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Mémoire de licence en littérature américaine
Présenté par **David Javet**
Sous la direction de **Boris Vejdovsky**

THE PEN(S) THAT NEVER STOPS WRITING

THE LOVECRAFT MYTHOLOGY
OR THE EXPANSION OF A LITERARY PHENOMENON

GOSH! 2009©

To the lurker at my threshold,

Mémoire de Licence: littérature américaine   David Javet
The Pen⁽ˢ⁾ that never Stops Writing   Hiver 2009-2010
Directeur: Boris Vejdovsky

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Foreword

The idea of writing this work occurred to me when visiting an exhibition at the *Maison d'Ailleurs* in Yverdon-les-Bains (Switzerland) called *An Exhibition of Unspeakable Things – Works Inspired by H. P Lovecraft's Commonplace Book* (28 October 2007- 6 April 2008). The visitor was presented with a massive amount of drawings, paintings or photographs from various artists each using lines from Lovecraft's *Commonplace Book* as the basis of their work. What strongly impressed me was how from the basis of a single sentence the artists could evoke an impressive referential universe. While it was not my first encounter with Lovecraft's work or anything derived from it, I experienced a profound amazement at the energy involved in order to visually reinterpret the writer's creation. As I searched deeper, it led to the discovery of a massive corpus of writing linked with the name of Lovecraft.

Along with this sudden interest I already knew that I had the desire to write something on group writing rather than focusing on a single writer. This desire was triggered by works I did in Japanese studies on the trivial form of *Haikai* (俳諧), a type of Japanese poetry involving group creation (later to become *Haiku* (俳句)). It then appeared that a study of Lovecraft's adaptations in the present days would completely respond to this desire.

What better way is there then to present a study about the achievement of a community than to show it as also the combined work of many?

I would like to give my sincere thanks to the *Maison d'Ailleurs* and especially Frédéric Jaccaud for giving me the access to their important collection of pulp magazines. I would also like to thank S.T. Joshi to who I am greatly indebted for having kindly sent me articles I could not find otherwise. This work would not have been possible without the participation of Boris Vejdovsky who directed this study and I am grateful to say accepted this subject with an open mind.

My thanks would also go to my family who supported me along the whole process— especially my mother, Danielle Javet, who landed me her skills as a librarian and greatly helped me to constitute my bibliography.

This work is the final produce of my friends' participation and, therefore, I thank Jérémie Wenger and Noël Christe who read it and gave their useful corrections, comments and suggestions as English students at the University of Lausanne. I would also like to give

Introduction

When on March 15th 1937 the American horror, science-fiction and fantasy writer Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) died in Providence, Rhode Island, he left behind him a substantial amount of letters, writings and articles. While he first published his tales in a pulp magazine with modest readership his works would gradually become popular and reach an international public throughout the years, up until the present. In 2005, the publication at The Library of America of the volume *Lovecraft Tales* significantly proved his entrance in the list of celebrated American writers. Along with his renewed popularity, academic works on Lovecraft proliferated and lead to a rediscovery of his texts and approach to writing. We have now come to the point where his name is widespread and his works widely translated. He does not appear anymore as surprising a writer to select for a final academic paper.

What could then be considered as original is to examine Lovecraft as much from the perspective of his writings as from the inspiration he gave to other writers who participated in making his works popular. Generally described as a recluse who ate only cheese and ice cream while taking long walks at night, Lovecraft paradoxically managed to inspire an increasingly large population of readers to take up the pen and use his creativity as a foundation for their creations. It follows that one of the reasons for the renown that we now associate with the name of Lovecraft is due to the large corpus of works resulting from his influence. In this paper, the main focus will be put on this corpus of writers, including Lovecraft, rather than on Lovecraft alone. This decision implies that the analysis is to be concerned as much with the contents of the works as with the historical development of the corpus. To recall Ferdinand de Saussure's terminology, rather than only having a descriptive synchronic take on the subject, the historical diachronic view will be emphasized to show its evolution through cultural changes up to the present. Consequently, this work deals with a phenomenon that first was the expression of a marginalized minority and then turned into the most important expansion of narratives in contemporary American literature: the writing of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, of his contemporaries and followers; what is now called among other names "The Cthulhu Mythos"[1] and what this study shall call "Lovecraft mythology."

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[1] The name Cthulhu, one of the main extraterrestrial beings introduced in this mythology was meant by H.P. Lovecraft to be the vague transcription of sounds impossible to pronounce for the human tongue. In a letter, his creator points to the correct pronunciation, "*Khlûl'-hloo*" adding: "My rather careful devising of this name was a sort of protest against the silly and childish habit of most weird and science-fiction writers, of having *utterly non-human entities* use a nomenclature *of thoroughly human character*; as if alien-organed beings could possibly have languages based on *human* vocal organs" (*Selected Letters* Vol.V: 11 [Quoted in Joshi, *Rise* 2008: 49]).

For reasons that follow, the title of "Lovecraft mythology" was selected. The term "mythology" has to be understood as a web of related myths. In fact, what has been considered as Lovecraft's main achievement is the establishment of an artificial mythology or in the writer's words "the solemnly cited myth-cycle of Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, R'lyeh, Nyarlathotep, Nug, Yeb, Shub-Nigguroth, etc., etc" (*Selected Letters* vol.III: 166). Lovecraft used the inspirational force contained in mythic structures to give more weight to his writings and reach the readers on a deeper level. His originality was that he managed to link some of his tales through the sharing of the same mythic background. This inspired other writers to participate in the use of this background for their own tales. While using mythic patterns, Lovecraft, in fact, triggered a chain reaction of re-writing and re-telling of narratives; a characteristic generally associated with myth-telling. Therefore, the term "mythology" is to be linked with every creation from Lovecraft or from anyone referring to this mythic background. While other terms such as "Cthulhu Mythos" or "Lovecraft Mythos" are also used by critics and writers, they are considered inappropriate since they only designate the precise recurrent elements of the mythology and do not allow for considering the corpus as an evolving cultural phenomenon. Also, it should be clear that the selective process consisting of deciding which particular tale should or should not be included in the mythology will not be our concern since the many studies on the theme have revealed the subjective quality of such a research. What was considered central for this study is how the Lovecraft mythology evolves and survives rather than what constitutes it.

As we shall see, the Lovecraft mythology has to be envisaged in a similar way as any other mythology, its only particularity being that it is evolving principally in the literary media rather than through an oral tradition. Our study is then constructed on the following set of questions: How is the Lovecraft mythology similar to any other mythology? How accurately can we determine its birth? What motivated its evolution and development? Finally, what could be the source of this inspirational power contained in the Lovecraft mythology?

This study will examine the Lovecraft mythology as any mythology defined by a process of re-telling, and proposes a reading of it that considers it as a literary phenomenon adapting itself to the cultural changes along its history.

His first appearance was in H.P Lovecraft "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926); his name would then reappear sporadically in Lovecraft's later tales, but only in allusion or quick reference. It Is "because it was in *The Call of Cthulhu* that the myth-pattern first became apparent" that August Derleth (1909-1971), creator of Arkham House named it "the Cthulhu Mythology", or "Cthulhu Mythos" (Derleth, August. "H.P. Lovecraft, Outsider." *River* 1. 3 (June 1937): 88-89. [Quoted in Joshi, *Rise* 2008: 177]). Finally, the word "Mythos" was preferred, giving to its object an archaic and mysterious touch.

The first part will deal with questions of definition associated with difficult concepts such as "myth" and "mythology." Firstly, it is important to define what the main characteristics of "myth" are in order to see if they appear in our object. The question of myth linked to literature will lead us to the question of the modern outburst of written material's quantity and its influence on myth-telling.

The second part will be concerned by the foundations of the Lovecraft mythology established by Lovecraft but also by his friends. It is important to see how the phenomenon was first considered in order to understand what lies behind the large tradition of tales that followed Lovecraft's death. It is through the process of group writing motivated by the pleasure of storytelling that the Lovecraft mythology was born. Powered by the special possibilities offered by the publication in pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales*, the Lovecraft mythology would establish at its very beginning a privileged bond with its readership. This part is meant to be more descriptive of the phenomenon and will function in parallel with the rest of the study which handles the phenomenon historically. It is necessary in order to see what the mythology was first intended to be and how much it adapted depending on the context rather than the ideas of its originators.

The third part of the study turns to the evolution of the phenomenon up until the present. As the figure of August Derleth, Lovecraft's friend and publisher, is extremely central in the process of redefinition and adaptation, a particular stress will be put on his influence on the Lovecraft mythology. Derleth mainly considered his readership and transformed the perception of the mythology in order to seduce as many readers as possible. His modifications triggered the rise of a new scholarship devoted to restoring the views on Lovecraft's work and rid it of its assumed misreading. This new scholarship looks at the Lovecraft mythology with negative considerations as they perceived what they called "imitations" or "pastiches" the generator of Lovecraft's misinterpretation. These are just two examples meant to show how the Lovecraft mythology changed according to what writers, but more importantly readers, will make of it.

Finally, the fourth part will be concerned in presenting a new way of considering the Lovecraft mythology: the post-structuralism of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and their studies on the figure of the "Author." This new approach proposes to give a greater emphasis on the readers or myth-hearers of the Lovecraft mythology than on the writers. In doing this, the study tackles with the very source of the inspirational power contained in it. Because

writers are foremost readers of the Lovecraft mythology and carry their experience and culture, the source for this need of re-telling is to be found in the act of reading the myth—in the discovery of the potential of the Lovecraft mythology. The study concludes on some propositions designating potential directions for further analysis and additional investigations on the Lovecraft mythology.

As said previously, this study is not concerned with trying to pursue a complete review of individual writers of the Lovecraft mythology (for obvious reasons of space) but also in order to present the subject on a global scale, as a phenomenon inherited from culture rather than isolated individuals. It is in discarding the idea of authorship in the Lovecraft mythology that its nature as a contemporary mythology can be seen.

I. Myth, Literature and the Lovecraft Mythology

1. Myth and Lovecraft: An Approach

Before a study of what Lovecraft was able to achieve as an artist, it is important to clarify difficult concepts such as "myth" and "mythology." As Lovecraft would reproduce their characteristics in his writings, one should grasp not only how complex these terms are but also how they aroused various interpretations.

When even for a very short period of time one decides to wear the suit of the mythologist, the difficulties of the task will quickly appear. Just as one myth never functions separately but constitutes a mythology within a complex web of interlinked narratives, the understanding of myth as one intrinsic cultural phenomenon becomes increasingly complex. To analyze myth is to be ready to be faced with an almost never ending pool of connections and links to other narratives present in the same culture but also in others. As David Bidney proposes: "Myth has a positive value for the ethnologist and folklorist as a record of man's culture history and as a means of establishing universal patterns of thought" (1957: 22). Accordingly, these narratives function on two different levels: first, they speak of the particular beliefs and understanding of a single localized culture, second, they reveal human patterns of behavior, questionings and metaphysical anxieties that stress the need their culture has for such narratives. One may consider myth from where it comes: a vital need present in every culture under different aspects to try to clarify human experience. This need is at the core of each culture and constitutes the only certain "universal pattern" that can be established, for with myth comes the specificity of its culture and history.

On the contrary, for structuralism, the pledge of knowledge proposed by myth to the analyst is clearly defined: myth has the potential to reveal parts of the human behavior and thought that can be applied to the whole of humanity with no concern about history, race or culture. As Lévi-Strauss argues: "What gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (1957: 85). This would suppose that a myth could have a similar value inespective of any situation to it in time or space. Lévi-Strauss implies that an ancient myth is as meaningful as a contemporary myth generated by present cultures. Thus the classical conception expressed by structuralists is to consider their field of study in the distant past or the antiquity as well as in the present (maybe even in the future). They are concerned with old surviving traditions.

