “*In the Vault*” (henceforth referred to as *Vault*) – was written and published in 1925. It is a story heard from someone, who knew the protagonist, and told by a doctor. The protagonist, an undertaker called George Birch (male, thus ‘he’), is in the middle of the task of burying the dead from last winter in April when he suddenly gets locked in the receiving tomb, a storage for bodies. The story tells of his escape from that tomb and of how and why his ankles become mangled in the process: Birch clears his way out through a transom above the door using the coffins as ladder. Earlier in the year he has made the coffins for the people who died during the winter and, unfortunately for himself, has made the decision to cut off the feet of an unfriendly man in order to fit him in a slightly flimsy coffin. In the end, the dead man gets his revenge.

The six short stories that I have chosen for my study introduce a variety of places, sources of horror, and plots. Horror is experienced indoors and outdoors. It is met face to face or seen, or at least its presence is felt, from afar. The source of horror is often something from the past, like in *Fear* and *House*, but in some stories it is left unclear. The length of these stories varies between three and twenty-one pages allowing for different plot structures. In the next chapter, I will introduce the theoretical bases for the analysis in chapter 4.

### 3 Theoretical approaches

In order to discuss my topic in an appropriately versatile manner I will use separate, yet connected, approaches. I will process the corpus in regard to the concept of *chronotope*, look at the setting from an *ecocritical* point of view, and analyse the two sides of places from the *threshold* while also considering some *lexical choices* in the descriptions of places. In this chapter I will go through each approach briefly and discuss them further in the analysis with examples using the short stories.

A rather general approach to literary analysis can be taken using the concept of chronotope which was originally used in biology but applied to literary theory by Mikhail Bakhtin (Steinby 2013, 109). This origin of the concept makes pairing it with ecocritical approach a naturally functioning approach. Bakhtin's (1981, 84) idea of the chronotope is that it is a literary way to express the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships". Defining a place or a setting using only spatial dimensions, such as directions, walls, or trees, is an inadequate description; adding the temporal element completes the scene. Steinby (2013, 115–16) explains how the chronotope should be considered through the actions of the characters: the spatial and temporal elements of a particular setting form certain limitations to what can be done in this particular setting. In a narrative, a description of an on-going action or of the beginning and the end (or, end-result) of an action are also seen as expressions of the chronotope.

It is stated by many scholars that the ecocritical approach has not been widely used in the literary analysis of horror (Tabas 2015, 2); however, that seems to have changed or at least to be changing, and with my analysis I wish to promote this literary trend. Tabas (2015, 1) states: "Horror fictions are much about ambiance, place, surroundings and environment". This statement is in accordance with Core's (2004, 11) thoughts, expressed in the introduction, about place as an essential element allowing the events and actions to happen and be seen. As there is no real nowhere, everything happens somewhere. Describing a place in a certain way is the writer's way to create a particular atmosphere in which the events then take place. It is important to consider human interaction with the place they are in (Waldron 2013, 25). Both parties affect each other, which, in the case of horror, can be manifested as, for example, people destroying nature or as "'revenge of nature' narratives like Steven Spielberg's iconic film *Jaws* (1975)" (Rust and Soles 2014, 509). To summarise this in other words, following

the ecocritical approach to literary criticism we can understand the significance of the setting to what is happening and being done in a certain place.

Several things affect the way the environment is seen and interpreted which is linked to *deep ecology*. Humans have good senses, although not the best ones. According to Corstorphine (2013, 129), stories can “‘deprivilege’ the human subject” by limiting their ability to use their senses. This can be achieved by poor weather conditions, strange or overgrown plants, or simply by setting the events at a certain time of the day, like dusk. With weather, it can be heavy rain or fog, for instance. Overall, the narrators in Lovecraft’s stories often have difficulties describing what they see or have seen. Lovecraft uses a deliteralising style in descriptive phrases creating a gap between the thing that was seen and the uncertain definition of it (Harman 2012, 24). Correspondingly, Kneale (2016, 44) discusses the importance of allusions and the gaps they create in Lovecraft’s writing style claiming that they are essential to its power. Lovecraft does not state everything clearly. As I mentioned above, things are not exactly what they seem at first – even if the viewer can be sure of what they see. Furthermore, where there is a gap, there is a connection (Kneale 2016, 47), which brings us to the idea of *thresholds*.

To begin with, a threshold is literally the line at the bottom of the doorway that one steps on or over when one enters a house or a room. It connects the two spaces on both sides. Thresholds can also be considered figuratively, and consequently they can be anywhere. Any point where two sides meet, and where it is possible to cross from one side to the other. Regarding Lovecraft’s writing thresholds are points of contact between the characters’ reality and the unreal, whether it is another universe or a dreamworld. Tabas (2015, 8) suggests that Lovecraft crosses our perceptual limits when he writes about place, thus creating thresholds between our world and what may lie beyond. Often, the other side is the home of something monstrous or evil. Similarly, Kneale (2006, 120) emphasises the clear use of the threshold as a spatial metaphor and the negative implications of thresholds in Lovecraft’s writing. Not only does the crossing of a threshold take the character into something horrible, but also the nearness of a threshold can be sufficient to bring horror into the character’s life.

Interconnected with all of the above I will analyse some of the word choices that the author has made, in particular the use of adjectives which Lovecraft is known for. In the following chapter I will briefly introduce Lovecraft’s writing style, then introduce the setting of each

short story to be analysed, and in subchapters 4.2–4.4 study the stories through the approaches of the chronotope, ecocriticism, and thresholds.

## 4 The setting of horror: When, where, what, and how it is written

Lovecraft, as stated in chapter 2, focuses strongly on the setting in much of his writing. His attention to detail and the abundance of his descriptive language offer the reader much to feed their imagination. According to Sederholm and Weinstock (2016, 29), typical features in Lovecraft's writing are the use of long sentences, many adjectives, and archaisms. He does not settle for using one adjective for one meaning but prefers to use synonyms. Looking at the selection of adjectives that Lovecraft uses in the six analysed short stories 'abandoned' is rarely used but its synonym, 'deserted', is quite frequently used both in *Fear* and in *Unnamable*. In the former, the Martense family mansion is described three times as deserted, once the hamlet where they hide from the thunder storm. In the latter, the same adjective is also used four times to describe the house where the horror lives according to a story, a house that is situated right by the graveyard. Other adjectives often used are 'old' and 'ancient'; these are featured particularly often in *Unnamable* (six and three times, respectively) and *House* (old three times). The third most used adjective is 'dark', especially in *Music* (four times) and in *Cats* (three times). The number of times that a single adjective is used is not very big but repeating a particular adjective emphasises its meaning; alongside that it is relevant to note that the overall number of adjectives used in descriptions of setting in the six short stories is between 15 (*Cats*) and 183 (*House*). The number of adjectives corresponds to the length of the story. In this chapter I will look at some of the word choices that Lovecraft has made in describing the settings of the six short stories and analyse the horror in these stories. This analysis will be incorporated into my discussion on the chronotope, the ecocritical point of view, and the thresholds in subchapters 4.2–4.4.

To begin with, I discuss two citations to give a general idea of Lovecraft's writing style. The protagonist-narrator of *House* claims that the house has always been the "kind to attract the attention of the curious" (*House*, 233). The following description does not include anything that stands out so it is more about the events that have happened in the place and not the way it looks. Nevertheless, having been unused for a long time the house appears to be in disrepair:

[T]he **weatherbeaten** [sic] front door with its **broken** fanlight, **rotting** Ionic pilasters, and **wormy** triangular pediment. (*House*, 234)

The small-paned windows were **largely broken**, and a nameless air of desolation hung round the **precarious** panelling, **shaky** interior **shutters**, **peeling** wallpaper, **falling** plaster, **rickety** staircases, and such **fragments** of **battered** furniture as

still remained. The **dust and cobwebs** added their touch of the fearful. (House, 235; emphases and underlining added)

There are two things to be considered in the extracts above. First, the adjectives can be divided into two groups. In addition to the noun ‘cobwebs’, the adjectives ‘weatherbeaten’ and ‘wormy’ reveal that nature has had an effect on the house during the decades. The first of these adjectives has a violent tone because of the second part of the compound word, ‘beaten’. The other adjectives express different forms of decay and breaking down. Things that should stay up and still, do not: the wallpaper and the plaster are ‘peeling’ and ‘falling’. Things that should stay solid and still, do not: the shutters and the staircases are ‘rickety’ and ‘shaky’. Second, Lovecraft uses some alliteration in the long descriptive list in the second extract; I have underlined the consonants. This literary technique is not used in every adjective-noun pair but in most of them. Using alliteration makes the reading flow and creates an overall image of the house. These descriptions show that the house is decrepit and maybe even insufficiently safe; the possibly unsafe state of the constructions reflects the suspected – and real – unsafety of the horror in the cellar.

While the location is an essential element of Lovecraft’s stories and he uses several classic horror locations, he set the events in Gothic tale style abbeys or castles quite rarely (Evans 2004, 189). Also, his stories are not mere classic horror stories: “The general fact is, that the house was never regarded by the solid part of the community as in any real sense ‘haunted’. There were no widespread tales of rattling chains, cold currents of air, extinguished lights, or faces at the window” (House, 234). Thus, the talk about the house in the short story House is fearful but not similar to traditional ghost stories; the author did not want his story to be considered a simple tale of a haunted house (Joshi 1996, 103). Whereas the way people talk about the Martense mansion in Fear is full of diabolic legends: “[T]he fear of the haunted house continued; and grew very acute when new and strange stories arose among the mountain decadents” (Fear, 77). The idea of people spreading scary rumours and stories about the locations of horrible events of these short stories in the stories themselves deepens the atmosphere the horrific events themselves create.

I will briefly introduce the general setting of each short story before analysing them in more detail in three subchapters. The introduction in 4.1 is in chronological order by year of publication in the same way as in chapter 2.

#### 4.1 Introductions to each setting

It is important to remember that for Lovecraft, the setting is more than mere physical ground or what we can see around us: for him, setting consists of everything in the background, including the cosmos (Tabas 2015, 7). The location of the village of Ulthar is not clarified beyond one given clue: the nearness of the river Skai. This river belongs to Lovecraft's alternate reality called the Dreamlands (Morales 2021c). It is only mentioned in the short story Ulthar. Like the name Dreamlands suggests, it can be entered, for example, through one's dreams (Morales 2021b). Despite the mention of the river Skai, nothing in the short story Ulthar directly refers to the Dreamlands, and Ulthar resembles a village in the natural world. Even though most explained events take place outdoors, the reader is also allowed to see inside a cottage where something has already happened. Therefore most descriptions apply to the outdoors, including the look of the cottage on the outside.