Accordingly, they consider that myth is understandable in a way unrelated to the origins of the analyst:

> Myth, like great art and dramatic literature, may have profound symbolic or allegorical value for us of the present, not because myth necessarily and intrinsically has such latent, esoteric wisdom, but because the plot or theme suggests to us universal patterns of motivation and conduct. It must be assumed, however, that the subjective, symbolic value of a myth for us and the actual historical beliefs of its originators are identical. (Bidney 1957: 22)

But can it be really "assumed" that the contemporary conception of an ancient myth corresponds to the original conception that gave birth to it? If structuralist theories are applied, it should be understood that the contrary may also happen. It may be assumed that the ancient Greeks would be as able to comprehend and rely on a contemporary American myth as any contemporary American; and this is a difficult argument to defend. Still, the analysis of a distant myth could reveal mythic narrative patterns that can then be found to recreate, reformulate or adapt to other cultures. And this in fact is why the closer one is culturally to a mythic pattern the more apt he will be to rely on its new adaptation. There is as much potential and need in contemporary cultures to create or reiterate myth, though the tools to transmit it may have changed radically. This cultural gap would then constitute the main differential element between the interpretations of an old or a contemporary myth. In the precise example of Lovecraft and his followers—still producing numerous writings—one has to consider this gap. In fact, one of the reasons that justify re-writings, adaptations or pastiches is to give an up-to-date aspect to Lovecraft's creation. What this contemporary use of myth demonstrates is that, while one has to try to grasp the qualities of myth in general, the contextual aspect of the time and space of the telling but also of the hearing/reading never has to be forgotten. Lovecraft and his followers are proofs of not only the everlasting presence of myth among human culture, but also of its contextual reformatting.

At the end of the 19th Century, mythologists such as Frazer, Frazer, Fiske, Bulfinch, Baring-Gould or Sir Walter Scott defended the idea that myth would be a mean for ancient cultures to explain the surrounding nature. They argued that for a very long period in the history of humanity, myth and ritual were the only means for cultures around the globe to understand the world surrounding them. Sea, sky, earth and space took shape in various ways; physical happenings were explained through narratives. And they would be amongst Lovecraft's reading list. While their views on myth are majorly contested today they stressed the important point that through myth one's place in the vast surrounding was resolved, justified. Myth always challenges the listeners with ontological questions; placing humans at

its core. In addition, as he is a part of it, one always has the choice to adopt and accept myth and what it offers him. Myth is also a tool of rallying; it gives the different individuals the possibility to join (or not) a group or a community through the sharing of a common view of the world. Myth is a tool used to express his relation to others and to the world:

> Both the great and the lesser mythologies of mankind have, up to the present, always served simultaneously, both to lead the young from their estate in nature, and to bear the aging back to nature and on through the last dark door. And while doing all this, they have served, also, to render an image of the world of nature, a cosmological image as I have called it, that should seem to support the claims and aims of the local social group; so that through every feature of the experienced world the sense of an ideal harmony resting on a dark dimension of wonder should be communicated. One can only marvel at the integrating, life-structuring force of even the simplest traditional organization of mythic symbols. (Campbell, *Mythological Themes* 1988: 144)

At this point, it should be underlined that the adoption of myth as a "life-structuring force" is still something that depends on one's personal experience. As myth is adaptable and variable it does not accept the claims of a rigid truth but proposes a version of truth. It is the choice of the individual or the community to decide whether they would adhere to its adoption or not. Myth is a tool at the individual's disposal: it structures his present and not his past, and he may opt to adapt it or dismiss it. Myth does not belong to the field of belief but to the one of custom. In order to be accepted it must please and be compatible with a time and a culture. Thus myth is considered as a social practice, with all the idea of adaptation, transformation and evolution that this implies. As it is the result of a choice, each myth illustrates an important aspect of the culture it is bonded with. A human culture is deeply interlinked with the creation and development of myth. For instance, as they thought of themselves as the children of Hephaestus and Gaia, the ancient Athenians explained through a myth their practical way of life. In the same way, the contemporary mythic example of the "self-made man" appearing as a narrative retold through various media shaped American culture. Both myths, however, are derived from specific contemporary thoughts and experiences. They would be adopted by different cultures as carrying an important symbolical meaning and as marks of their singularity.

To study myth in a culture requires an analytical approach of the different media that are employed to present the mythical narratives. Even if, early in human history, the various cultures decided to record and speak of their myths on walls and in books, myths appear to us as ever-changing narratives. The image of the myth-teller shaping his story while he tells it using his personal language to adapt the narrative, itself taken from the well of a common heritage, cannot be excluded from our vision of myths; myth is both individual and common.

It belongs to the myth-teller, but also at the same time to the myth-hearers. As Lévi-Strauss emphasizes, a myth is a narrative that "has to be told" (1957: 84). It is a story gathering sign or identification object, not fixed in a definite language or structure. Just like language is not a stabilized object, the telling of myth, mimicking language, knows variations and alterations. It is the property of myth to be both stable (universal) and diverse, unique when it is reenacted, reappropriated and recreated afresh by each new teller. [2] To tell the variations is also part of the game of myth-telling. Since it is as well a part of each individual as of the whole culture, myth is accepted as being always presented differently; as a personal expression through the language of one individual telling his variation to the community. Hence, myth parallels language. Produced by an individual expressing his emotions and views about human experience, it has to be *performed* in order to be effective.

2. The Possibility of Myth: Literature as Myth-Telling

a. From Myth-Telling to Myth-Writing

Granted that myth is closely related to language, what can be its relation with literature? Obviously both are strongly linked in the way that they rely on language and writing to convey their meanings. While a myth is often passed on orally, it also offers to literature a strong inspirational basis. The individual act of writing and the common sharing of myths coexist in the creation of a literary work. Harry Levin states this clearly when he writes that "myth, at all events, is raw material, which can be the stuff of literature. Insofar as this implies a collective fantasy, it must be shared" (1969: 111). He then adds that "we are still inclined to think of the novel as the most immediate, circumstantial, and individualized of artistic forms, the faithful mirror of actualities. We need to be reminded that it contains the elements, and continues the functions, of myth" (1969: 113). Literature may be seen as a prolongation of the act of myth-telling. To write a novel or a short story is to create or employ contemporary or old mythical narrative structures and patterns that allow the readers to rely on it on a cultural level. Myth gives the work of art a larger civilizing quality instead of remaining an individual statement. The literary work becomes as much a personal creation as

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[2] It is no wonder that Derrida's first philosophical gesture, the reflection on the impossibility of a "voice" (origin) that would have preceded writing (supplement), included readings of Lévi-Strauss, and the problem of myth: in this sense, myth embodies at a macro-level what Derrida proves for the whole of language – the being of myth, just as language, is precisely to be always in a state of *différence* towards itself, in a state of constant re-writing, redefinition of itself. It is only in realizing that there is no original myth (since all myth utterance is the transformation, the supplement of many others), but only the very process of *différence* (which actually defines writing as such, and hence myth as well), that we can truly understand the 'stability' and the 'diachonicity' of myth. See Jacques Derrida, "La Structure, le Signe et le Jeu dans le discours des Sciences Humaines" in *De la grammatologie: l'écriture et la différence*.

a common cultural belonging.[3] Literature appears as a convenient tool to transmit, expend, and even create contemporary myths. Accordingly, writing is another form of telling that enable the myth-teller, or the writer, to re-actualize myth in its present and give it a resonance.

As Western society changed, literature became increasingly central to the transmission and the expansion of myth. By way of illustration, the comparison between our use of senses in the Elizabethan times and the present shows a very clear shift in our perception of the world. In Shakespeare's time, one would go to "hear" a play; while at the present the correct expression would be to "see" a play, and our emphasis on the visual sense goes as far as making us say to "go see a concert." Here is expressed a radical shift from a culture where hearing would be more central in a performance (and here we also include the act of myth-telling) than seeing. This suggests that this transformation also gave literature more importance and responsibility, especially in the passing-on of myth. Novels and short stories retold in different forms re-actualized myths that were transmitted orally before. What can be said of our contemporary times where vision has become by far the most needed sense to experience the world? It is by realizing how much western culture now relies on print, image and electronic media that a perception of the development of mythic narratives can be grasped.

b. Myth in Contemporary Times: The Needed Fabula

While society, technology and arts evolved, the ways of using different kinds of language to convey a narrative also evolved, bringing along with it the new ways in which culture expanded and shared myth; the sudden technological outburst offered a new set of possibilities. One of the objectives of this work is also to demonstrate the need in contemporary cultures for contemporary mythologies. As the veil of mystery surrounding the questions of cosmos and nature is more and more taken away by scientific advances, human culture should be impelled to turn itself away from deluding myth. This may be what Bidney has in mind when he writes:

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[3] See Mark Schorer: "Most profoundly they [Myths] apply in literature. Great literature is impossible without a previous imaginative consent to a ruling mythology that makes intelligible and unitive the whole of that experience from which particular fables spring and from which they, in turn, take their meaning. Literature ceases to be perceptual and tends to degenerate into mere description without adequate myth. . . . Thus, for example, the prevailing and tiresome realism of modern fiction. When we feel that we are no longer in a position to say what life means, we must content ourselves with telling how it looks. Those of our novelists who have transcended realism have done so by a bootstrap miracle, by supplying the myth themselves. . . . In a disintegrating society such as this, before it can proceed with other business, literature must become the explicit agent of coherence. . . . All readers are aware that the chief energies of modern poets have been expanded not simply in writing poetry but in employing poetry to discover its indispensable substructure. They have been compelled to build a usable mythology, one that will account for and organize our competing and fragmentary myths" (*William Blake: The Politics of Vision*. New-York: Henry Holt and Company, 1946 [Extract "The Necessity of Myth" in Appendix of *Myth and Mythmaking*: 357]).

> Myth must be taken seriously as a cultural force but it must be taken seriously precisely in order
> that it may be gradually *superseded* in the interests of the advancement of truth and the growth
> of human intelligence. Normative, critical, and scientific thought provides the only self-
> correcting means of *combating the diffusion of myth*, but it may do so only on condition that we
> retain a firm and uncompromising faith in the integrity of reason and in the transcultural validity
> of the scientific enterprise. (1957: 23; my italics)

Bidney suggests that myth represents an archaic "cultural force" that needs to be "superseded" in order for human cultures to reach upper levels of intelligence and knowledge. He even goes as far as thinking that there is a way of "combating the diffusion of myth" through the use of "scientific thought." Myth is here presented as an enemy of science that needs to be undermined in order for the "scientific enterprise" to progress. Where Bidney's argument comes to a dead-end is upon the acknowledgement that scientific progress and truth is a myth itself. Literary works built upon the myth of science, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In fact, the opposition would more likely be between *mythos* and *historia*. *Mythos* is *fabula*, what is told, invented and imaginary while *historia* deems itself the exploration of facts (*historia* meaning in ancient Greek "investigation"). Seen in this way, myth is associated with everything that is told (thus written) as an imaginary creation. A decade later, Levin refuted Bidney's views introducing a completely different perception of the recent situation: "In this part of the latter twentieth century, face to face with the decline in the literary arts and a rise in the extra-literary and audiovisual media, myth should be more influential than ever, as students of communication and public opinion should demonstrate" (1969: 114). Even if science advances, media also evolve and human culture always finds new means of telling their mythic narratives. Levin denies the idea that myth is a passing social feature that can be outmoded. For him, myth is an irremovable force contained in human culture that only fluctuates depending on the media at its disposal.