The city in Lovecraft's Music is not completely described as only the part of the city which is relevant to the story is depicted in some detail and, of the rest of the city, there are only two pieces of information. This city can resemble any city that has buildings made of brick, a river, and some industry which leaves a wide range of cities from the past centuries to be used as models in the imagination of the reader. The name of the street, Rue d'Auseil, where the protagonist lived at the time of the events is in French which makes it seem that the city is in a francophone area – either still francophone or francophone in the past. Also, the violist writes his story in French. This detail does not limit the location of the city very accurately in the real world, because French is spoken both in Europe, Africa and North America.

Nevertheless, Joshi (1996, 87–88) claims that the city is Paris, France. On this dead-end street, Rue d'Auseil, there is an old block of flats that has several flats and two rooms in the attic. The most important room is one of the attic flats.

The next short story, Fear, is set back in the United States. There are hills in the area and the Martense mansion is built on one of them: the Tempest Mountain where groves of oak grow. Cone Mountain and Maple Hill are also mentioned because they are used to create an idea of where different locations are compared to each other. While the main setting is the old family home of the Martenses, essential events also take place in a hamlet and in the area surrounding Tempest Mountain.

The place is a remote, lonely elevation in that part of the Catskills where Dutch civilisation once feebly and transiently penetrated, leaving behind as it receded



only a few ruined mansions and a degenerate squatter population inhabiting pitiful hamlets on isolated slopes. (Fear, 66)

The Catskills, The Catskill Mountains, are located in the state of New York, in the north-eastern part of the United States of America. Between 1609 and 1664, Dutch settlers occupied areas along the Hudson River where their wealth came from fur trade; eventually they lost to the English due to lack of forces in the second Anglo-Saxon War (National Park Service 2022). The Dutch built houses in their colonies during their five-decade-rule which are referred to in the extract above. Joshi (1996, 95) reveals that Lovecraft actually never saw the mountains with his own eyes but succeeds in depicting their landscape realistically. The extract above gives a good idea of the setting of Fear in general: old, abandoned, and alone. This is expressed by the use of adjectives, such as ‘remote’ meaning far from others, ‘lonely’ as without company, and ‘isolated’ to say that there are no neighbours nearby, but also adverbs like ‘once’ which refers to a time far back in history. The combined effect leaves the participant, whether it be the protagonist or the reader, alone with whatever horror lurks in the area.

The setting of Unnamable is simple, a cemetery, and unlike in the previous short story, it remains the same throughout the horrible events experienced by the protagonist. The cemetery in Unnamable is located in a city called Arkham which is a part of the fictional Massachusetts that Lovecraft often used in his stories (Morales 2021a). It corresponds to the real Massachusetts but has many Lovecraftian elements and fictional places in it, like several of his New England stories. In this short story, the protagonist-narrator mentions that Arkham is a “witch-haunted old town that stretched around” the cemetery (Unnamable, 129). Joshi (1996, 100) actually reveals that the original source of inspiration for this place as setting is a cemetery in Salem. Some of the details are the same. Salem is known for its witch trials which may explain the protagonist-narrator’s description. During the 1690s, a couple hundred people were accused of witchcraft and a couple dozen were executed for it in Massachusetts; King William’s War sent a flow of refugees to Salem which led to an aggravated rivalry between people depending on farming and those depending on the port eventually causing the villagers to blame people for working with the Devil to harm others (Blumberg 2007). Whether the adjective *witch-haunted* refers to actual witches or people only thought to be witches, the description of the town of Arkham reflects its origins. Additionally, it is mentioned in another short story that the area “had been settled in 1692 by fugitives from the witchcraft trials in Salem” (Lovecraft and Price 2008, 394). The two places, the real and the

fictional, are strongly linked. Furthermore, Evans (2004, 187) explains that Arkham is a literary parallel to a Colonial village resembling the towns of the Colonial era so strongly that it immerses the reader into that reality like Colonial villages immerse the tourist. This is possible due to Lovecraft's ability to use language to create a credible setting.

In my selection, there is another short story, *Vault*, which is set in a cemetery, like *Unnamable*. The general location is New England, though it is not specified where in New England, merely that the village is called Peck Valley. Joshi (1996, 110) notes that this is "the last of Lovecraft's tales that is not placed upon some quite precise New England location". Quite similarly to *Unnamable*, the events of *Vault* are focused in a particular place in the cemetery: the receiving tomb. It is a chamber where the dead are stored before they can be buried, used by the living and occupied by the dead. Actual graves are not entered and they are barely mentioned. In addition to this, things that are typical of cemeteries, such as gravestones, are not part of the story. The events take place mainly in this one place, only the aftermath is mostly in another one – though not far from the primary location.

The last one of the chosen short stories, *House*, has something in common with several of the other stories. The main setting, the house and its cellar, is in a city, like in *Music*. At the beginning of the story, it is revealed that the location is "the ancient city of Providence, where in the late forties [1840s] Edgar Allan Poe used to sojourn" (House, 233). The author links this fictional story to the real world by referring to a real, known person, the author Poe, and to a real place. Providence is located in New England which is Lovecraft's area of choice in the United States of America. He set the events of several of his stories in New England (Joshi 1996, 100). Another thing in common is the setting of terrible events inside a building, as in *Music* and in *Fear*. The inspiration for the house in *House* is also real: a house on Benefit Street where Lovecraft's aunt stayed for a short while (Joshi 1996, 103). All the real reference points make it easier for the author and the reader to imagine themselves in this place, possibly even in the midst of the events of *House*. According to Waldron (2013, 25), literary ecology requires "placing knowledge in context" which is what is enabled here with the reference to historically real elements. All featured locations, houses, streets, and forests, will be discussed in the following subchapters.

## **4.2 Where and when: The chronotope in action**

The first part of my analysis concerns the setting in terms of the chronotope. As explained in the previous chapter, the concept of chronotope comes from Bakhtin and it refers to using

expressions of time and space together to create a sense of place in a story. According to Bakhtin (1986, 52; original italics), “[t]he ability to see time, to read time [...] is the ability to read in everything *signs that show time in its course*, beginning with nature and ending with human customs and ideas”. The signs can be, for instance, the changing of seasons, or changes caused by the weather, or some activity people are doing. It is important to be able to see the fact that time is passing or has passed. Steinby (2013, 107) continues on this by stating that the chronotope is not just one singular viewpoint but there are several chronotopes which can be seen and interpreted in different situations. Thus each literary text and each situation is unique and requires a reading of its own. In this subchapter I will present some examples of the use of the chronotope in Lovecraft’s short stories.

The first sign of the chronotope I study here is the act of digging. The protagonist-narrators of two short stories, *Fear* and *House*, do this at one point of the story in order to confirm their suspicions about a death or the source of horror. In *Fear*, the protagonist is digging in the grave of one family member of the Martenses at the bottom of which he discovers more than he has expected to find:

I stood digging alone and idiotically in the grave of Jan Martense. I had begun to dig in the afternoon [...]. I have described my protracted digging as idiotic, and such it indeed was in object and method. [...] It is impossible to say what monstrous depth I had attained when my spade, and soon my feet, broke through the ground beneath. (*Fear*, 74–77)

The digging is actually spread out over a few pages because the protagonist-narrator explains the story of Jan Martense while he is digging. He states his feelings, comments on the surrounding area, and occasionally mentions how he is doing with the digging, for instance he found Jan’s coffin. Nevertheless, the end result is clear: he has dug a deep hole and finally ends up in an underground tunnel. He does not know exactly how deep the hole is, but describes the depth as ‘monstrous’. This adjective can refer to two things: simply that the hole is very deep or, in a more complex way, that it has a sinister air. Considering the latter, the sinister nature of the location does not limit to the actual hole the protagonist-narrator has just dug but also along the discovered tunnel which leads to the mansion where the source of the horror dwells. “What language can describe the spectacle of a man lost in infinitely **abysmal** earth; [...] through **sunken convolutions** of **immemorial blackness**” (*Fear*, 77; emphases added). As he explores the tunnel he again refers to the location with an adjective that means both bad and deep, ‘abysmal.’ Additionally, the words used in the second part of this short extract are linked to the meaning of deep as well: ‘sunken convolutions’ refers to the dirt that

has moved down or the tunnel he is in and ‘immemorial blackness’ strengthens the image of darkness underground. These lexical choices confirm that the same theme is carried throughout the entire scene, from digging to exiting the tunnel. Eventually, he has a close encounter with one of the monsters but he is saved by the thunder.

During the digging process the weather changes: at first, the afternoon is clear with an approaching thunder but by night time, the storm has reached the location. Thus, there are two indications of the chronotope in this part of *Fear*: the digging process with its end result, and the change in the weather conditions. The thunderstorm, its lightning bolts, has also affected the ground which is seen on page 78 of *Fear* as the protagonist-narrator climbs out of the tunnel and looks around and sees “the remains of the curious low hummock which had stretched down from the wooded higher slope”. Here the mound has become something just spread around, it has lost its form but not its interesting nature.

The protagonist-narrator of *House* begins his digging a little earlier in the day. The exact duration of the digging is not revealed but it does not continue into the night. In the extract below, the passing of time is shown as the hole becomes bigger (emphasised in bold) and the dirt is moved around (emphasised in italics).

At 11 A.M. the next day I commenced digging. [...] *As I turned up the stinking black earth* in front of the fireplace, my spade causing a viscous yellow ichor to ooze from the white fungi which it severed, I trembled at the dubious thoughts of what I might uncover. [...] **With the deepening of the hole**, which was about six feet square, the evil smell increased [...]. At length I climbed out of the hole and *dispersed the heaped-up dirt...* (House, 252; emphases in bold and italics added)

The narrator mentions the dirt twice: first, as he digs “the stinking black earth” up from the hole, and second, as he moves the dug-up dirt farther away from the edge of the hole. It is evident that he is making progress. He even mentions the current size of the hole. The extract above is also a good example of how a particular setting poses restrictions to the actions done in it (Steinby 2013, 120–122); Steinby explains that Bakhtin’s chronotope is time and space working together and creating certain conditions in which the characters act (ibid.).

Considering the extract from *House*, where the location is the cellar which has an earth floor and the protagonist needs to find something that he thinks is underground, digging is a logical choice of action. In the same extract, where the act of digging is described, Lovecraft also focuses on maintaining the horror atmosphere of the story. The earth is described as ‘stinking’ and ‘black’, and the stench, the ‘evil smell’, grows stronger as the hole becomes deeper. It is not only about the location but also about the protagonist-narrator himself because he admits

to having 'dubious thoughts', i.e., being uncertain, about what will be discovered underground.

In the short story *Music*, the act that goes on and indicates the passing of time is the playing of the viola. It can be said to be less of a choice for the violist who is compelled by the horror that is somehow linked to his music; however, the setting is more than the loft room of the block of flats, it is also the surrounding area which holds within it the horror and its home reality: "The playing grew fantastic, delirious, and hysterical [...]. Louder and louder, wilder and wilder, mounted the shrieking and whining of that desperate viol. The player was dripping with an uncanny perspiration and twisted like a monkey" (*Music*, 62–63). The music changes and continues, it fills the attic room as time goes on. Another thing indicating time is the claim that the violist is sweating; the loft is not a warm room, so the sweating could be caused by exercise, the playing. In a more general sense, this is a difficult story as time and place are considered: "In Lovecraft's early work [like *Music*] [...] the relationship between mind and world, text and real is articulated through a confounding of our sense of place and time. This results in our inability to locate or cognitively situate a place" (Tabas 2015, 8). He refers to the beginning of *Music* where the protagonist-narrator confesses that they have not been able to find the place where it all happened after they ran away from there. This is elaborated on in subchapter 4.4.

Besides the violist in *Music*, there is another character whose perspiration reveals that he has exerted himself as time has passed during a task: the protagonist of *Vault*. He is "tired and perspiring despite many rests" before he can get out of the receiving tomb (*Vault*, 138). The activity of Mr Birch can be compared to the digging of the protagonist-narrators in *Fear and House*; instead of digging, Mr Birch is chiselling his way out of the receiving tomb by enlarging the transom above the vault door: "Dusk fell and found Birch **still toiling**. He worked largely by feeling **now**, since **newly-gathered clouds** hid the moon; and though progress was still slow, he felt heartened at the **extent of his encroachments** on the top and bottom of the aperture" (*Vault*, 137; emphases added). The adverb 'still' in the first sentence indicates that the 'toiling' has been going on for a while. In addition to this, Birch works 'by feeling' at the moment, 'now', which means that he has worked in a different way, by sight, earlier and has had to change approaches as it has become later in the day. The change in weather conditions outside also shows how time is passing. Considering again Steinby's views on the chronotope and how the setting limits the choices of action that the characters have, the protagonist of *Vault* is very clearly limited by his surroundings as he is locked in the

receiving tomb. The vault has been dug into the side of a hill and other materials include, for example, brick. There are only certain tools at his disposal. As well as the physical setting, time is also a factor: on Good Friday afternoon, it is unlikely for anyone to pass the place, maybe not even until Monday. These elements of the setting strongly condition the character's choice of actions.

At the beginning of the recount of the day's events the narrator mentions that the receiving tomb smells unpleasant. After Birch has been locked in, the narrator mentions that inside "[t]he air had begun to be exceedingly unwholesome" (Vault, 136); this indicates that time has passed. With the door closed, the air inside the receiving tomb does not change much and it becomes mustier. However, Mr Birch is untroubled and doesn't expect any danger; this is seen around the last emphasis in the extract above. His attitude remains optimistic and relaxed during most of the process which I discuss a little more in subchapter 4.4. The chronotope is expressed in many forms in the analysed short stories: the continuous activity of a character creates a changing scenery, actions are completed with visible results, and the atmosphere or conditions are changed.

As the last example of the chronotope, I will look at the weather which I already mentioned while discussing previous extracts. The connection of time and space is evident in the changes that happen with different weather conditions. First, rain is an essential element throughout the story in *House*. It is connected to the appearance of horror and the worst events of the story: "It was the dank, humid cellar which somehow exerted the strongest repulsion on us [...] and for another thing, we did not like the white fungous growths which occasionally sprang up in rainy summer weather from the hard earth floor" (House, 235). The fungi are often accompanied by a faintly visible vapour which forms a human-like figure and which eventually turns out to be the cause of death of the narrator's uncle. The protagonist-narrator says it is raining on the night of their guard in the cellar of the shunned house. After the disappearance of his uncle some hours after they started their guard, he runs out to the "rain-drenched sidewalk," "the soaking street" (House, 251). The signs of a long rain are clearly visible.

Second, the short story *Fear* features a description that is a little more detailed:

Gradually a **calming of the wind and dispersal of the unusual darkness** told of the storm's passing. I had hoped it would last into the night to help our quest, but a furtive sunbeam from a knothole behind me removed the likelihood of such a

thing. [...] **The ground outside was a singular mass of mud and pools, with fresh heaps of earth from the slight landslide** (Fear, 74; emphases added).

The protagonist-narrator and his companions are hiding from a thunder storm in a hamlet. The extract above describes the situation right at the end of the storm. At the beginning, the words in bold tell the reader what is happening, how the weather is changing. The latter part in bold is a clearer example of the use of chronotope. In it the narrator describes the scene as it is after the thunder storm: dirt has turned into mud, puddles have been formed, and a landslide has moved some earth. Despite the disturbing feeling that the narrator often has looking at the landscape, the ground was solid and still before the storm. The thunder affected it and changed it into something more unstable and unclear.

The chronotope does not always affect the atmosphere of the story but locks it in place. The use of the chronotope is an essential part of the setting of stories because it links time and place together. Even though Bakhtin used it to describe the structure of novels, it can be applied to short stories as well. In the next subchapter I will study Lovecraft's short stories from an ecocritical point of view.

### **4.3 Where and what: Nature in Lovecraft's weird horror**

In this, the third subchapter of my analysis, my focus is on place as setting. Time is a natural part of it but, unlike in the previous subchapter on the chronotope, it will not be considered separately and its effect will be less obvious. As I stated in chapter 3, quoting Tabas, the surroundings are very important in horror fiction. The surroundings, the setting, can be studied in general – as the overall area – or in detail, for example, what is precisely at the protagonist's feet or where the protagonist's gaze is directed. In their introduction in *EcoGothic*, Smith and Hughes (2013, 3) state that the (Romantic) Gothic treats nature as a suitable background for crisis. Using the natural setting in this way allows the author to discuss ecological issues as well as the actual story which may or may not include such issues explicitly as part of the story itself. Despite this remark the short stories that I study in this thesis do not include references to big ecological crises; therefore I will continue with other topics.

In accordance with deep ecology, Corstorphine (2013, 129) raises the issue of depriving the protagonist, "the human subject," of the full benefit of his or her senses. One example of this is found in *Vault* where the protagonist is forced to work in conditions of poor lighting because the door is closed and the hour grows late (see previous subchapter). He has to work

slowly and carefully. Also, even though he is not disturbed by it, the air inside the receiving tomb is not very good. The obstruction of fully working senses is linked to what is stated in chapter 1: the feeling of uncertainty and fear raised by a situation when the weather inhibits clear vision. Tabas (2015, 3) compares this to a dangerous situation where a person's senses are heightened: in deep ecology, the weirdness of objects and the places that they create all reach one's attention. Humans often regard nature as a set of things that they can use and place value onto objects, also plants and animals, according to their usefulness; by introducing something that defies human perception the author can challenge their characters in a new way (Corstorphine 2013, 129). This view is well in accordance with the way that Lovecraft writes a lot of his fiction: "As a means of expressing place, then, Lovecraft constantly steps over the boundaries of our perception, vaguely hinting to us the details of an outside or ultimate reality, while at the same time rendering us acutely aware of the finitude of our grasp on the real" (Tabas 2015, 8). Lovecraft keeps the reader guessing and wondering at the meaning of certain elements of his stories and particular words in his writing. He creates his weird horror by adding a weird element to an otherwise natural setting or by adjoining weird places with commonplace locations.

One example of this is found in the short story *Music* where the strange music played by the violist seems to keep a monster away or even keep the doorway to a different dimension locked. At the end of the short story, when the protagonist-narrator is again listening to the violist and finally looks out of the window in the attic flat, the view is not at all what they expected. Instead of rooftops and city lights, the protagonist sees "only the blackness of space **illimitable; unimagined** space alive with motion and music" (*Music*, 63; emphases added). Space is dark and 'unimagined', so it is difficult to define or describe it. It is something new to the protagonist-narrator. Also, space is 'illimitable' which means that it seems all-encompassing and the protagonist-narrator is unable to see its limits. Things without clear definitions or borders create uncertainty and unease, including weather conditions (Cavallaro 2002, 21). The surprising scene horrifies the person who is already in a frightening situation as the violist plays endlessly and the wind howls in the flat. After realising that the ceaselessly playing violist is dead, the protagonist-narrator flees the attic, the building, and the street. They escape to the other side of the river where the streets are wider and safer (as I discuss below). The quote above illustrates, in addition to Tabas, Kneale's (2016, 52) idea of Lovecraft's "weird geography where spaces are inhabited by other places not directly accessible to us". Whereas Rue d'Auseil is a seemingly normal, if peculiar, place it holds



something horrible within, something that is only accessed by the violist's music. As I stated earlier, the horror of Rue d'Auseil does not exist inside the block of flats or the attic room, but it is drawn to the attic and to the music of Erich Zann, the violist, from its own place of existence. The idea of thresholds, places on the border, will be discussed in subchapter 4.4.