Still, it remains difficult to decide what makes it so necessary to human culture even after the scientific discoveries have offered a rational enlightenment. Lévi-Strauss states the problem by showing clearly how various contemporary approaches interrogate the survival of myth:

> In order to understand what a myth really is, are we compelled to choose between platitude and
> sophism? Some claim that human societies merely express through their mythology,
> fundamental feelings common to the whole of mankind, such as love, hate, revenge; or that they
> try to provide some kind of explanations for phenomena which they cannot understand
> otherwise: astronomical, meteorological, and the like. But why should these societies do it in
> such *elaborate and devious ways*, since all of them are also acquainted with *positive
> explanations*? On the other hand, psychoanalysts and many anthropologists have shifted the
> problems to be explained away from the natural or cosmological towards the sociological and

psychological fields. . . . Whatever the situation may be, a clever dialectic will always find a way to pretend that a meaning has been unravelled. (1957: 82-83; my italics)

Now that science has become such an important part of contemporary culture, one has to reestablish the position of mythical patterns in our society. One is no longer able to trust myth to give a valid explanation of human experience. In fact, in each culture, there is a balance between scientific claims and mythic suggestions. Joseph Campbell evokes this when writing that "[myths] have served, also, to render an image of the world of nature, a cosmological image as I have called it, that should seem to *support* the *claims* and *aims* of the local social group" (1988: 144; my italics). Myth is not said to create or dominate the "claims" and "aims" of the group but to "support" an image of the world surrounding it. But rational thoughts and scientific claims supplement this image. Myth should not be considered as an enemy of scientific thought but on the contrary as a partner who "supports" its advances. Joseph Campbell further adds that "to be effective, a mythology (to state the matter bluntly) must be up-to-date scientifically, based on a concept of the universe that is current, accepted, and convincing" (1988: 144). Campbell underlines once again how myth has to change and adapt in parallel with scientific discoveries bringing new vista on the cosmos. It serves as a reminder for the scientific minds that the further you dwell into knowledge of the universe the more you will be faced with interrogations; myth will always adapt to the new media but also to scientific knowledge. As a result, one of the questions will be to see how it creates and adapts itself according to our new audio-visual, literary and extra-literary media.

3. The Lovecraft Mythology: A Legacy of Myth-Writing

To give oneself a first idea of the importance of the Lovecraft mythology in our recent literary history, one would simply have to check the data base *The Cthulhu Mythos on the Internet* created by E. P. Berglund, who collected and ordered all the available material, short stories or poetry based on "The Cthulhu Mythos" and present on the internet.[4] One can only wonder at the enormous amount of various amateur or professional writers willing to offer their creation and provide new tales to the impressive body of narratives in place. Famous writers such as Robert Bloch, Fritz Leiber, Ramsey Campbell, Colin Wilson, Fred Chapell, Stephen King, Thomas Ligotti, F. Paul Wilson, Neil Gaiman, Roger Zelazny or T.E.D. Klein have all contributed to the expansion of the Lovecraft mythology. Publishing houses such as The Necronomicon Press, Chaosium or The Elder Sign Press who devote themselves to publications linked with the Lovecraft mythology were created in response to the demands of

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[4] See http://www.epberglund.com/RGttCM/cmnet.htm (updated: 21 June 2007)

an ever-growing audience. Portland, Oregon, has become the host of the *H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival & Cthulhucon*: an event presenting each year a selection of cinematographic works based on H.P. Lovecraft accompanied by a convention inviting Lovecraftian renowned scholars and writers.[5] This is only a glimpse of the various media "The Cthulhu Mythos" has adopted to expand: music, radio, video games, role-playing or board games can also be added to the list. Furthermore, as Robert M. Price states at the end of his short essay "'Lovecraftianity' and the Pagan Revival," society now witnesses the creation of neo-pagan cults using the literary material created by Lovecraft and his followers as elements of their beliefs. One of the first writers who published a book on this phenomenon was Lin Carter, who designated the "Cthulhu Mythos" "as remarkable a literary phenomenon as this century has seen" (1972: XVII, introduction).[6] Recently, in his book *The Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos*, the famous Lovecraftian scholar S.T. Joshi wrote that "there is really no parallel in the entire history of literature for such enduring and wide-ranging attempts to *imitate* or *develop* a single writer's conceptions" (2008: 20; my italics). As we have seen, this is precisely what myth requires: "imitation" and "development." All these particulars prove how much the Lovecraft mythology[7] that critics and readers majorly call "Cthulhu Mythos" has expanded in all the media of our contemporary culture and now forms a mythology. One can consider this mythology as seriously as ancient ones but bearing the marks of modernity and thereby more appropriate.

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[5] http://hplfilmfestival.com/ (updated: 30 October 2009). As the introduction text on the website's homepage explains, the event was created "in the hope that H.P. Lovecraft would be rightly recognized as a master of gothic horror and his work more faithfully adapted to film and television."

[6] Lin Carter presents an extremely subjective and often erroneous analysis of Lovecraft's life and the development of the Lovecraft mythology. Still, despite his boastful attitude towards it he guessed the importance of what this mythology represented for our contemporary culture. But could he possibly imagine how far the whole expansion would go?

[7] To use "Lovecraft mythology" as a new designation was a necessary act in order to avoid being caught in the epistemological conflict of these last years. From 1982, S.T. Joshi and Donald R. Burleson, two of the leading scholars in Lovecraft studies, proposed to discard the term "Cthulhu Mythos," a name they judged was carrying the imprinting of August Derleth's erroneous vision of Lovecraft's work. Instead, they proposed the use of the expression "Lovecraft Mythos" when speaking of the unstained existential and literary universe created by Lovecraft. The term "Derleth Mythos" would then be appointed to the expansion lead under Derleth's vision. The critic could now decide whether to keep the term of "Cthulhu Mythos" or dismiss it. However, this work is concerned with the whole social and literary phenomenon and not only with the work of Lovecraft, Derleth or any other author; there was a need to detach ourselves from the current conflict in order to designate this social achievement on a larger scale. Hence, "Lovecraft mythology" will be the name given to the literary phenomenon containing "The Cthulhu Mythos" as well as "The Lovecraft Mythos" or "The Derleth Mythos." The change of "Mythos" into "mythology" was needed in order to relieve the phenomenon from this obscure archaic touch but also to parallel it with other mythologies.

We should then retrace the record of its creation by Lovecraft and his fellow writers—also called "Lovecraft Circle"[8]—while keeping in mind the parallels that could be established between what the scholars can tell us about myth and our present object:

> Conscious revivals may prove to be less revelatory than unconscious survivals. Literary achievements are never quite so personal or original as they may seem, and generally more traditional or conventional. The most powerful writers gain much of their power by being mythmakers, gifted—although they sometimes do not know it—at catching and crystallizing popular fantasies. (Levin 1969: 112)

Are we faced here with a conscious or an unconscious achievement? Obviously none of Lovecraft contemporaries, or even himself, would have been able to conceive even the slightest idea of the massive inspiring potential contained in their creation. They surely have "caught" and "crystallized" latent "popular fantasies," but they would have to wait before they could witness their work expand and receive a life of its own. All of them are myth-tellers, and this aspect is probably one of the appealing features of the Lovecraft mythology (as of all mythology): every one of the group can join the game of myth-telling, the game of variation. It is through writing that most of these myth-tellers will recount their personal versions.

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[8] August Derleth (1909-1971) was a friend and later a major publisher of Lovecraft's and introduced the term designating the circle of fellow writers all linked to Lovecraft through intense correspondences, exchanging ideas, manuscripts and influencing one another; despite the fact that, at the time, there never was the idea among Lovecraft or his fellow writers to designate their fellowship (with still H.P. Lovecraft at the center) under a common pompous title.

II. For an Understanding of the Lovecraft Mythology's Birth

1. A First Study of the Lovecraft Mythology

a. Bringing Modernity: Lovecraft and Myth-Making

Before going back to the initiation of the Lovecraft mythology, it is important to first define briefly what it is constituted of. In order to do this, it is relevant to see how a strongly negative critic of the work of Lovecraft would consider what is now considered to be one of his greatest literary achievements. In his brief article on Lovecraft "Tales of the Marvellous and the Ridiculous," Edmund Wilson presented a very depreciative vision of the pulp writer's work to the public. [9] Even though his most famous criticism was directed at Lovecraft's use of archaic words and simplistic style, he still devoted a little space to his consideration of the Lovecraft mythology:

> The principal feature of Lovecraft's work is an elaborate concocted myth which provides the supernatural element for his most admired stories. This myth assumes a race of outlandish gods and grotesque prehistoric peoples who are always playing tricks with time and space and breaking through into the contemporary world, usually somewhere in Massachusetts. (1980 [1945]: 47)

He then lands the second strike by adding:

> The "Cthulhu Mythos" and its fabricated authorities seem to have been for him a sort of boy's game which he diverted his solitary life by playing with other horror story fanciers, who added details to the myth and figured in it under distorted names. (1980 [1945]: 48)

And for the finishing touch:

> The Lovecraft cult, I fear, is on even a more infantile level than the Baker Street Irregulars and the cult of Sherlock Holmes. (1980 [1945]: 49)

If we omit the large number of factual and interpretative errors contained in Wilson's article, we still have to concede that this description of "The Cthulhu Mythos" refers to its more elementary elements. Indeed, Wilson still notices most of its characteristics and at the time could certainly not have predicted its expansion. Even if he was in fact trying to criticize the product of Lovecraft and his friends, he stated the main elements that would later become their achievement's power. In saying that these "outlandish gods" were using "time and space" to appear in our "contemporary world," the literary critic implies two important ideas intrinsic

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[9] The article was first published in *The New Yorker* on the 24 November 1945. It was written in response to a reproach made to him by fans of Lovecraft for not having included the New Englander in his article "A Treatise on Tales of Horror," published a year and a half before. This article became a central element for the evolution not only of Lovecraft's criticism, shunning him from the academic world, but also for the expansion of his mythology.

to this mythology: the modern world setting and the use of new scientific discoveries such as relativity—one of the elements of the Lovecraft mythology at the time he created it being its state-of-the-art modernity. As he rejected the use of archaic myths in horror tales, he devised a use for modern knowledge to create a new up-to-date fear. Likewise, when he refers to "outlandish gods," Wilson designates inaccurately the presence of extraterrestrial forces and beings also described by Lovecraft in his narratives; and that are a part of his "elaborate concocted myth." In fact, what he refers to would be the various fictive elements that Lovecraft introduced in his narratives to disrupt the natural and the rational order. Nowadays, critics accord themselves to state that at least three distinct (yet linked) imaginary groups of creations feature in the mythology at the time Lovecraft launched it: fictive geographical locations (Arkham, Kingsport, Innsmouth, Dunwich, all situated in Massachusetts as Wilson implied), a library of invented esoteric books (among which the *Necronomicon* of Abdul Alhazred) and a large "pantheon"[10] of extraterrestrial beings (Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep, Yog-Sothoth, the Great Race of Yith, the Shoggoths, etc…).[11] These three facets would constitute a mythic framework that will be more and more expanded up until our days. Still, what is now

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[10] While the term "pantheon" suggests a religious relationship from human to divinities, we should precise that in the case of Lovecraft, as many critics such as Dirk W. Mosig in "H.P. Lovecraft: Myth-Maker" or Robert M. Price's "Demythologizing Cthulhu" demonstrated, these extraterrestrial beings only appear to the humans as gods because of their ungraspable powers. In order to accept the presence of these beings, humans have to relate to religious terminologies and practices (the different esoteric books present in the Lovecraft mythology are the result of this process). In reality, Lovecraft introduces them as probable entities, in consideration of the immensity of the universe. Thus, this term must be used with caution when referring to Cthulhu or others. This is why we will use words such as "entities," "beings" or "creatures" rather than "gods" in referring to them. See Price: "Extradimensional and extraterrestrial entities are called "gods and devils" by humans *who cannot understand them* and so either worship their greatness as divinity or exorcise their threat to human security and peace of mind by calling them devils. The Old Ones are as indifferent to puny humanity as humans are to insects. But since their greater power is either coveted or feared, humans worship or anathematize them. When Lovecraft's characters see the Old Ones as gods or devils it is because they refuse to see the terrible truth that the Old Ones are simply beings who do not care about humans (though they may in fact be dangerous to us). Gods and devils, by definition, do care about us, whether to save or tempt us" (*Artificial* 1991: 249).