Even though the location of the events in *Music* is discussed in more detail in the following subchapter, it is relevant to continue the analysis here a little. The protagonist-narrator's description of this location is quite common to Lovecraft's texts; it creates a normal setting to which hints of horror and the weird are added. On one side of the river, there are narrow cobblestone streets. This part of the city is not portrayed as a bad or shabby place; however, brief descriptions give the idea that it is not as nice as the other part of the city. On the other side of the river, far from Rue d'Auseil, there are "broader, healthier streets and boulevards" (*Music*, 64). There are two reasons for the use of comparative forms of the adjectives 'broad' and 'healthy' in the short extract above – one for each adjective. First, Rue d'Auseil is claimed to be the narrowest street the protagonist-narrator has ever seen. In addition to this, the buildings on that street are tall and leaning in towards each other, which adds to the closed and dark feel of the street. Therefore, the other streets must be wider. Second, the unhealthiness of Rue d'Auseil's side of the river can refer to two things: the events involving the violist or the air around the river. About the events, what happened in the building where they lived and where the protagonist-narrator became acquainted with the violist was unhealthy in a psychological way considering all the excitement and strangeness. And then the river, the protagonist-narrator states that the river smells very bad. Apart from the smell, the air near the river is grey "as if the smoke of neighbouring factories shut out the sun perpetually" (*Music*, 58). Clean, clear air is free of strange odours and is healthy to breathe. Dark, shadowy places are ideal for strange and scary creatures and events to lure or take place in (Cavallaro 2002, 21). Both, the street partly hidden from the sun and the smog over the river and its surroundings, make the area suitable for weird and scary activities or beings.

In my ecocritical analysis of Lovecraft's short stories I will now focus on more nature-based settings. I will study larger areas and the burial sites in *Fear* and *Unnamable*, and finally explore the presence of nature inside buildings. As I mentioned in subchapter 4.1, the events of *Fear* are set in the Catskills region. The protagonist-narrator describes the area as a place of hills and lowlands covered in forest in several parts. The trees are large (see discussion below) and many of them have suffered damage caused by lightning strikes. After the protagonist-narrator's first close encounter with the monster, he remembers his flight from the scene

during a thunderstorm which created “**Charonian shadows** athwart the low mounds that dotted and streaked the region” (Fear, 70; emphasis added). The mention of ‘Charonian shadows’ changes the image of this earthly scenery to something more resembling of a place far away and with rough ground, like the surface of a moon. The protagonist-narrator notices how the mounds are spread both as separate and as line formations. He also notes that the “curious mounds and hummocks in the weedy, fulgurite-pitted earth reminded me of snakes and dead men’s skulls swelled to gigantic proportions” (Fear, 66). Tabas (2015, 10) argues that Lovecraft’s writing is at its best when he describes places that most resemble existing, natural places. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember Lovecraft’s ability to add something weird, often sinister, to the setting or situation. The weird addition is what makes his characters feel uneasy in, for instance, the forest; natural environments are usually calming but, in horror, can also reflect the wicked nature of the monsters within them (Kröger 2013, 19–20). Of the six short stories, this is most clear in Fear.

In the short story Fear, there is a graveyard and in it the grave of Jan Martense that the protagonist-narrator is digging open. The action is briefly discussed in the previous subchapter, and I will focus on the place now. Graveyards do not, in themselves, represent any ecological crises or troubles. However, it is interesting to look at their descriptions because Lovecraft does not leave the dead to lie entirely in peace; instead, his text is hinting at something worse than the characters’ eyes can see. The following extracts are from Fear and Unnamable:

And nearest of all was the graveyard, where **deformed trees** tossed **insane branches** as their **roots displaced unhallowed slabs** and sucked venom from what lay below. (Fear, 74–75; emphases added)

Looking toward the **giant** willow in the cemetery, whose trunk had nearly engulfed an **ancient, illegible** slab, I had made a fantastic remark about the **spectral** and **unmentionable** nourishment which the colossal **roots must be sucking** from that **hoary, charnel** earth (Unnamable, 128; emphases added)

In both extracts, the power of nature is clear as nature is reclaiming space in the cemeteries. Trees and their roots are described as big and somehow unnatural, ‘deformed’. The roots of the trees in the Martense family graveyard cause the tombstones to move from their original position, to get out of the way of the roots. Similarly, in Unnamable, a tree trunk is taking over the space of a tombstone. In these cemeteries, human-made things are slowly being replaced by nature. Kröger (2013, 26), discussing Gothic ecology, states that nature will eventually overpower humans and the structures humans have built: Gothic literature often

features, for instance, old buildings more or less in a state of ruin which is a clear example of man's weakened power. In most short stories the trees are left unspecified but Unnamable features a willow in the cemetery (as present in the extract above). In Ulthar, the yard of the old cotter's house has oaks in it and there are oak trees also near the Martense family mansion; oaks are typical in New England. However, the type of tree does not seem to have importance to the story.

The use of adjectives is of some interest particularly in the second extract above. Lovecraft often uses two adjectives together to describe things: 'ancient' and 'illegible' grave slab, 'spectral' nourishment that is also 'unmentionable', and the ground that is 'hoary' and 'charnel'. Furthermore, the second adjective usually emphasises the meaning of the first, and together they create a strong quality for the described noun. For instance, the grave slab is so ancient that the text on it has become illegible, and the earth that is hoary, old, is even charnel, filled with old remains of the dead. Similar use of double adjectives is seen in the extracts of the following paragraph in which I will continue my analysis of descriptions of trees.

Trees are described in a similar way to that explained above, big, old, and strange, on several other occasions throughout the short story Fear as the following extracts will show (all emphases added):

The **ancient** and **lightning-scarred** trees seemed **unnaturally large and twisted**, and the other vegetation **unnaturally thick and feverish** (Fear, 66)

wild-armed **titan** trees (Fear, 70)

**Baleful** primal trees of **unholy size, age, and grotesqueness** leered above like the pillars of some **hellish Druidic** temple (Fear, 74)

What these extracts reveal is that the trees have been able to grow without human interference and reach a great size. The areas in question are not gardens or yards, thus it is not surprising that trees have been growing freely for a very long time. The protagonist-narrator finds them intimidating due to their size and form; he is portrayed as a small, insignificant human compared to the might and vastness of nature. At the same time, there is something sinister about the trees, something that cannot be expressed precisely. This idea is clear in the use of adjectives such as 'twisted', 'baleful', and 'unholy'. Saying that something is 'twisted' means that it is not straight or clear; in Fear, the trees have not grown straight. Using the adjective 'baleful' indicates that the protagonist-narrator experiences the presence of the trees as threatening or as indicators of an evil presence. The protagonist-narrator does not express this

reference explicitly but his words can be read as such. He also claims that everything about some trees is ‘unholy’ like they had grown beyond the limits of what is normal and sacred. This last connotation is further developed as he refers to the trees as pillars of a temple which is ‘hellish’ and ‘Druidic’ – again indicating to something sinister and old.

Returning to the use of double adjectives, the vegetation is said to be ‘thick’ which means that there is much of it and it probably grows closely together. The density and possibly also the strong growth of the vegetation is made clearer by the use of the second adjective, ‘feverish’. This is further emphasised by the preceding adverb, ‘unnaturally’, which can be read as a statement on the normality of the vegetation. Descriptions such as the ones discussed above can also be considered from a purely Gothic point of view: according to Punter (2012, 1–2), the location of Gothic stories is often exaggerated. Lovecraft’s text includes several adjectives and nouns that give the impression of objects being extremely large, old, or distinguishable from others of their kind or from their surroundings.

In addition to the trees, other plants are also remarkable. The first of the previous extracts above includes the mention of “unnaturally thick” vegetation. More plants are described in the extracts below (all emphases added):

[W]hile somewhat nearer was the abandoned Dutch garden whose walks and beds were polluted by **a white, fungous, foetid, over-nourished vegetation** that never saw full daylight. (Fear, 74)

the brier-choked cellar [...] where the **thick weeds** grew (Fear, 80)

the mouldy floor with its **uncanny** shapes and **distorted, half phosphorescent fungi** (House, 244)

Like the trees in the extracts above, bigger and smaller plants are described as having somewhat unnatural forms and as having taken over a large amount of space. The original flowers and other plants in the Dutch garden have been replaced by the “white, fungous, foetid, over-nourished vegetation” (Fear, 74). It is not explained what nourishes this vegetation but the fact that it is ‘over-nourished’ indicates that there is plenty of nourishment and that the vegetation has grown extensively. The locations of these short stories are places where humans have not lived in a long time; therefore, a natural phenomenon has occurred and the amount of vegetation in the area or the room has increased. Indoor spaces will be discussed a little further below. There are different kinds of plants in these extracts and in other parts of the short stories: some unnamed but also, like here, weeds and fungi.

Thus far in my analysis nature has been presented as strange and massive. Descriptions of nature such as the ones presented above are in keeping with what Tabas explains to be a feature of weird fiction: showing the reality and the environment of the story as something that is veered slightly off, not exactly right but close (Tabas 2015, 3). This applies especially well to the descriptions of trees which are clearly trees but they are not the familiar kind, normal trees that one would expect. As has been shown, the trees are deformed in either size or shape, or both. The deformity of the trees reflects the weirdness of the story and of the genre itself. Lovecraft's signature style of adding a weird touch to something normal is clear here.

Even though nature has a strong presence in many of the six short stories, particularly in *Fear* and *House* there is an element missing: "Of wild creatures there were none – they are wise when death leers close" (*Fear*, 65–66). Later in the story it is stated that wild animals were killed, like many humans in the area near Tempest Mountain and the Martense mansion (*Fear*, 72). In the city, like in the countryside, the shunned house is surrounded by a "yard where birds never lingered" and it was like that already in the protagonist-narrator's youth (*House*, 235); some time after the horror has been defeated, birds return (*House*, 253). This is an example of how nature always survives and finds a way to live on.

I will now return to some extracts I have already used and discuss them from a different point of view. In addition to the power and grandeur of nature that is expressed in the short stories, some plants are given human characteristics. In particular, the narrator of *Fear* describes trees like they were active participants:

Baleful primal trees of unholy size, age, and grotesqueness **leered above** like the pillars of some hellish Druidic temple. (*Fear*, 74; emphasis added)

[D]eformed **trees tossed insane branches** as their roots displaced unhallowed slabs and **sucked venom** from what lay below. (*Fear*, 74–75; emphases added)

Trees are described as things that act of their own accord. They are leering at what walks below or tossing their branches, giving the impression that they are moving. Giving plants human-like characteristics makes them hybrids of the two forms, borderline beings, human and plant. According to Rust and Soles (2014, 509–510), the definition of what is human can be stretched in ecohorror writing. This technique allows the writer to confuse the distinction between what is human and what is not human. The choice of words is also interesting here: verbs 'toss' and 'leer' are not entirely neutral but express actions that are somewhat

unfriendly. The adjective used to describe the branches in the second citation, ‘insane’, is also interesting. Overall, the dichotomy between sane and insane is difficult to define when it should concern trees because it is usually used in reference to humans and their mental health. Most importantly, here, this adjective strengthens the idea that everything is not alright.

There is an example of anthropomorphism also in Unnamable: “[T]he giant willow in the cemetery, whose **trunk had nearly engulfed** an ancient, illegible slab, [...] which the colossal **roots must be sucking**” (Unnamable, 128; emphases added). In this extract, the enormous willow tree is portrayed as if it was consuming its surroundings. Again, the tree is active; it claims more space by merging what is near into itself. Another element of the cemetery as the setting of horror to point out here is ambiguity; horrific events are likely to occur in places that represent two sides which here are nature and culture (Stewart 1982, 41). Trees and plants are part of nature that can be seen in the cemetery, as is also earth and the idea of natural decomposition that happens to the bodies in the ground. In addition, cemeteries represent culture in the sense that they are closely related to religion and tradition. Not only is the distinction between human and non-human blurred, but also the clear definition of place as having a single purpose or representing only one thing. I will analyse the duality of places further in the next subchapter.

Lovecraft’s countryside in the short story Fear does not include farming or fields, but both open land and forests which are spread over elevated and low-lying land: “[A] steep unforested place on the southwest slope of the mountain [...] the wooded higher slope” (Fear, 77–78). This kind of variation is normal and can be seen anywhere. The story features an element in the natural areas that is an expression of the presence of something more than what is plainly natural. The old Martense family mansion stands on Tempest Mountain. In the land around it there are long, low mounds that draw the attention of the protagonist. These mounds are discussed earlier in this subchapter. Tempest Mountain is said to have “the prevalence of violent thunderstorms in summer” (Fear, 75). In an earlier extract, there is a mention of “lightning-scarred trees” (Fear, 66) which shows that there are several markings of the thunderstorms in the area. The strength and power of nature is again made clear. The topic of nature claiming its space and retaking it from humans was discussed earlier in the text when cemeteries were analysed. I will now return to this topic and study the descriptions of setting that are indoor spaces.

The protagonist-narrator does not describe the Martense mansion in a lengthy manner. Instead, he reveals some details which concern either the looks of the mansion or ideas about it. Some ideas are linked to the stories that circulate among the inhabitants of the area about the owners of the mansion and that these stories are coloured with ideas of danger and monstrosity. The mansion is described as cursed which is clearly due to the wide-spread stories. The general attitude towards this place is well expressed in the beginning of the following extract: “[T]he **shunned and deserted Martense mansion**, which crowned the high but gradual eminence whose liability to frequent thunder storms gave it the name of Tempest Mountain” (Fear, 66; emphasis added). The first adjective, ‘shunned’, describes the fact that people do not want to go into this place, and the second adjective, ‘deserted’, means that the mansion has not been lived in or used for a while. This is yet another example of how Lovecraft uses double adjectives: both ‘shunned’ and ‘deserted’ mean that people avoid the place. Besides, ‘avoided’ is among the adjectives used to describe the mansion. The use of all these adjectives can be linked to the scary stories told about it. On the contrary to rooms in the upper floors of the Martense family mansion, the cellar is not equally preserved. It is filled with plants as nature has taken over what man has abandoned. Of all the rooms in the mansion, the cellar is the closest to earth and nature as cellars are often located below the ground level: underground. It can be understood from the text that the cellar is built of rock, because there are ‘chinks’ and other holes through which the moon shines until the storm rises. This also reveals that the cellar is not, at least completely, underground; the holes must be on the surface – possibly high up the walls – because visible light cannot penetrate earth.

There are two types of plants which are said to grow in the cellar of the Martense mansion: “[T]he **brier-choked** cellar [...] where the **thick weeds** grew” (Fear, 80; emphases added). Firstly, ‘brier’ is an umbrella term which refers to many different plants. These plants have thorns and grow in bushes, like, for example, roses. Unlike the other type of plant, weeds, it is more likely that briars are planted on purpose – not in the cellar, but in the garden or by the wall of the mansion. ‘Weeds’, then, can be unwanted plants, often some sort of grass, and they usually grow anywhere unless they are weeded. However, they can also be used on purpose to fill up a space. As I mentioned earlier, the mansion has been uninhabited for a long time (besides the degenerate population underground) so there has been nobody to weed the grass or to cut the briars. The interest of weeds lies in how they represent nature’s strength, whereas the thorny bushes can be planted for decorative or even protective purposes. Thick

bushes are possibly impenetrable; also, people are careful with thorns even when handling a single rose.

The same extract is revealing about the amount of vegetation in the cellar. The cellar is ‘choked’ with briars, meaning that the plants have filled the space. Also, the weeds are described to be ‘thick’ which relates the idea that they grow tightly together and that they are strong. Nature has taken over. However, despite these two elements, the protagonist-narrator does not state that walking in the cellar would be in any way difficult. The terrain around the Martense mansion is quite rough and the trees, which I have already discussed above, are numerous and large; the weeds are also said to grow outside. Besides forming obstacles on someone’s path, vegetation may also obstruct the view: one cannot see where to step or, if the vegetation is high, what is ahead or around. This is a very concrete way of allowing someone to use their senses in only a limited way which is an element of deep ecology. These characteristics in the surroundings cause unease and possibly also fear; particularly in the case of the protagonist-narrator of *Fear*, because he is already searching for a monster. The cellar is also a dark place when the protagonist-narrator only has one candle with him, and later, the only light comes from the lightning striking outside. Again the character is not able to use his sense of sight to the fullest.

The cellar of the shunned house in *House* is described to be on street level because the house is built on a hill that rises above the street. The cellar is also right next to the street; its brick wall lines the street (House, 234–235). This brings the horror, its source, very close to the ordinary world where people live their normal lives. As a child, the protagonist-narrator explored the house with his friends but not “the dank, humid cellar which somehow exerted the strongest repulsion on us” (House, 235). He states that the place had a bad smell which was the most noticeable in the cellar (ibid.). Cellars with earth floor tend to have an earthy odour of their own and to be humid. In addition to the earth floor, plants are growing in this cellar as well:

[W]e did not like **the white fungous growths** which occasionally sprang up in rainy summer weather from the hard earth floor. **Those fungi**, grotesquely like the vegetation in the yard outside, were truly horrible in their outlines; **detestable parodies of toadstools and Indian pipes**, whose like we had never seen in any other situation. They rotted quickly, and at one stage became slightly phosphorescent (House, 235; emphases added)

[T]**the sinuous tree-roots** that thrust their way into the cellar through the loose foundation-stones. (House, 236; emphasis added)



Trees are extending their roots into the cellar from outside: nature is entering human's space. Unlike in the cellar in *Fear*, there are only fungi-like plants in this one: proof of the dampness of the space. Also, Indian pipes grow in dark places, like the detritus of the forest floor, which makes the cellar a very likely place for them to appear in. It should be noticed that the protagonist-narrator claims that the plants here are "detestable parodies" of the plants that he names and continues to say that their resemblance does not match exactly that of anything they had seen before (House, 235). Comparing these plants to the real ones is still justified so it can be said that the growing place here indoors is very similar to their natural habitat outdoors. This can be seen as nature's way of transforming the place back into a natural state.

In another one of the short stories, there is a further example of a human-made indoor space that is partly natural: "[O]n the earthen floor, and a number of singular beetles crawling in the shadowy corners" (Ulthar, 23; emphases added). The emphasised words in the citation create an image of the cottage being almost a part of the ground it stands on. Any kind of hybridity is an element of horror fiction (Fahy 2010, 3), especially of weird fiction which stretches the boundaries of familiar definitions. In the extract, the cottage is described as a combination of a construction that is made by humans and the earth making it part of nature. Nature is strong in the whole yard which is seen in the presence of the spreading oaks around the cottage. Beetles and other insects represent nature also inside buildings which can be read as a sign of the power of nature and how nature claims space from man.

While the actual cottage of the cat-killing couple is not much described, the malignancy of the couple is reflected in the description of the yard. It is referred to as 'accursed' and 'repellent' and it is shaded by big oak trees. Dark surroundings where one's vision is compromised, just as in the area in *Fear*, the cellar in *House*, and the attic room at the end in *Music*, are common in horror which I referred to in the introduction. The couple's home is considered to be cursed because of the horrible end that comes to all cats that enter it. It can also be said to be cursed by the little traveller boy whose cat disappeared; unlike earlier, this curse means that cats stay alive but the couple dies. All the deaths of cats and the mean behaviour of the couple make the place repellent in the minds of other villagers.

Lovecraft is a widely acknowledged writer of weird horror fiction. His short stories are set in classic horror settings, such as abandoned, old buildings and cemeteries surrounded or accompanied by natural areas. Nevertheless, that is not all: Lovecraft does not settle for using a normal classic setting. "The genius of horror and the supernatural precisely lies in its refusal

to accept the Natural as ultimate or identical with reality. The very condition of possibility for supernatural horror is the acknowledgement of a gap between the real and the Natural or naturalized” (Tabas 2015, 3). A little later Tabas continues that weird writing does not offer exact knowledge about a place but directs the reader’s attention and attunement towards the weird in the otherwise natural or realistic setting (Tabas 2015, 4). Reading Lovecraft’s short stories from an ecocritical point of view reveals his ability to add a weird element into a normal setting. In this analysis I have pointed out the strangeness of big trees and other plants, the presence of nature in places that used to be claimed by humans and the mixing of human or human-made and non-human or nature. In the next subchapter I will focus on place as a borderline, a threshold, and places representing two things.

#### **4.4 Where: Thresholds and duality in Lovecraft’s weird horror**

In this subchapter my interest is strongly on places which form the two sides that meet on a borderline. I will begin with Music, continue with the buildings in House and Fear, then analyse cellars and graveyards, and finally draw their similarities together. Kneale (2006, 113) quotes Joshi’s observation that the name of the street in Music, Rue d’Auseil, is pronounced exactly like ‘au seuil’ which means ‘on the threshold’. The threshold is a spot or a place between two places, the bordering line between the two. In Music, Rue d’Auseil seems to be a place that is somehow unattached from the rest of the city. In addition to that, the violist’s room in the attic and, to be precise, the windowsill of that room, is a threshold between the reality of the violist and the protagonist-narrator and that of the horror which is held back by the violist’s music. Tabas (2015, 9) notes the same thing about the name of the street in his essay and continues to say that this place is “a place on the threshold of being on the threshold”. By this he means that the location itself exists in such a liminal manner that it is difficult to express it lexically or to define its features in detail. This also affects the fact that the protagonist-narrator cannot find Rue d’Auseil again after having fled the place; it is not on any map and no one knows about it (Music, 58). This statement is actually the beginning of the short story. The protagonist-narrator begins their recount by establishing the uncanniness in the physical setting of the story. In addition to that, strangeness is emphasised by using the word ‘peculiar’ or ‘peculiarities’ on several occasions.