[11] S.T. Joshi, in his book *The Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos*, adds a fourth vital aesthetic element present in the mythology: "*a sense of cosmicism*" (2008: 17). If a tale contains in Lovecraft's words "the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large"(*Selected Letters* Vol. II: 150), what he called the "sense of outsideness" then even if no direct references are made to the mythology, the tale can still be deemed as one of it. This allows us to consider one of his most brilliant short stories, "The Colour out of Space" (1927), as an important contribution to the development of the mythology. In addition, recent contributions such as Thomas Ligotti's "The Last Feast of Harlequin" (1990) are considered as directly related to the Lovecraftian myths while lacking the presence of other obvious clues than a very strong "*sense of cosmicism.*" Accordingly, the presence or absence of this cosmic aspect in Mythos tales becomes for Joshi a selective aesthetic criterion throughout his book. Even though the importance of this aspect is without a doubt central to the study of the Lovecraftian genre, it needs to be laid away from our analysis. In fact, as Joshi clearly demonstrates, the number of authors and narratives that are not concerned with this element (or simply do not achieve an aesthetic rendering of it) is by far greater than the ones who are. Besides, it appears that the other more obvious (and appealing) three elements (places, books and pantheon) of the mythology have been a luxurious turf to additions and playful variations. As this study is concerned not only by one man's vision but by a cultural phenomenon, the Lovecraftian feature of *cosmicism* has to be left aside for our study.

the most important aspect in Cthulhu Mythos based tales is the way this mythology would be used by other artists in their own works. The Lovecraft mythology that was first intended as mysterious background material later became the narrative nucleus for writers.

b. The Mythology as the Work of a Community

And yet, in order for it to become a full-fledged mythology, Lovecraft would have been powerless without the assistance of other voices from the weird or horror tale genre; and, despite his virulent critic, this is again something that Wilson had to mention as singular in his article. Devotee to the Cthulhu Mythos, writer Lin Carter notes that "perhaps the most unique thing about the Mythos is the fact that it *spread beyond* Lovecraft himself" (1972: XVIII, introduction; my italics). Lovecraft friends and correspondents, the "horror story fanciers" played also an important part in the birth of the Lovecraft mythology. Among them Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961), Robert Ervin Howard (1906-1936), Robert Bloch (1917-1994), Frank Belknap Long (1901-1994), August Derleth (1909-1971), Donald Wandrei (1908-1987), or Henry Kuttner (1915-1958) all have exchanged letters with Lovecraft and discussed the possibility of making references to each other's work in their short stories. This is indeed a distinctive feature: the formation of a micro-society of writers deciding at one point to cross-reference their tales, thus expanding the web already sewed by Lovecraft.[12] The Lovecraft mythology is then not to be considered as the achievement of one man but of a whole community; something that becomes even truer as the number of rejoining writers is growing each day:

> Beginning with "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926), the Mythos acquired its mature, definitive form, in collaboration with the entire Lovecraft Circle. Each one of his friends added a small grain of sand to the whole: one invented a new god; another, a new book of obscure forgotten knowledge; an afterlife, a situation, a detail, an atmosphere. The Cthulhu Mythos is, therefore, a collective work that was crystallized around a solitary man. (Llopis 1992: 19)

The notion of "collective work" is to be remembered, as it completely changed the reach of Lovecraft's creation; it is only when the collaboration between the Lovecraft Circle started that the nature of what was first a personal fantasy[13] changed into a literary phenomenon of

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[12] We use here the term "cross-reference" in order to emphasize the idea that all the references and imaginative engendering did certainly not come from Lovecraft, but each writer would individually create new elements while referring briefly to the creations of others, thus paying homage to them.

[13] It is in fact an error to suppose that this mythology was a central element of Lovecraft's ambitions for his writings. As the work of Fritz Leiber, S.T. Joshi or Richard L. Tierney demonstrated, what Lovecraft wanted the reader to feel was a sense of "cosmic terror;" and this required a background of extraterrestrial creatures. Lovecraft merely needed them as tools to convey a larger meaning, contained in his best short stories. He wanted the reader to experience a terror derived from his sensibility as "a mechanistic materialist" (*Selected Letters* Vol.II: 160): the realization of man's meaninglessness and nothingness on a cosmic scale, *cosmicism*. His myth-cycle was then considered by his creator as the perfect tool to help him convey this existential feeling, and was

inspirational potential. Recently, as the work of the Providence writer is being acknowledged,[14] most scholars are presenting essays that try to restore our view of the individual production of Lovecraft, and rid him of the stains made by the eruption of works that followed. While this may be as positive a measure as can be, it still presents the disadvantage of excluding or working against the communitarian attainment made by the micro-society of the Lovecraft Circle. It is in fact what sets apart the New Englander from other writers or poets that have also relied on the universal qualities of myth for the empowering of their work. It is in considering the achievement offered by the English poet, painter and printmaker William Blake (1757-1827) that Harry Levin in his essay "Some Meaning of Myth" reflects on the individual creation of a mythology: "Conversely, we may wonder whether any single person—even so intense a poet as William Blake—can fabricate and promulgate his own mythology? Must not a private myth, rather, be labelled a pseudomyth?" (1969: 111).[15] Indeed, the difference between Blake the English poet and Lovecraft the American pulp writer's creations is made through the variations and extensions of the latter's circle of friends. Both writers share a creative capacity for engendering a "private myth;" as individual writers, both relied on an artificial myth; both, created in the literary world a "pseudomyth" for their literary goals. But only the work of Lovecraft would change through various circumstances, and because of the specific genre and era it appeared in, develop into a mythology. It is the literary relationship that Lovecraft shared with his

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created for this purpose. It must therefore be considered in its very beginning as a personal artificial myth-cycle supporting an existential vision and goal.

[14] The best example to show this change of consideration from the academic world is the publication of a volume of *Lovecraft Tales* at the Library of America in 2005.

[15] It is not a surprise that Harry Levin takes the example of William Blake as he responds to the claims stated by Mark Schorer in his book *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*. Schorer, sharp interpreter of Blake's vision, proposed in it a definition of myth connected with literary works and political issues in western culture:

> The definition of myth, if the term is to be used in the discussion of modern poets, particularly of William Blake, must be both broad and loose, for myth operates universally and diversely. The term must include such varying manifestations as the sharply formed figures of classic fable and the malformations of delusion and neurosis. . . .
>
> Myths are the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life; that is, which has organizing value for experience. A mythology is a more or less articulated body of such images, a pantheon. Without such images, experience is chaotic, fragmentary and merely phenomenal. It is the chaos of experience that creates them, and they are intended to rectify it. All real convictions involve a mythology, either in its usual, broad sense or in private sense. In the first case it is embodied in literature or in ritual or in both, in which it has application to the whole of a society and tends to be religious. In the second, it remains in the realm of fantasy, in which it tends to be obsessive and fanatical. (Schorer, Mark. *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*. New-York: Henry Holt and Company, 1946 [Extract "The Necessity of Myth" in Appendix of *Myth and Mythmaking*: 354-355])

It is notably in this passage that Schorer states the possibility of a "private" mythology; an idea to be debated by Levin.

fellow correspondents which allowed his pseudo-myth[16] to become a full-fledged mythology. This point makes the literary achievement of the Lovecraft Circle most singular in the history of literature.

Luckily enough for the scholars, this micro-society was principally communicating on the epistolary level; and it is in their correspondence that we can understand how their ideas converged together. Speaking of this system of "cross-references," Lovecraft, in a letter to Robert E. Howard, answers the amazement of the latter who discovered a rough correspondence between "Kathulos" (one of Howard's creations) and Cthulhu, first featured in "The Call of Cthulhu" (written August-September 1926/published February 1928). Howard also observed the link between the names of Nyarlathotep and Azathoth that can be found in a short story written by Adolphe de Castro "The Last Test" (published in November 1928) and in Lovecraft's previous stories. As a result, the writer wonders at the genuineness of the mythic names quoted in these tales; he asks Lovecraft if indeed there exists an obscure mythology related to Cthulhu. And the New Englander answers:

> Regarding the solemnly cited myth-cycle of Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, R'lyeh, Nyarlathotep, Nug, Yeb, Shub-Nigguroth, etc., etc.—let me confess that this is all a synthetic concoction of my own, like the populous and varied pantheon of Lord Dunsany's *Pegãna*. The reason for its echoes in Dr. de Castro's work is that the latter gentleman is a revision-client of mine—into whose tales I have stuck these glancing references for sheer fun. The *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred is likewise something which must yet be written in order to possess objective reality. . . . Long has alluded to the Necronomicon in some things of his—in fact, I think it is rather good fun to have this artificial mythology given an air of verisimilitude by wide citation. . . . Clark Ashton Smith is launching another mock mythology revolving around the black, furry toad-god *Tsathoggua*, whose name had variant forms amongst the Atlanteans, Lemurians, and Hyperboreans who worshipped him after he emerged from inner Earth (whither he came from Outer Space, with Saturn as a stepping-stone). I am using Tsathoggua in several tales of my own and of revision-clients. . . . It would be amusing to identify your Kathulos with my Cthulhu—indeed, I may so adopt him in some future black allusion. (*Selected Letters* vol. III: 166-167 [To Robert E. Howard: August 14, 1930])

After this exchange, Howard would join the other writers in their game of "glancing references," "wide citation" and "black allusion." Indeed, the use of these terms shows how Lovecraft considered, at one point, this "synthetic concoction" as a mean of exchange and connection with his friends. Not only his friends would create links between stories but at the same time Lovecraft would add "artificial" new voices to its myth-cycle. Every time Lovecraft would make a small reference between one of his revisions (or ghost-written)

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[16] From this point on in the study, the use of the words "pseudo-myth" and "pseudo-mythology" will refer to Levin's statement of a "private" form of myth or mythology.

stories[17] and the newly founded web of connections, it would increase the number of different artists engaged or familiar with it; and this lead Howard to suppose that what first appeared as a pseudo-mythology could in fact be a real one. Adolphe De Castro, Zelia Bishop, Hazel Heald or William Lumley have become new voices that, through Lovecraft's revision-works, participate in the globalization and reattribution of the Lovecraft mythology. And what happens when more and more persons utter the same lie is that it becomes more and more plausible each time it is uttered anew.[18] Consciously or not, Lovecraft would himself contribute, along with his fellow writers, to the transformation of his pseudo-mythology. It is in comprehending how the American writer would first step by step build his mythic background that one can grasp the reasons behind its attractive and inspirational quality. Consequently, this study will now be concerned with the pseudo-mythology established by the New England writer. In order to understand our main object, we need to go back to its foundation: the roots of the Lovecraft mythology.

2. Lovecraft and the Establishment of a Pseudo-Myth

a. The Development of a Literary Tool

Even though most critics agree that it is when Lovecraft came back to Providence from his depressing years in New-York and wrote "The Call of Cthulhu" that the clear basis for the "Mythos" was laid, one must not forget that his pseudo-mythology was created gradually. It is not to be considered as a spontaneous creative idea that took shape clearly in his mind upon a single tale. Even as early as "Dagon" (written July 1917/published November 1919), one of his first tales as a pulp writer, anticipations of his future pseudo-myth-cycle can be clearly distinguished: traces of a forgotten old race, sleeping under the oceans, creating a possible threat to the human race. Not only will this idea be developed in tales such as "The Call of Cthulhu" or "The Shadow from Innsmouth" (written November-December 1931/published 1936), but also the very name of Dagon will be reclaimed by the pseudo-

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[17] Among the collaborations, revisions or ghost-writings where we can find important references to the mythology are: Adolphe De Castro's "The Last Test" (written October-November 1927/published November 1928), Zelia Bishop's "The Mound" (written December 1929-January 1930/published 1940 (abridged), 1989 (completed)), Hazel Heald's "Out of the Aeons" (written circa August 1933/published April 1935) or William Lumley's "The Diary of Alonzo Typer" (written October 1935/published February 1938).

[18] Curiously enough, Mearle Prout's "The House of the Worm" (published October 1933) is a Lovecraft-related story that uses this idea in its plot: how the sharing of a common thought could actually trigger its happening in the reality; a cult, located in the deeps of a place called Sacrament Wood, by collective belief creates a ravaging contamination. The short story plagiarizes whole passages from Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" or "The Colour out of Space" without Prout even being one of his correspondents (see Joshi, *Rise* 2008: 168-169). The interesting part is that Mearle Prout does not realize that in doing this he becomes a participant of the very process he describes giving it even more plausibility: the adding-up of voices referring to a collective fictive core.

mythology and its bearer become one of the member for its pantheon of alien beings. However, it is unquestionably in "The Call of Cthulhu" that the American writer first used at its full potential the pseudo-mythology he realized he could take as a background and a literary apparatus to convey *cosmic horror*.[19] The elements of fictive locations (Arkham, R'lyeh), secret books (the *Necronomicon*) and extraterrestrial pantheon (Cthulhu) are all combined and interwoven into the plot. When new tales brought new elements, the pseudo-mythology progressively extends from this basis.[20] Once he had achieved the process of gathering every element in a larger framework, he could really start to use his artificial creation as a tool, perfectly aware of the aesthetical and existential goal that was hidden behind this mysteriously seductive fictive pattern. But who better than the pulp writer himself can describe this creative process:

> In my own efforts to crystallise this spaceward outreaching, I try to utilise as many as possible of the elements which have, under earlier mental and emotional conditions, given man a symbolic feeling of the unreal, the ethereal, & the mystical—choosing those least attacked by the realistic mental and emotional conditions of the present. Darkness—sunset—dreams—mists—fever—madness—the tomb—the hills—the sea—the sky—the wind—all these, & many other things have seemed to me to retain a certain imaginative potency despite our actual scientific analyses of them. Accordingly I have tried to weave them into a kind of shadowy phantasmagoria which may have the same sort of vague coherence as a cycle of traditional myth or legend—with nebulous backgrounds of Elder Forces & transgalactic entities which lurk about this infinitesimal planet. . . . establishing outposts thereon, & occasionally brushing aside other accidental forms of life (like human beings) in order to take up full habitation. This is essentially the sort of notion prevalent in most racial mythologies—but an artificial mythology can become subtler & more plausible than a natural one, because it can recognize & adapt itself to the information and moods of the present. . . . Having formed a cosmic pantheon, it remains for the fantaisiste to link this "outside" element to the earth in a suitably dramatic & convincing fashion. This, I have thought, is best done through glancing allusions to immemorially ancient

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[19] For a definition of the word "cosmic" as used by Lovecraft see Schultz: "The word 'cosmic' is not a word Lovecraft carelessly bandied about, but one he used quite appropriately to express a new-found realization of our place in the cosmos . . . Lovecraft forces us to shift the focus from the immediate and humanocentric to the point of view taken by the vast uncaring cosmos. Cosmic fear must surely penetrate far deeper and with greater persistence than any personal fear, and obscure cosmic relationships cannot be perceived by shortsighted humans" (*Microcosm* 1991: 208).

[20] To justify them, most of the claims that are presented in this work are based on the idea that in order to see how the pseudo-mythology has developed, we have to read Lovecraft in the compositional chronological order. Even if a tale such as "The Colour out of Space" would be published before "The Call of Cthulhu," it still was composed half a year after and must then be considered a later expansion of the pseudo-mythology. It is unquestionably also interesting to see when each of his tales would be published as it shows the completely different interaction the readers had at the time with the expansion of the pseudo-myth. For example, see David E. Schultz who underlines the difference there was between the evolution of cross-references inside the Lovecraft Circle and the readership of *Weird Tales*: "Lovecraft read Smith's [Clark Ashton Smith] 'The Tale of Satampra Zeiros' in December 1929 and was so impressed by the story, which he thought was going to be printed soon in *Weird Tales*, that he made a nodding reference to Tsathoggua in 'The Mound' and 'The Whisperer in Darkness'. Smith's story was rejected, so Lovecraft's reference to Tsathoggua actually appeared in print before Smith's" (*Needs* 1986: 50). The readership of *Weird Tales* experienced the Lovecraft mythology in a very different order that the later anthologies and rearrangements allowed us to make. Indeed, at the time, only Lovecraft and his friends could have experienced the evolution of the Lovecraft mythology in the way we are able to construct its evolution today.

cults & idols & documents attesting the recognition of the "outside" forces by men—or by those terrestrial entities which preceded man. The actual climaxes of tales based on such elements naturally have to do with the sudden latter-day intrusions of forgotten elder forces on the placid surface of the known—either active intrusions, or revelations caused by the feverish & presumptuous probing of men into the unknown. Often the merest hint that such a forgotten elder force may exist is the most effective sort of climax—indeed, I am not sure but that this may be the only sort of climax possible in a truly mature fantasy. (*Selected Letters* vol. IV: 70-71)

Obviously, Lovecraft was deeply aware of what he was doing while writing his stories. What here is important is that nowhere does the writer speak of his project of cross-referencing or collaborations with other literary writers. He presents his work as an individual creative development originated from his strong impressions of the space void. It is indeed the case at the beginning; to see that he reflected so constructively on the nature of his artificial mythology makes it become even more a personal trait of his work. Therefore, completely aware of how he was constructing his "shadowy phantasmagoria," he knew it could evolve after each new tale into a strongly inspirational fantasy. Moreover, in this quote, Lovecraft clearly justifies his decision of using a pseudo-mythology instead of relying to the old classical *cliché* of the horror tales, including ghosts, vampires, werewolves or other spirits derived from ancient folklore. It was his lack of belief in the archaic religions, deficient of the modernity correspondent to his perceptions of the world, which induced him to create a mythology that would be fit for him. How can we be afraid or feel terror when confronted with something we do not believe is plausible? According to Massimo Berruti, this is what brought Lovecraft to the conclusion that he could not find the tools to convey a terror that affects him in the old traditional narratives; therefore, he constructed upon a new ground a pseudo-mythology that would reflect his personal experiences:

> According to [Alfred] Galpin, Lovecraft's supernatural suffers from a sort of 'lack of roots', since it is invented and does not contain any references to archetypal beliefs like those in Satan, the vampire, etc. . . . Just the supposed 'lack of roots' of the lovecraftian theophany represents a merit of the author's new mythology, its *originality*. Lovecraft aims in fact at refounding the *gothic* from its own bases, renewing completely a genre filtering it through his own mechanistic vision of the universe and his marked oneiric-apocalyptical sensitivity: in the end, it has no real importance to look for what have been the literary influences on the birth of the 'Myth', because it represents a fully original creation in its conceptual foundations. (2004: 394-395)

But this specificity is not as complete as the critic would want to see it. While Lovecraft certainly created something original for his time and the genre he was writing in, one could not forget that he still used the structure of other mythologies to build his upon. Lovecraft made something new and modern with an old canvas. He started to build a whole new mythology on the basis of other "racial mythologies," adding his own conceptions of cosmos

and human beings—thus rendering it original and unique. In that way, the artist took advantage of both "natural" and "artificial" mythologies: the experience of traditional collective symbols present in archaic ones (which is the object of comparative mythology)[21] and the malleable aspect of a contemporary mythic fantasy. Whereas it certainly represents a laborious task to enumerate what could be the literary influences to his pseudo-mythology, it is essential to ascertain how he came to use a mythical apparatus. The idea of exploiting an artificial mythology does not come directly from him. It would mainly be the result of an influence received early in his writing career by the Irish fantasy writer, Lord Dunsany (1878-1957).

b. At the Roots of the Pseudo-Myth: Lovecraft and Dunsany

In his book *The Weird Tale*, S.T. Joshi emphasizes the aesthetic differences between Lovecraft and one of his well-known models, Lord Dunsany. It is indeed impressive that Lovecraft wrote "Dunsanian" pastiches[22] prior to his mature works when "it is hard to find two more different writers of weird fiction—Dunsany's atheism is implicit, Lovecraft's explicit; even Dunsany's cosmicism, which first attracted Lovecraft to him, is an entirely different sort from Lovecraft's: Dunsany's cosmos, enclosed in his pretty imaginary realm,

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[21] Lovecraft was very knowledgeable on the subject of the mythologist and folklorist of his time having read Frazer, Fiske, Bulfinch, Baring-Gould or Sir Walter Scott (Lovecraft, *Suggestions* in Joshi *Collected Essays* 2004: 193). He also had a great fondness of ancient Greek mythology which took shape in short stories such as "The Tree" (written January-June 1920/published October 1921). All this has to be taken into account while looking at his pseudo-mythology: on the one hand, his great fondness for ancient mythologies but on the other hand, his desire to top them in creating a new modern one. However, as Murray's essay "The Dunwich Chimera and Others: Correlating the Cthulhu Mythos" proposes, there still can be found in Lovecraft's invented mythology a large heritage of *topos* and symbols derived directly from the Greek tradition: "Lovecraft distorted Greek themes not merely because they provided him with excellent plot and thematic loam, but because this perversion of the beloved myths of his youth was genuinely disturbing to him" (1984: 23).