Apart from giving a general view of the city and of Rue d’Auseil’s surroundings, the protagonist-narrator never specifies the feature which they claim to be the one that makes the neighbourhood very memorable and noticeable: “[D]istinguished by peculiarities which could

hardly be forgotten by any one who had been there” (Music, 58). By using the verb ‘distinguish’ the protagonist-narrator indicates that Rue d’Auseil is different from the streets around it and maybe even from all the streets that they have ever seen or heard of. The latter seems unlikely because there are streets which are blind alleys or hills, even such a steep hill like this one that it needs to be closed to motorised traffic, in many places. However, it is impossible to know where the protagonist-narrator has lived or travelled so assumptions cannot be made. The noun ‘peculiarity’ also means something that separates one thing from another, makes something different, maybe unique. It is a word which reveals that Rue d’Auseil has its very own characteristics. Among these characteristics are the steepness and narrowness of the street and the leaning buildings. The landscape is depicted in a direct, realistic way which does not conceal the weird in it; locations are described in a similar way in many of Lovecraft’s later writings (Joshi 1996, 88). Besides the strangeness of the place itself, there are other factors, as also the protagonist-narrator claims: “The inhabitants of that street impressed me peculiarly. At first I thought it was because they were all silent and reticent; but later decided it was because they were all very old” (Music, 59). Here again, the protagonist-narrator uses the word ‘peculiar’, now as an adverb. Peculiarity and strangeness are very strongly present in the protagonist-narrator’s mind when they think about the place where they experienced such horror.

After considering the area on the outside, I now turn to look at it on the inside. I analyse the description of the block of flats where the protagonist-narrator heard the music. The attic room, where the violist lives, is a big room and quite empty as there are only few items of furniture:

Of furniture there was only a **narrow iron** bedstead, a **dingy** washstand, a **small** table, a **large** bookcase, an **iron** music-rack, and three **old-fashioned** chairs. Sheets of music were **piled in disorder** about the floor. The walls were of **bare** boards, and had probably never known plaster; whilst the **abundance of dust and cobwebs** made the place seem more deserted than inhabited. (Music, 59–60; emphases added)

The protagonist-narrator does not reveal which items of furniture are provided by the landlord and which are purchased by the inhabitant of the attic room; at least, the violist does not express any need to decorate his flat more. Like the building, the furniture is old and worn; this is evident from the use of adjectives such as ‘dingy’ and ‘old-fashioned’. Also, the use of iron in the frame of the bed and the music stand indicate old age because the use of iron dates back to the middle of the 1800s. The bareness of the walls added to the scarce furniture shows

that there has not been much effort in making the attic room habitable or pleasant – not by the owner, not by the renter. Dust and spider’s web are marks of time and lack of cleaning. Both are present in classic horror stories, especially cobwebs which can be found both indoors and outdoors. Cobwebs indoors can also be considered with ecocriticism in mind, as was discussed in the previous subchapter, because spiders bring nature into the building when they enter them and build their webs in corners, on lamps, and behind furniture.

Carroll (1990, 35) states that in horror fiction “the creatures [meaning monsters] come from marginal, hidden, or abandoned sites; [...] that is, they belong to environs outside of and unknown to ordinary social intercourse”. Marginality means that the places are on the border, for instance, between the living and the dead. Carroll (ibid.) names abandoned houses and graveyards as examples of these kinds of places; both of these are used as setting in Lovecraft’s short stories. Also Kröger (2013, 16) mentions old castles and houses which are falling apart as typical setting of Gothic horror stories. Deserted houses can be seen as representing a border because they are reminders of their old inhabitants but not used anymore. Memories and knowledge of previous residents prove that there has been life in the house while the abandonment brings the house closer to death. The same reasons also make these places possible thresholds between two realities. I analysed the inhabited building in *Music* above, now I will turn my focus on two abandoned houses, those in *Fear* and in *House*. As a grander house, a mansion, the main building in *Fear* represents a more classic setting of a horror story, whereas the building in *House* is merely a detached house. Their similarity lies in the fact that they have both been abandoned by their inhabitants and they are not taken care of anymore.

First, I will study the descriptions in *House*. The most described place in the house is the cellar which is the main location of the events. There are several indications of age and wear, including how nothing of the original whitewash remains on the cellar walls (*House* p. 247).

the rotting remains of what had been stools, chairs and tables, and other more shapeless furniture; the **heavy planks** and **massive beams** of the ground floor overhead; the decrepit plank door leading to bins and chambers beneath other parts of the house; the crumbling **stone staircase** with **ruined wooden hand-rail**; and the **crude and cavernous fireplace** of **blackened brick** where rusted iron fragments revealed the past presence of hooks, andirons, spit, crane, and a door to the Dutch oven (*House*, 247; emphases added)

Here, everything is not intact anymore; there are mostly remains of different items of furniture. Additionally, the brickwork of the fireplace has signs of hooks and other items

which have been used on it but are now gone. While the use of adjectives is quite simple here, alliteration in adjective-noun pairs gives the text some strength and flow. Besides proper alliteration, such as the /r/ in ‘rotting remains’ and the /b/ in ‘blackened brick’, there is the /u/ sound in the first syllables of ‘ruined wooden’. In the second row of the extract above, there are two adjective-noun pairs which should be considered with more attention: ‘heavy planks’ and ‘massive beams’. Even though there is no alliteration, the four form a combination which expresses strength and mass. The adjective ‘heavy’ is paired with a noun that has hard consonants, p and k, after which both of the words ‘massive’ and ‘beams’ begin with a bilabial sound, m and b. The former indicates something hard and heavy; the latter indicates mass and size. Further, considering the remains of items left and adding the ‘stone staircase’ creates an image of the fragile, worn insides of a firmly walled cellar. Thus, duality is present again. In this case it is the duo of past and present, strength and weakness.

In the previous subchapter I noted that graveyards are places that have a twofold nature: they represent both culture and nature. The image of a cemetery is bifold in another aspect as well: on the one hand, it is a calm and sacred place where the dead have their final resting place, but on the other hand, it is a creepy and dark place where creatures of the night begin their nightly walks or have their parties. In classic horror fiction the cemetery is a popular place where several scary beings can be encountered. Unlike classic horror, modern horror fiction focuses more on suburban areas (Cavallaro 2002, 86). Nevertheless, horror can be anywhere. Burial grounds are places on the border also because living and dead people meet there. Sometimes people search for solace or answers in the nearness of their past loved ones. There is an example of this, though not about a loved one, in *Fear* where the protagonist-narrator is digging in the graveyard of Martense mansion because he believes that he can find an answer there. Despite the seeming similarity to normal customs, finding the answer does not bring him peace of mind or solve the mystery.

The graveyard is usually visited by people who are either attending a funeral, simply drawn to the peaceful atmosphere, or who want to visit a loved one’s grave. Often, however, graveyards are liminal non-places for the living, meaning that they are not meant for staying. People only pass through and do the thing they came to do without lingering any longer than necessary. In *Unnamable*, however, the protagonist and his friend do not mind staying in the graveyard while they are talking which is against Carroll’s (1990, 35) idea that the places of monsters are not places for normal social interaction. To emphasise their nonchalant attitude, the protagonist-narrator begins his recount of the events by mentioning that they are “sitting

on a dilapidated seventeenth-century tomb [...] at the old burying ground in Arkham” (Unnamable, 128). A little later he also claims that the tomb is a comfortable place to be sitting on. The protagonist is an author of horror fiction himself which explains the easiness he seems to feel about his surroundings.

Another protagonist who is very comfortable in his setting is Mr Birch in Vault. As the receiving tomb is the workplace of the undertaker and, as such, very familiar to him, he does not feel uncomfortable in it, like many other people might. He is trapped in a place that is clearly of two sides: As I mentioned in 4.1, it is a place for both the living who work there and the dead who are kept in it. Additionally, two sides are formed by the materials of which it is made, brick and earth. Only some of the walls are built by people because the receiving tomb is in the side of a hill. This place does not function as a threshold between two universes or realities, like the window in Music, but it is a place where the dead can come to life. In the story, this is what happens to Asaph Sawyer, the dead man avenging his cut ankles to the undertaker. Of course, it can be argued that the place has nothing to do with what happens and that it is more about an avenging spirit, but in my opinion, the receiving tomb is similar to the actual threshold in Music. The case is also quite alike in House which I will analyse next.

What I have not yet mentioned is that the shunned house was built in a place that functioned as a burial ground earlier. The graves of original settlers were eventually moved into a new graveyard which allowed the straightening of some streets and the building of new houses (House, 234). This forms an interesting background even though it is not actually linked to the horror of the house. The cellar with its earth floor is the focal point of the story. As I have discussed before, the cellar has a bad smell and disturbing fungal growth. The source of horror is discovered when the protagonist-narrator digs into the earth floor of the cellar and finds the buried remains of an old tenant which he later destroys. Like in Vault, the location is the meeting point of the living and the spirit of a dead person, an evil spirit. The cellar thus functions as a threshold. On this borderline, or through this threshold, the spirit of Roulet is able to enter the world of the living and harm them. Similarly, the cellar of the Martense mansion is a threshold, an entryway for the beings that live somewhere underground and exit only to do harm to the animals and humans in the area. The idea can be stretched here: the ground everywhere is their threshold because they dig tunnels to move around near Tempest Mountain.

However, it seems that there are certain conditions which are required for the threshold to work. First in *House*, the spirit can only manifest itself when the surroundings are moist, even wet. It requires rain. Second, the weather also plays a part in *Fear* as the horrible creatures only attack when it is thundering. Third, unlike in the two already mentioned, the playing of the violist is the triggering element linked to the threshold and the horror beyond it. Only this time it is for the opposite purpose: to keep the border closed.

I have now explored Lovecraft's writing in regards to being on the borderline of two places, the duality in the meaning or nature of places, and some significant word choices in this subchapter. Places that have something to do with the living and the dead, places that could be used but are not, places that are in a state of disintegration are all common as what Lovecraft uses as setting, specifically in the corpus of this study. Next, I will finish my thesis with a brief conclusion.