[22] All these pastiches were written in a period of two years after Lovecraft first read of the work of Lord Dunsany during the fall 1919: "The White Ship" (written circa October 1919/published November 1919), "The Doom that Came to Sarnath" (written 3 December 1919 / published June 1920), "The Cats of Ulthar" (written 15 June 1920 /published November 1920), "Celephaïs" (written November 1920 /published May 1922), "The Quest of Iranon" (written 28 February 1921 /published July-August 1935), "The Other Gods" (written 14 August 1921 /published November 1933). Two other pieces are also related to Dunsany (but that cannot really be included in this list): "Polaris," written in late spring early summer 1918 bares strong resemblance to Dunsany's work but was written prior to Lovecraft's reading of the Irish writer (S.T. Joshi suggests that both writers were influenced by the dreamlike prose of Poe's prose poems (Notes to "Polaris" in *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*: 399)). It is still interesting to notice how close Lovecraft's earlier style could be from Lord Dunsany's; thus, explaining the appeal that the latter would have on the American writer. The second piece is *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (written October 1926-22 January 1927 /published 1943) which also bares a strong resemblance to Poe's only novel: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838). For Lovecraft who already had written "The Call of Cthulhu," setting the style for his later period *The Dream-Quest*, his last "Dunsanian" piece, should be considered as his farewell to "Dunsanian" prose. The climax of the novel is, in fact, the main character's apprehension being mislead in thinking that the Dreamlands would be what he so longed after; while his nostalgic ache appears to be his birthplace, New-England. Lovecraft thus illustrates his claim of using prose realism (*Selected Letters* vol. III: 96) for the writing of his later tales rather than fantasy and prose poetry.

entirely lacks (and is meant to lack) the clutching ontological terror of Lovecraft's void" (1990: 182). But despite these existential and stylistic divergences, one aspect of Lord Dunsany's work will strongly influence Lovecraft in his later writings (as Dunsany also created his own pseudo-mythology). It is first in *The Gods of Pegāna* (1905) that Dunsany laid the foundations of his myth-cycle of gods and prophets (later to be completed by *Time and the Gods* [1906]). The dreamer of worlds, the sleeping god *MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI* and his following pantheon of gods symbolizing Time, Death, Life, Art and so on, constitute the basis for his work. In this early piece, Dunsany's prose poetry is employed in the description of the genesis and myths of his fantasy world: Pegāna. Moreover, as each chapter could be considered as an individual mythic narrative part of a whole, the project of Dunsany is clear: to create a fantasy world through the weaving of its own mythology. The strong influence Dunsany had on the birth of the Lovecraft mythology results from that.[23] But while it is true to consider that the idea to elaborate a fake mythology came from *The Gods in Pegāna*, there still is a great difference between the two men's achievements. When Joshi says that "Dunsany's cosmos" is "enclosed in his pretty imaginary realm," the critic highlights one facet of Pegāna: its remoteness from the modern world. Although this is obviously one characteristic of the genre in which Dunsany works, what must not be forgotten is that Lovecraft wrote and was also influenced by another genre: horror. Whereas Dunsany's Pegāna mythology is meant to create pure fantasy, Lovecraft's appeal is to pure horror.

Thus in order to inspire terror to his readers, Lovecraft had to set his stories in a modern world with modern fears. This implies that the combination of the "Dunsanian" genre and the modern horror—or weird tale—required a pseudo-myth completely different from Dunsany's pantheon. The Irish fantasy writer conceived a pseudo-mythology remote from his contemporary times, located in another culture and another world. Therefore, the only way of relating to this mythology is, as for the ancient mythologies, from a dusty and estranged point of view. Indeed, the readers' look at the gods of Pegāna can only be a curious exterior one, directed at another culture and other myths. This establishes a distance (meant by Dunsany) between modern culture and the imagined realm; it is by this distance that "Dunsanian" fantasy is created. In order to create his own horror or weird, Lovecraft had to follow what he strongly started to believe in when writing his mature fictions: supernatural horror needed a

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[23] It is indeed easy to discern a resemblance between Dunsany's main deity MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI, creating the world of Pegāna in his dreams then destroying it upon its awakening, and Cthulhu, sleeping in deep R'lyeh, who will awaken when "the Stars are Right."

realistic setting, a setting that the reader—but also the writer—could rely on.[24] Consequently, as unease and terror depend on reliance and credibility,[25] the setting Lovecraft needed was one that himself and his readers could really represent themselves in—that spoke to their experience and culture. The American writer had to bring his own pseudo-mythology to New England and modern times. And that induces Joshi to state later in his book:

> Lovecraft's stupendous achievement was to transfer his pantheon from Pegãna to the real world. . . . When Cthulhu suddenly emerges from the depths of the Pacific, he effects an unprecedented union of horror and science fiction unlike anything that went before. Cthulhu is a real entity—it may be a symbol, as Nyarlathotep and Azathoth are very largely symbols (and as Dunsany's gods, caught in their imagined universe, are entirely symbols), but it is first and foremost a real, dangerous, and malignant entity. . . . its mere existence is more horrifying than its actions or attributes, for by manifesting itself in the real world it embodies the quintessential phenomenon of the weird tale—the shattering of our conception of the universe. (*Weird* 1990: 190-191)

In achieving this "transfer," Lovecraft linked his myth-cycle to a modern American civilization as full of interrogations and uncertainties as any, but blinded by a pride for the recent scientific discoveries. Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology forces itself into the real world, thus forcing his narrators but also readers to change their conventional vision of their experience of the world surrounding them.[26] Added to that is the critical difference of narrators and myth-telling. When Lord Dunsany is simply writing his myths as a myth-teller would narrate them, Lovecraft adds a narrative layer, making the readers read the story of characters faced with the discovery of his pseudo-mythology. While Dunsany is mainly concerned with the poetic beauty of his artificial myths themselves, Lovecraft's focus turns elsewhere: he is more concerned by the effects caused on the myth-hearers than on the myth itself. The terror contained in Cthulhu or the other creatures of Lovecraft mythology comes from the very acceptance of their probable existence by first the narrators, and then the

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[24] See Lovecraft's own comment: "The more I consider weird fiction, the more am I convinced that a solidly realistic framework is needed in order to build up a preparation for the unreal element. . . . Only normal things can be convincingly related in a casual way. Whatever an abnormal thing may be, its foremost quality must always be that of abnormality itself; so that in delineating it one must put prime stress on its departure from the natural order, & see that the characters of the narrative react to it with adequate emotions" (*Selected Letters* vol.III: 192-193 [To Clark Ashton Smith: October 17, 1930]).

[25] Lovecraft despised the horror stories written and published during the 1920s and using the same devises, atmospheres and style as Victorian ghost stories. For him, the plot devises, but most of all the supernatural elements (such as ghosts, werewolves or romantic vampires) were the remnants of archaic folktales—certainly not fit for modern terror and modern readers.

[26] See Schultz: "Lovecraft plants us squarely in the world that we know, the modern, twentieth century—a world of science and knowledge, not myth—and then paints around us a world we *seem* to know but which we know not at all; a world populated by creatures contrary to everything that we have known in our short history on this planet. His stories imply that humans are not the crown of creation but helpless pawns or worse—creatures of no significance whatsoever. Religions and mythologies in the West espouse the belief that supernatural entities act directly in our lives. The situations Lovecraft poses suggest that God does not act in our lives; they are directed by chance" (*Microcosm* 1991: 207).

readers. This is why Lovecraft has to make them exist in an environment as believable as possible: only through this devise can "the shattering of our conception of the universe" really take place. It is this concept which is furthermost the goal of Lovecraft in writing his tales, and his artificial myth has to be considered subject to it.

c. What Lies behind Lovecraftian Terror: The "Delight" after the "Delusion"

Who better than Lovecraft can speak of his appeal to Dunsany's fantasy? Lovecraft himself, and probably better than many critics, provides an analysis of their work's relationship. In his famous essay "Lord Dunsany and his Work,"[27] Lovecraft offers a lecture not limited only to his vision of the Irish writer but also on fantasy writing in general. Furthermore, the essay suggests the proper link between his achievement and Dunsany's; the linkage being established at a point when the writer questions the place of Art in his modern American culture:

> Art has been wrecked by a complete consciousness of the universe which shews that the world is to each man only a rubbish-heap limned by his individual perception. It will be saved, if at all, by the next and last step of disillusion; the realization that complete consciousness and truth are themselves valueless, and that to acquire any genuine artistic titillation we must artificially invent limitations of consciousness and feign a pattern of life common to all mankind—most naturally the simple old pattern which ancient and groping tradition first gave us. When we see that the source of all joy and enthusiasm is wonder and ignorance, we shall be ready to play the old game of blindman's buff with the mocking atoms and electrons of a purposeless infinity.
> It is then that we shall worship afresh the music and colour of divine language, and take an Epicurean delight in those combinations of ideas and fancies which we know to be artificial. (Lovecraft 2004 [1922/1944]: 61)

Four years before the writing of "The Call of Cthulhu," the New Englander already anticipates his famous short story in giving an account of his future artistic goal illustrated by his mature works. Lovecraft designates what will be his aim: "the realization that complete consciousness and truth are themselves valueless." In fact, this two-step process of "disillusion"/ "delight" needed in order to give Art a real value is faithfully reproduced by the relationship between both writers' pseudo-mythologies. We understand that the bond between them is one of improvement. This allows both creations to work together toward a common goal. In other words, Lovecraft realized that Dunsany's fantasy (and indeed Art in general) could no longer achieve its purpose in this era of science, reason and stoicism, and created his pseudo-myth in order to attain this first step of "disillusion." Without the effect that should be induced by this first procedure, modern culture could not access to the "delight" contained in

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[27] In *Collected Essays Volume 2: Literary Criticism*, the editor S.T. Joshi notes that the essay was first published by *Marginalia* (Arkham House, 1944). The text is based on a manuscript dated 14 December 1922. It was written for a lecture given around mid-December 1922 at a meeting of the Hub Club, an amateur group in Boston.

Dunsany's Art. The Lovecraftian terror produced by his pseudo-mythology leads the reader through a reassertion of his certainties, while Dunsany's Pegãna recalls to him the pleasure of "artificial" "ideas and fancies" which constitute Art. Lovecraft's *cosmicism* does not simply try to reveal to the reader his meaninglessness compared to the cosmos—thus triggering terror and despair upon the understanding of the fact. What is expected of the reader after terror left its traces is the dismissal of any idea of certitude or truth that science could have induced; only when we understood how inconstant knowledge can be are we able to embrace a life without worries.[28] This desire would be fired by the contemporary state of American thought, as Paul Buhle reminds us: "If Lovecraft, like the Surrealists, continually reminded humanity of its fragility and slightness in the scale of the Universe, it was not to diminish human striving but to reopen the vents to the imagination increasingly closed since the rise of formal society, the State, and private property" (1980 [1976]: 208). In fact, what lurked behind his cosmic terror was not sheer pessimistic materialism, but rather authentic, although light-hearted artistic pleasure and ingenuousness. To achieve such a reaction on his readers, Lovecraft needed to perform one crucial goal through his weird tales: transform the certainty of everyday life. To do so, Lovecraft had to modulate its style and settings from his early pieces. He wanted it to be as close as possible to the reality he experienced everyday, to cheat his readers into something as likely as could be believed—and this lead to the shaping of a mythology credible enough.

3. Lovecraft's Pseudo-Myth: Taking Shape in the Weird Genre

a. A Self-Proclaimed "Hoax-Weaver"

In Lovecraft's style lies a very important characteristic which would determine the very shape and influence of his pseudo-mythology for the following years: deception into the probable. In order for the supernatural to disrupt the accepted natural order in the strongest way, this same order must be painted in plausible convincing traits. As the pulp writer is also well-known for his sharp analysis and insight of the horror and weird genres,[29] he realized

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[28] The goal of forcing uncertainty into the secure science-proofed world is what defines for Tzvetan Todorov "le fantastique" in opposition to "le merveilleux." This argument is developped especially in chapter 2 and 3 of *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*.