## 5 Conclusion

In this thesis I have studied the way setting is created in six of H. P. Lovecraft's early short stories using approaches of time and place together as the chronotope, the presence of nature via ecocriticism, and the duality in the meaning and purpose of places which sometimes form thresholds. Within my analysis I have also focused on lexical choices expressing these things, notably the use of adjectives with nouns. Altogether, I have illustrated that Lovecraft's settings represent two things. On the one hand, the general view of the settings in the six short stories is similar to that of classic horror: terrible situations are set in old, abandoned buildings and cemeteries. On the other hand, several details in most of the settings reveal something weird: trees are too big and gnarled, the appearance of the place is a little off (peculiar), or the presence of something from beyond can be detected. Lovecraft's attention to place and its depiction is praised for good reason.

I will now take a brief look back on chapter 4 and the analysis. First, I showed how Lovecraft uses an abundance of adjectives and also otherwise rich descriptive language. Due to the fact that his approach to settings is very detailed, Lovecraft's choice of adjectives is interesting and very full. Second, I presented an overall setting of each short story. Third, I studied the setting of these short stories with the use of time and place as equal parts working together. The chronotope offers a natural way to analyse the setting because it challenges the reader to take into account both action, location, and the elements which affect each other in creating the setting. As the protagonists work, such as dig, time goes on and the scene is formed clearly with its piles of dirt on the ground or drops of perspiration on the skin. The weather does its part as well which is shown in soaking streets and muddy pools. Then, fourth, using the ecocritical approach allowed me to analyse the texts with a focus on nature. Nature has a strong role in the setting of four out of six short stories that I analysed. In every one of these short stories natural elements, such as plants, are described as tall, thick, and often unnatural. What is also unnatural is what some of them are doing: merging their surroundings into themselves and portraying anthropomorphic characteristics. Nature is powerful: it is reclaiming its space and ignoring humans. While exaggeration is a common technique in Gothic fiction, Lovecraft reaches a little further and adds something weird. And then fifth, the final part of my analysis consisted of the thresholds present in the settings and exploring the two sides the thresholds connect. It became evident that most places in these short stories are



either places that have a two-fold meaning, as the cemetery, or form a border between two places, like the attic loft and its window.

Thus to summarise the analysis, the settings of Lovecraft's short stories are on the threshold between classic horror fiction and weird (horror) fiction. Based on the analysis of Lovecraft's six short stories from the first half of the 1920s, an admittedly small corpus, his style of depicting the setting is, in itself, an example of the concept of *threshold*. It allows the reader to glimpse at what is beyond. In addition, considering how Lovecraft's topics turned to cosmicism in his later writings early signs can be seen in the analysed short stories: the grandeur of nature leaves the human subject small and insignificant. It would be interesting to expand the corpus to cover Lovecraft's entire oeuvre, and to explore the use of thresholds in the writings of other authors of weird or horror fiction. This thesis has barely got the study of setting off the threshold.

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## Appendix

### Finnish Summary

Miljö (*setting*) on olennainen osa kauhukirjallisuutta ja kauhutarinoiden luomaa tunnelmaa. Paikka (*place*) voi olla sisällä tai ulkona, avoin tai rajattu; joka tapauksessa se vaikuttaa siellä oleviin ja siihen, mitä he voivat tehdä. Tutkielmassani keskityn analysoimaan, miten ja millaisena tapahtumapaikat kuvataan muutamissa H. P. Lovecraftin novelleissa. Lovecraft (1890–1937) on tunnettu kauhukirjailija, joka kuvasi itseään usein oudon fiktion (*weird fiction*) kirjoittajana. Suurin osa hänen fiktiotuotannostaan on novelleja, mutta hän kirjoitti myös paljon runoja ja kirjeitä. Lovecraftin tekstien yleisimpiä piirteitä on runsas adjektiivien (*adjectives*) käyttö. Tapahtumapaikat ovat tärkeitä ja hän kuvaa niitä usein tarkasti. Tässä tutkielmassa pyrin selvittämään, millaisia Lovecraftin novellien tapahtumapaikat ovat verrattuna perinteisen (*traditional horror*) tai goottilaisen kauhun (*Gothic horror*) tapahtumapaikkoihin. Tarkoitukseni on lisäksi ymmärtää luonnon (*nature*) roolia tapahtumapaikoissa. Tärkeä osa koko analyysiä on itse teksti ja millaisia sanavalintoja (*lexical choices*) kirjailija on tehnyt kuvatessaan tapahtumapaikkoja.

Lovecraftin novellit ilmestyivät pääasiassa *Weird Tales* -lehdessä. Hänen teoksensa ovat saavuttaneet laajempaa suosiota vasta hänen kuolemansa jälkeen. Lähes puolet Lovecraftin novellituotannosta on peräisin 1920-luvun alkupuolelta. Tutkielmani korpus koostuu kuudesta novellista, jotka on kirjoitettu tuona aikana: *The Cats of Ulthar* (1920; suom. Ultharin kissat, Ulla Selkälä ja Ilkka Äärelä, 2010), *The Music of Erich Zann* (1921; suom. Erich Zannin musiikki, Ulla Selkälä ja Ilkka Äärelä, 2011), *The Lurking Fear* (1922; suom. Vaaniva pelko, Ulla Selkälä ja Ilkka Äärelä, 2011), *The Unnamable* (1923; suom. Nimetön, Ulla Selkälä ja Ilkka Äärelä, 2011), *The Shunned House* (1924; suom. Kammottu talo, Ulla Selkälä ja Ilkka Äärelä, 2009), ja *In the Vault* (1925; suom. Hautaholvissa, Ulla Selkälä ja Ilkka Äärelä, 2009). Neljä näistä kuudesta novellista noudattaa yleistä kauhutarinan kaavaa, jossa päähenkilö kertoo kokemistaan tapahtumista. Näiden novellien tapahtumapaikat ovat keskenään osittain samanlaisia, esimerkiksi hautausmaita ja hylättyjä taloja, mutta myös osittain erilaisia, esimerkiksi kaupungin hautausmaa, suvun oma hautausmaa ja ruumiskellari. Novellien tapahtumien pääpaikat on listattu tässä novellien mukaan kronologisessa järjestyksessä: fiktiivinen Ultharin kylä, kerrostalo ranskankielisessä kaupungissa, hylätty

kartano ja sitä ympäröivä maaseutu, hautausmaa Arkham-nimisessä fiktiivisessä kaupungissa, pitkään asumattomana ollut talo Providencen kaupungissa ja jonkin hautausmaan ruumiskellari. Lovecraft pystyy lisäämään oudon sävyn teksteihinsä, mikä vie paikat, hahmot ja tapahtumatkin kauas tuntemastamme todellisuudesta. Näin ollen osoitan tutkielmassani, että Lovecraftin novellien tapahtumapaikat poikkeavat perinteisistä kauhutarinoiden tapahtumapaikoista juurikin tällä outoudella.

Analyysini nojaa erityisesti kahteen teoreettiseen lähestymistapaan: kronotooppi ja ekokritiikki. Kronotooppi (*chronotope*) eli aikapaikallisuus on Bakhtinin kirjallisuudentutkimukseen tuoma käsitys siitä, kuinka temporaaliset ja spatiaaliset elementit liittyvät yhteen. Aika ja paikka tarkentavat ja todentavat paikan ilmaistemista, esimerkiksi sateen jäljet maassa osoittavat ajan kuluneen. Tähän liittyy myös se, että tapahtumapaikka rajoittaa siellä olevia tapahtumia ja tekoja: päähenkilö ei pysty kaivamaan betonilattiaa tai uimaan kuivalla maalla. Ekokritiikki (*ecocriticism*) pohjautuu pääasiassa Tabasin, Krögerin ja Corstorphinen teksteihin, jotka käsittelevät kauhutarinoiden miljöötä ekokriittisestä näkökulmasta. Kyse on luonnon roolista sekä ihmisen ja luonnon välisestä vuorovaikutuksesta. Paikkaa ja siinä toimijoita ei voi erottaa toisistaan kokonaan, oli sitten kyse luonnon kyvystä vallata alaa tai ihmisen toiminnasta tietyssä ympäristössä. Lisäyksenä on syväekologia (*deep ecology*), jonka mukaan ihmisen ja ympäristön yhteys on vahva. Esimerkkinä voidaan pitää ihmisen aisteja, joiden käyttöä ympäristömme voi hankaloittaa monin tavoin, muun muassa tiheän kasvillisuuden tai sateen ja sumun kautta. Sää onkin olennainen osa miljöötä, jota analysoin tutkielmassani.

Monet kertojat Lovecraftin novelleissa ovat kykenemättömiä kuvailemaan tarkasti näkemiään asioita, erityisesti hirviötä. Todellisuudesta poikkeavat outoudet ja aistien häirintä vaikuttavat tähän suuresti. Aiemmin mainitsemani adjektiivien runsaus on myös osa tätä tekstuaalista käytäntöä, jolla Lovecraft jättää kirjoituksessaan aukon hahmojensa näkemien kohteiden ja niistä kertovien sanojen välille. Kirjailijan sanavalinnat ovat muutenkin huomionarvoisia, koska hän käyttää niitä luomaan tarinasta kokonaisuuden oikealla tunnelmalla. Palatakseni vielä lyhyesti paikkoihin, tutkin Lovecraftin novellien tapahtumapaikoissa esiintyviä rajatiloja seuraten Knealen huomioita kynnyksistä (*thresholds*). Tarkoitukseni on tarkastella erilaisia merkityksiä, joita paikoilla on, esimerkiksi kulttuurinen ja luonnollinen, sekä konkreettisia rajan erottamia paikkoja.