[29] Among all his literary criticism, the most important work of Lovecraft is without a doubt his essay "The Supernatural Horror in Literature." Written as an article for his friend W. Paul Cook's short-lived amateur journal *The Recluse*, it constitutes one of Lovecraft's longest essays ever written. First published in August 1927, it will be revised and serialized in the fanzine *The Fantasy Fan* from October 1933 to February 1935. Readers have to wait until 1939 for its appearance in the Arkham House—first publication of Lovecraft's works: *The Outsider and Others*. Up until now, no work of criticism can rival the acuteness of his analysis of the weird tale's modern masters (such as Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, M.R. James, Ambrose Bierce, Lord Dunsany or William Hope Hodgson). Moreover, his essay is relevant as he covers the development of horror

that this element was needed in order lead the readers to the final artistic climax he proposed to reach; it follows that this characteristic constituted the core of his style in his later writings:

> The more I consider weird fiction, the more am I convinced that a solidly realistic framework is needed in order to build up a preparation for the unreal element. . . . Only normal things can be convincingly related in a casual way. Whatever an abnormal thing may be, its foremost quality must always be that of abnormality itself; so that in delineating it one must put prime stress on its departure from the natural order, & see that the characters of the narrative react to it with adequate emotions. *My own rule is that no weird story can truly produce terror unless it is devised with all the care & verisimilitude of an actual hoax.* The author must forget all about "short story technique", & build up a stark, simple account, full of homely corroborative details, just as if he were actually trying to "put across" a deception in real life—a deception cleaver enough to make adults believe it. *My own attitude in writing is always that of the hoax-weaver.* One part of my mind tries to concoct something realistic & coherent enough to fool the rest of my mind & make me swallow the marvel. (*Selected Letters* vol. III: 192-193 [To Clark Ashton Smith: October 17, 1930]; my italics)

This rule was applied to all his later writings. For this reason, Lovecraft called himself a *prose realist* (see *Selected Letters* vol. III: 96) who tried to depict realistic human behavior and settings. Not only the readers but the writer himself should be tricked by the elaborate hoax. He would first set a deceiving veil of plausible reality before the eyes of the reader. It is only by small glimpses that Lovecraft would let him discover what the veil really hides: his elaborate artificial mythology, harbinger of cosmic terror. It is only in making the whole tale plausible from the natural to the supernatural, that the final effect produced by the climactic discovery of human meaninglessness set against cosmic forces persist after the reading process. Hence, it was a matter of first priority for him that the narrators and characters respond to the hoax, but also to its undoing in the most believable and natural manner possible.[30] This is, of course, one of the reasons why Lovecraft's main characters (most of the time first-person narrators) come from learned elite: they are students, professors, scientists, etc. It was easier for Lovecraft to depict and imagine characters that would resemble him, and

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literature from the antiquity up to the 1920s; which demonstrates how well Lovecraft knew what he was handling when writing in the weird genre. It is from this treatise that derives the famous quotation introducing it: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft in Joshi 2004[1927]: 21).

[30] The famous counter-example to this claim and for some Lovecraftians his worst later tale would be "The Dunwich Horror" (written August 1928/published April 1929). Indeed, even if the beginning of the tale is constructed as some of his other stories, it is in the conclusion that the plausible and realistic emotions depicted by the characters differ from his other works. The reaction of Dr. Armitage, Warren Rice and Dr. Francis Morgan upon the discovery of the truth behind the Whateley family appears insignificant if we assume that at this moment they should be struck by Lovecraftian cosmic horror. In fact, in this story the heroes (for they really are to the extent of their heroic deeds) fight against the physical incarnation of cosmic horror, and win; while in other stories, the very concept of a similar being shatters the narrators' mind and reason. "The Dunwich Horror" still has to be considered a proof that, even if Lovecraft seems confident in his goal, he was constantly questioning his work, reevaluating it, and experimenting something new in each tale.

thus share similar reactions in a given situation.[31] In addition, the "hoax-weaver" had to include his hints of "marvel," the clues to his hidden artificial mythology through deceiving but realistic methods. As a result, he knitted his hoax with his imaginary concoctions subtly interwoven in the lines; the three distinct groups of artificial creations that feature in his pseudo-mythology (town, books and pantheon). Every aspect of the secret myth-cycle has to appear to be belonging to the narrative as plausibly as any other elements. The towns of Arkham and Kingsport or the villages of Dunwich and Innsmouth were to be described with a geographical strictness that would not let the reader doubt their real origin; they were given a history, a detailed topography and chart along with localization in the (also created) Miskatonic Valley, a region in Massachusetts. What Fritz Leiber called "that remarkable series of imaginary but deceptively realistic 'secret books'" (1980 (1944): 55)[32] was similarly given a realistic background: a bibliographical data, places in famous libraries, the appearance alongside a list of existing specialized entries. Thus, it adjoined them to the common literary heritage. Both the locations and the books—fantastic additions to the realistic and contemporary setting—are doors through which Lovecraft's devised myths can be glimpsed at for a second (or a line); in presenting them as plausible elements, the pseudo-mythology becomes a part of the realistic setting. Only in doing this would the hoax be effective; the readers, preys to the unbalancing final effect of the weird, would still question the existence of these fantastical elements but with unease and doubt, unsure of their claims. In fact, if anyone should tell the readers that a book such as *The Necronomicon* existed it would not be a great shock, considering how realistically he is incorporated in the narrative. Likewise, for his pantheon of extraterrestrial entities, Lovecraft had also to make them believable in order for them to be taken seriously. "Only the human scenes and characters must have human qualities" (*Selected Letters* vol. II: 150); and the extraterrestrial beings must have extraterrestrial qualities. What Lovecraft would call "the essence of real externality" are scenes and beings described not from an anthropocentric point of view, but on the contrary, as representative of

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[31] See Lovecraft: "In relation to the central wonder, the characters should shew the same overwhelming emotion which similar characters would shew toward such a wonder in real life. Never have a wonder taken for granted. Even when the characters are supposed to be accustomed to the wonder I try to weave an air of awe and impressiveness corresponding to what the reader should feel. A casual style ruins any serious fantasy" ("Notes on Writing Weird Fiction" in Joshi, *Literary Criticism* 2004[1937]: 177).

[32] A more complete quotation is interesting as it gives a complementary reason for the use of rare dangerous books in his stories: "It is to be noted that Lovecraft, to his last month a tireless scholar and questioner, was the embodiment of the one noble feeling scientific materialism grants man: intellectual curiosity. . . . This alchemist-like yearning for 'hidden knowledge' was one of the forces which led Lovecraft to create that remarkable series of imaginary but deceptively realistic 'secret books,' chief among them the *Necronomicon*, which are featured prominently in his later stories"(Leiber 1980 (1944): 55).

the boundless and unknown but with infinite potential cosmos.[33] The alien places and inhabitants should be based on the modern scientific progress, on our representation of space and time: some would travel in between dimensions not even imagined by the human mind, possess far more senses than human beings, other ways to communicate and other perceptions of time. Still, as the cosmos should be perceived as infinite, the possibility of encountering such creatures cannot be excluded; therefore, their existence appears as a probable scientific fact and not the blabbering of an imaginative pulp recluse. In brief, the style he used to set up his pseudo-mythology allowed even a 1930s reader to believe in it; this mythology would not go against the ever trusted science but would complete it, revealing what new uncertainties were raised by its progress. Lovecraft tried to trigger a reaction of belief (similar to a religious epiphany) in the mind of his readers; and for that he needed to hide the inherent literary quality of artifice and fakery. But that would not be easily done; and the American writer was in search of his style and the perfect way to present his imagined myth-cycle up until his tragic death.

b. Inconstancy and Openness: The Need to Create Links in the Pseudo-Myth

It is a common delusion to believe that from the very first appearance of an element linked to his artificial mythology,[34] Lovecraft devised a precise, structured and strongly established mythical framework. Although (as was previously seen), he wrote under the idea of creating something believable, his mythology changed along with his writings; it illustrates the inconstancy and instability of his style and ideas. These changes were mainly the results of a constant questioning, induced by his own view of literature, but also by the difficulty he experienced while trying to publish his short stories or novellas and seeing them getting rejected for various reasons. As Lovecraft was only using his mythical background as a tool to

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[33] See Lovecraft: "Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form—and the local human passions and conditions and standards—are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all. Only the human scenes and characters must have human qualities. These must be handled with unsparing realism, (not catch-penny romanticism) but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown—the shadow-haunted Outside—we must remember to leave our humanity—and terrestrialism at the threshold" (*Selected Letters* vol. II: 150 [To Farnsworth Wright: July 5, 1927]).

[34] For a very long time, critics and writers fought to decide which of the Lovecraft tales were parts of "The Cthulhu Mythos," and which were not. Lists were established and multiple definitions of a "Mythos tale" would justify these. The whole debate stopped when it was demonstrated that there was not a precise moment when it could be said that Lovecraft "started" to refer to his pseudo-mythology. Accordingly, his whole writings show that the concept of a concocted but mysteriously hidden myth-cycle evolved throughout his carrier; never the same but adapting to its creator's aesthetic wishes. One should just take the idea of the "forbidden" books and see how it evolved to understand the ever-changing characteristic of these imaginary elements (See Joshi, *Rise* 2008: 29-37).

provoke an existential questioning, he never considered it as more than a convenient and trivial aesthetic apparatus. The American writer would never consider the building-up of his pseudo-mythology or the possible linkage between tales as a central and substantiate element for his writings. As Joshi sums up: "The important thing to remember is that Lovecraft never felt bound by previous data when elaborating upon his fictitious topography: consistency from one story to the next was not paramount in his mind, especially if the potential for more powerful imaginative exploitation of the theme required a deviation from a prior scenario. This point holds true for all aspects of the Lovecraft Mythos—places, 'gods,' and books alike" (*Rise* 2008: 41). The mythic framework was never designed as a charted, structured creation but must be considered as an inconstant patchwork of elements that need to be reasserted after the reading of each new story by Lovecraft;[35] therefore it received an essential quality: openness to any plot or style that Lovecraft would introduce it in.

While this may be true, two different qualities of Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology contradict themselves at this point. On the one hand, an unstable, changeable (sometimes creating contradictions with previous elements) and convenient tool; on the other hand, a web of links created by the mythical elements between his tales that gives more aesthetic and seductive potential to each individual work. It is this second quality that definitely allowed Lovecraft's work to spread, once the hidden pattern of links was discovered by the hungry pulp readers. S.T. Joshi foregrounds it by saying: "I believe we must still regard this whole elaborate myth cycle—which is really more akin to a saga in the weird mode—as Lovecraft's greatest achievement. . . . And if it is futile to distinguish cleanly which tales do or do not utilize the framework of gods, places, and books, it is nevertheless the case that the subtle links between nearly all the stories of Lovecraft's later period allow them to build upon one another and derive a cumulative power they could not have achieved as separate units" (*Weird* 1990: 193).[36] Indeed, the links are sometimes "subtle," but, they give the illusion of a solid

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[35] In his short essay "Tentacles in Dreamland: Cthulhu Mythos Elements in the Dunsanian Stories," Will Murray, emphasized on the mythical nomenclature and reference shared by the Dunsanian tales and what is labelled as Cthulhu Mythos tales. Unable to find a clear logic to define the use of the pseudo-mythology, the critic finally comes to the conclusion that "because Lovecraft allowed such a free and undisciplined cross-pollenization of ideas to take place between his various fictional undertakings, it is nearly impossible to separate his stories from one another in any meaningful manner" (1992: 33). Murray suggests that Lovecraft's work has to be considered as a whole and goes against the idea of the simple division applied to the whole tales: Macabre tales, Dunsanian tales and Cthulhu Mythos (or Lovecraft Mythos) tales. Accordingly, the evolution of his pseudo-mythology can not only be witnessed in the later tales but has to be acknowledged from his very first writings.