Aloitin analyysini tutustumalla lyhyesti Lovecraftin kirjoitustyyliin, tapaan jolla hän kuvailee tapahtumapaikkoja. Olen jo maininnut, että novellit sisältävät paljon adjektiiveja; lyhyin tarina sisältää 15 adjektiivia miljöön kuvauksissa, kun taas pisimmässä niitä on 183. Samat adjektiivit eivät toistu usein tarinan sisällä, mutta tietyt adjektiivit synonyymeineen toistuvat useissa tarinoissa. Yleisimmät adjektiivit ovat 'hylätty', 'vanha' ja 'pimeä'. Lovecraft käyttää adjektiiveja kahdella erottuvalla tavalla: merkityspareittain ja äänneparina substantiiville. Ensimmäisellä tavalla vahvistetaan adjektiivin merkitystä käyttämällä kahta adjektiivia kuvaamaan yhtä pääsanaa. Adjektiivit ovat joko synonyymejä tai niiden merkitykset ovat lähellä toisiaan. Jälkimmäinen tapa sitoo sanat yhteen merkityksen ohella yhtenäisellä ääntämisellä niin, että sama äänne toistuu sekä adjektiivissa että sen määrittämässä substantiivissa. Kyse on kuitenkin vain erillisistä, yksittäisistä äänneistä näissä sanapareissa. Samanlaiset äänneet esiintyvät useimmiten allitteraationa.

Jokainen teksti edellyttää omaa tulkintaansa kronotoopin avulla, koska jokainen paikka ja jokainen hetki on omansa. Aikapaikallisuus voi olla tulkintoja paikasta pitkällä tai lyhyellä aikavälillä. Pitkää ajanjaksoa edustaa esimerkiksi vuodenaikojen vaihtelu. Analysoiduissa novelleissa ei ole vastaavaa, mutta niissä esiintyy lyhyen aikavälin muutoksia. Novelleissa "Vaanima pelko" ja "Kammottu talo" päähenkilöt kaivavat maata kohdissa, joissa tietävät tai olettavat olevan joku haudattuna. Kaivaminen on mahdollista, koska novellin "Vaanima pelko" päähenkilö on ulkona ja novellin "Kammottu talo" maapohjaisessa kellarissa. Ajan kuluessa ja työn edistyessä maata kertyy kuopan reunalle ja kuoppa syvenee. Näissä novelleissa on yhteistä lisäksi se, miten päähenkilöt kuvailevat maata, jota kaivavat. Pahaenteisuus ja negatiivisuus nousevat esiin, kun kuoppa novellissa "Vaanima pelko" on hirviömäisen syvä ja kellarin maa mustaa ja pahalta haisevaa. Novellin "Hautaholvissa" päähenkilö tekee samantyylistä kaivuutyötä suurentaessaan seinässä olevaa aukkoa päästäkseen pois ruumiskellarista. Ajan kulumisen näkyy aukon suurenemisen lisäksi siinä, kuinka hän hikoilee. Toinen hikoilemaan alkava hahmo on viulisti, joka soittaa kuin villissä transsissa pitääkseen hirviön poissa novellin "Erich Zannin musiikki" loppukohtauksessa.

Säällä on suuri merkitys useimmissa novelleissa, joita käsittelen. Novellissa "Vaanima pelko" kauhun aiheuttajat lähtevät liikkeelle aina ukkosmyrskyn aikaan. Yllä mainitsemani kaivuuprosessi päättyy, kun kaivaja päätyy maanalaiseen tunneliin ja lopulta kohtaa siellä niin sanotun hirviön kiiluvat silmät; hän kuitenkin pelastuu tilanteesta puhjenneessa ukkosmyrskyssä iskevän salaman myllätessä maata ja avatessa hänelle reitin maan pinnalle. "Kammottu talo" -novellin kauhistus puolestaan ilmestyy aina kun kellarissa on kosteaa, siis

sateella. Muuttuvat sääolot osoittavat samalla kronotoopin käytön, esimerkiksi sateen kastelema katu ja sateen luomat lätäköt jälkimmäisessä novellissa. Perinteisen kauhun tapaan sää synkkenee useissa analysoimissani novelleissa, kun tilanne huononee ja tarinan hirviön on aika ilmestyä. Pilviä kerääntyy taivaalle ja hämärtyy novelleissa ”Ultharin kissat” ja ”Hautaholvissa”, tuuli yltyy novellissa ”Erich Zannin musiikki” ja myös ”Vaanimassa pelossa” ennen myrskyn puhkeamista. Sään tavoin ilmaan liittyy vielä viimeinen asia kronotoopista: suljetun tilassa ilma muuttuu tunkkaiseksi. Tämä ilmiö esiintyy novellissa ”Hautaholvissa”. Kronotoopin ohessa ilmiö liittyy syväekologiaan, koska se vaikuttaa ihmisen, tässä päähenkilön, aisteihin, vaikkakaan päähenkilö ei itse kommentoi sen häiritsevän. Yllä mainittu hämärtyminen puolestaan hankaloittaa työskentelyä, koska päähenkilö ei enää näe tarvitsemiaan esineitä kunnolla.

Kirjallisuutta voidaan tulkita syväekologian mukaan niin, että esineiden ja paikkojen outous eli kuinka ne poikkeavat tavallisesta ja tutusta korostuu ja erottuu hahmojen havainnoissa ja tulkitsessa ympäristöään. Lovecraft lisää kummallisia elementtejä ja rinnastaa tavallisia paikkoja outoihin, usein konkreettisesti vierekkäin. Näin on tehty novellissa ”Erich Zannin musiikki”, jonka minäkertoja ei kykene löytämään pelottavan kohtaamisen tapahtumapaikalle enää uudestaan pakonsa jälkeen. Kyseinen paikka erottuu hänen kuvauksessaan poikkeavuudellaan, vaikka hän ei pystykään suoranaisesti nimeämään näitä poikkeavuuksia; hän epäilee asian johtuvan muun muassa vetäytyvistä, vanhoista asukkaista ja kerrostalojen kaltevuudesta. Joshin mukaan kaupunki on Pariisi. Kerrostalo sijaitsee kadulla nimeltä Rue d’Auseil, jonka jälkimmäisen osan ääntämisasu muistuttaa ilmausta ’au seuil’, joka tarkoittaa ’kynnyksellä.’ Nimen symbolinen merkitys on suuri, kun huomioidaan se, että rakennuksen ullakkohuoneiston ikkunasta on kulkureitti jonkin toisen, kauhistuttavan todellisuuden puolelle; viulisti yrittää soitollaan pitää reitin kiinni ja toisen puolen kulkijat ulos suljettuina. Ullakkohuoneiston ikkuna siis toimii kynnyksenä kahden maailman välillä.

Lovecraft muuttaa tavallisesti rauhoittavan luonnon ympäristöksi, joka aiheuttaa epävarmuutta, pelkoa ja pienuuden tunnetta hänen päähenkilöissään. Luonto heijastaa pahuutta, joka siinä asuu, usein kauhukirjallisuudessa. Tämä nähdään esimerkiksi novellissa ”Ultharin kissat”: kissoja tappavan pariskunnan pihaa kuvataan luotaantyöntäväksi ja suurten puiden varjostamaksi. Kuitenkin, novellissa ”Vaanima pelko” aluetta terrorisoivat olennot asuvat suvun kartanon alla, mutta luonto ilmentää kauhua kaikkialla ympäröivällä alueella, minne olentojen hyökkäykset vain ulottuvat. Puut ovat suuria, vääntyneitä ja vanhoja, muu kasvillisuus tiheää. Maassa näkyy valjeja ja kumpuja paikoissa, joissa olennot ovat

kaivautuneet ja nousseet pintaan. Luonnon mahtavuus ja suuruus ilmenee lisäksi novellin ”Nimetön” hautausmaalla, jossa kasvaa jättikokoinen paju, jonka juuriakin tarinan minäkertoja epäilee kolossaalisiksi. Lovecraftin tapa käyttää runsaasti erilaisia adjektiiveja on omiaan värittämään paikkojen kuvailua ja luomaan tunnelmaa.

Samalla hautausmaalla luonto valtaa alaa siellä, minne ihminen on rakentanut: pajun runko kasvaa eräässä hautakivessä kiinni niin, että kivi alkaa kadota rungon sisään. Tämä on samalla esimerkki antropomorfismista, koska tekstissä puun sanotaan nielaisevan hautakiven.

Lovecraft antaa myös ”Vaaniva pelko” novellin puille ihmismäisiä piirteitä. Päähenkilö kuvailee puiden viskovan järjettömiä oksiaan ja mulkoilevan allaan kulkijoita. Kuvaileva teksti on kauhukirjallisuudelle tyypillisesti liioittelevaa, mutta myös Lovecraftille tyypillisesti outoa. Palatakseni kappaleen alkuun, ihmisen rakennelmat ovat häviämässä luonnolle myös novelleissa ”Vaaniva pelko”, jossa kartanon kellarissa kasvaa tiheästi rikkaruohoja, ”Kammottu talo”, jonka kellarissa on sienikasvustoa, ja ”Ultharin kissat”, missä vanhan pariskunnan talon maalattialla liikkuu kovakuoriaisia. Luonnon voima näkyy erityisesti paikoissa, jotka ihminen on hylännyt, kuten novellien ”Vaaniva pelko” ja ”Kammottu talo” rakennuksissa.

Sekä antropomorfismi että luonnon ja ihmisen rakennelmien yhdistelmät luovat miljööhön epämääräisyyttä, mikä on tyypillistä kauhukirjallisuudessa. Tapahtumapaikoilla tai niiden osasilla on näistä johtuen kaksoisluonne. Puut edustavat sekä kasvillisuutta että ihmistä, hautausmaa edustaa sekä luontoa että ihmisen kulttuuria ja lisäksi sekä rauhaa että pelottavuutta, jotkin rakennukset edustavat sekä luontoa että ihmisen tekemää. Ambivalenssi ja hybridisyys saavat aikaan sen, että tällaiset paikat voivat olla rajatiloja, kynnyksiä, joihin viittasin aiemmin analysoidessani Rue d’Auseil’n kadunnimeä novellista ”Erich Zannin musiikki”. Lovecraftin tekstit edustavat rajatilaa jo itsessään, koska tarkkoja genererajoja rikkoessaan niitä voi kutsua kauhuksi, oudoksi kauhuksi tai oudoksi fiktioksi.

Analysoimieni novellien miljööt, erityisesti tarkat tapahtumapaikat, vastaavat pääpiirteissään perinteisiä kauhutarinoiden tapahtumapaikkoja, kuten vanhat kartanot ja hautausmaat. Siinä ei kuitenkaan ole kaikki, sillä varsinkin kirjailijan käyttämät adjektiivit tuovat mukaan jotain enemmän. Tämän tutkielman korpus on silti vasta pieni osa Lovecraftin tuotannosta, ja kattavaa analyysiä varten olisi tutustuttava kaikkiin novelleihin.