[36] Joshi kept this idea and went even further later on adding that "we have to acknowledge that Lovecraft himself began the procedure of linking his stories within a mythic framework, so that each individual story built upon the rest and the result was more than the sum of its parts" (*Rise* 2008: 15). Here, the author appears as much more responsible for the final effect produced on the readers by the artificial myth-cycle. For sheer fun or a larger

structure that readers could reveal by piecing up all the elements. This illusive structure, using devices common to mythical narratives, allows the stories to "derive a cumulative power" that diminishes their individual qualities to its profit. In brief, not only does each new story add up a new setting, plot or idea but "Lovecraft's cosmic stories work together as a whole. His mythological background illustrates that the world we observe is dwarfed against that background" (Schultz, *Microcosm* 1991: 212). Indeed, the verb "to dwarf" is a careful choice as it shows how the background, each time gaining a new snowballing power, takes a capital importance during Lovecraft's final years, exceeding its limits as an aesthetic tool. The cause of this is Lovecraft's capacity to create a mythical core and to link it to his stories, in the same way that myths linked together compose a mythology. What is first supposed to be the account of an isolated event, justifying the length and use of the short story or novella, would then be given much more importance as the event becomes a part of a larger narrative: a chronicle, "a saga in the weird mode" said Joshi. More than any other aesthetic or stylistic property, this is what gave Lovecraft's efforts enough intensity to reach an increasingly larger readership. Is it then possible to have at the same time an object that is variable but must be considered entire? How was it possible to give the readers the impression that this pseudo-mythology was precisely charted, and therefore believable, while coping with an openness leading to modifications, contradictions and new interrogations? Whatever the changes Lovecraft applied to his myth-cycle during the course of his writing carrier, there undeniably remains an invariable basis between all his tales; it spawned and grew in the Weird genre.

Keeping in mind that "the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (*Supernatural*, in Joshi 2004 [1927]: 21), Lovecraft wrote weird tales where horror would be produced more by suggestion than any kind of description. At the complete opposite from Dunsany's myths—which would be revealed to us in forthright means—Lovecraft associated with his created myths a strong belief in the power of suggestion, mystery and indefiniteness.[37] What follows is that since the artificial mythology is only glimpsed at along the tales, it is the readers themselves that have to create the links between the stories and realize the presence of a larger narrative that unites them. The hidden myth-cycle will only be hinted at through small quotations from rare books or mad characters that confronted it

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aesthetic goal, Lovecraft would have been aware of the empowering offered by such a procedure; and would use it to include each of his stories in a larger narrative construction.

[37] Using the illustrative example of horror lurking behind a door, Stephen King, another New-Englander and horror writer, says that "Lovecraft would open the door…but only a crack" (*Danse* 1993: 135). Lovecraft would only let the reader see a glimpse of revelation and then finish his tale letting the power of suggestion and human imagination fill up the gaps.

directly. In fact, Lovecraft is well known for adding the term "indescribable" to his descriptions; thus underlining not only the impossibility to understand or define them in human terms, but also giving just enough information to the readers in order for their imagination to be aroused. He seeks to awaken the common need in man for order and structure; forcing them to create one where in fact there is no possibility to give even a little steadiness to the whole.[38] In *The Open Work* (1962), Umberto Eco argues against a definite concept of "structure" and "form." He accentuated in his work the powerful concept of "openness," underlining the artist's desire of leaving elements of a work to the audience or to chance. His views, later to be echoed by post-structuralism, provided the reader with a strong power in giving meanings to a text, thus shaping his own "structure" and "form." Lovecraft appears to be conscious of these concepts. Not only does he adapt his pseudo-mythology to each individual tale or revision, but the mystifying and tangent ways in which readers are faced with the myth pattern (combined with "the fear of the unknown"), allow him to transform it in any way he wants while at the same time knowing that readership will still feel compelled to weave it together; this situation is created by the readership who needs to understand and rationalize the pseudo-mythology for fear of the unknown and inexplicable. This feeling would have been even greater in a time when what once was mysterious—the surrounding cosmos—could now be grasped satisfactorily in scientific terms; likewise, this need for regulation and justification was the legacy of an era under the rule of progress in the United States. Thus Lovecraft would use this common need to give more inspirational power to his writings while still allowing himself to modulate his creations at will.[39]

c. Lovecraft's Loss of Climax: Knowledge against the Weird Tale

This empowering could not be achieved without a weakening effect in the balance; the more a whole pattern could be seen between his tales, the less the "fear of the unknown" would be effective. To add up, complete, modify or deepen the pseudo-mythology also

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[38] See Lovecraft: "I agree with what you say about *suggestion* as the highest form of horror-presentation. The basis of all true cosmic horror is *violation of the order of nature*, and the profoundest violations are always the least concrete and describable" (*Selected Letters* vol. III: 174 [To Robert E. Howard: October 4, 1930]).

[39] Lovecraft also felt this need for order, as described by David M. Mitchell, writer and editor of the anthology of Lovecraftian tales, *The Starry Wisdom*: "A large part of Lovecraft's driving force came from the *frisson* he experienced between the patriarchal vision of order, logic and reason to which he adhered, and the intruding chaotic, female forces from 'outside' – forces both disruptive and ultimately redeeming. This paradox was, for him, never resolved and I am of the opinion that his occasional misogyny and ill-considered racism both sprang from this gulf between these antagonistic sides of his personality" (1994: 10, introduction). While this may be true, the confrontation of these two opposed forces Mitchell speaks of also shaped his pseudo-mythology in a very decisive way. Lovecraft would simultaneously want his literary tool to illustrate his vision of a chaotic inconceivable unknown while feeling the need (by revealing and adding) to create a more and more regulated pattern.

familiarized the readership (and also Lovecraft) with it and reduced its awing result. Thus each individual tale has a completely different effect depending on how experienced the reader is with the pseudo-mythology. Once a linking pattern can be established, what was previously unknown and mysterious becomes more and more precise and can even be rationalized. The more Lovecraft would create links and new elements to his artificial mythology the less he would be able to inspire cosmic terror and awe; the more he would reveal, the less he could hope to come back to the first cathartic emotions. The readership soon became familiar with the *Necronomicon*, Azathoth, Cthulhu or the Miskatonic Valley; they were expected. Once one is accustomed to it, Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology seen as a whole would help the readers to deal with the *cosmicism* the writer wanted to inspire. What Joshi called "the quintessential phenomenon of the weird tale—the shattering of our conception of the universe" (*Weird* 1990: 191) had to be balanced with an inherent quality present in all myths: the reassuring, soothing ability to justify and locate the human being in his environment, to clarify his surrounding and existence—even if this reveals our insignificance. The Weird tale genre also had to cope with what a pseudo-mythology could bring along; and that did not imply only aesthetic aspects. Lovecraft myths, even while being artificial, still gave answers to the great unknown he wanted the readers to fear above all else. Going back to a passage from his letters already referred to previously, the writer emphasized the targeted effect produced by the pseudo-mythology: "Often the merest hint that such a forgotten elder force may exist is the most effective sort of climax—indeed, I am not sure but that this may be the only sort of climax possible in a truly mature fantasy" (*Selected Letters* vol. IV: 70-71). It is in exchange of this "merest hint" for an increasingly revealed mystery that Lovecraft lost the possibility to achieve more effective climaxes. When the reader becomes growingly accustomed with knowledge of what should initially be the infinite unknown and boundless void, horror, weirdness and the final climax are lost.[40] As a result,

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[40] These horrific climaxes could be, in fact, replaced or surpassed by other emotions. For example, the childish pleasure of collecting new information and details on the mythology such as the one expressed in Lin Carter's subjective analysis of the Cthulhu Mythos. While Carter's book is hardly recommended for its data on Lovecraft mythology, it still represents a valuable piece for the very precise subjective but assumed look it directs at its object. Carter states honestly what would be the approach to the mythos for most of the readership, in Lovecraft's time and up to the present:

> As the tale opens, neither the narrator nor the reader know anything about this cult [the cult of Cthulhu]; step by step, Lovecraft leads the reader through the jumble of seemingly isolated bits of data, until both reader and narrator begin to perceive a frightening *pattern* behind these cryptic incidents. Lovecraft was to use this narrative technique in story after story from this point on. His readers, by then very much on the alert for any hints concerning 'Arkham' or the *Necronomicon* or any of the other tags and references, experienced the repeated thrill of discovery with each recognized symbol. To the intellectual pleasure of the detective work involved in putting clue and clue together was added the terrific suspense of *knowing things the narrator did not*: an innocent Lovecraft character might find a

one should assume that Lovecraft pseudo-mythology surely enhanced the influential global potential of his work as a literary artist and yet, it diminished his probable achievement as a weird and horror writer.

One should wonder how differently could Lovecraft's later tales affect us, if the pseudo-mythical background was each time different, unique, and unrelated to others? In fact, Lovecraft never forced the links between his tales to be made but rather induced the readers to make them alone through subtle references. Hence, amongst his later tales we are faced with a set of individual tales that participate to the construction of his pseudo-mythology at various degrees. Definitely one of Lovecraft's best tales (and also one of his favorites), "The Colour out of Space" (written March 1927/published September 1927) refrains from making precise links or references to the pseudo-mythology—while still keeping at its core the devices of cosmic terror.[41] What makes this short story unique amongst Lovecraft's later tales is this complete lack of references or explanations concerning the phenomenon; and it is this complete unknown, this isolation from the pseudo-mythology which makes the "Colour out of Space" illustrate the idea of *cosmic terror*, but as an individual tale. The tale not only is deprived of any baptizing of a new alien entity or supernatural force, but also no explanation appears from a selected quote of some secret esoteric book. Therefore, the reader is completely lacking any kind of knowledge that would be able to explain or understand the "Colour"'s existence or objectives. Later on, Lovecraft will sometimes shift his focus from the mind-shattering terror of the unknown to a more precise and explainable knowledge. Tales such as *At the Mountains of Madness* (written February-March 1931/published February-April 1936) or "The Shadow Out of Time" (written November 1934-February 1935/published June 1936) allow the readers to gain access to a larger and more definite knowledge of the first unknown phenomenon. Granted that behind this knowledge still lurks a worrying unknown, and that each answer brings its share of new disturbing questions, the extraterrestrial entities introduced in these tales, the "Elder Things" and the "Great Race of Yith" are described in a concise way through different means. Up to the end of the tale, their

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certain ancient book mouldering in the attic; in idle curiosity he turns the pages, while (as it were) the readers, peering over his shoulder in helpless suspense, held their breath waiting for the shattering horrors they knew were coming. (*Look* 1972: 56)

Indeed, because of its mysterious aspect, the pseudo-mythology quickly became a puzzle that readers believed each new Lovecraft tale would give a piece of, in order to complete it. "The shattering horrors" now became predictable as the notion of *cosmic terror* was since the very beginning so strongly attached to the imagined mythology. On the common reader side, each new tale brought a redundancy of the mind-shattering *cosmicism*, while the awaited freshness would be new elements to the well-known mythology.

[41] In fact, the only reference to the pseudo-mythology—and what let the reader link it with other later tales—is the location where the story happens: a rural area near the fictional town of Arkham.

physical attributes, culture and history become part of the knowledge of the narrators. Accordingly, Lovecraft wants his readers to accustom themselves to the alien beings, discovering their culture, sharing their troubles and ultimately feeling empathy for their ruin. Here, Lovecraft's goal is to take the readers back to an unknown distant past, rid him of his anthropocentrism by making him look at human beings through the eyes of alien creatures, and finally return him to his now dangerous present (of the narrative, and of the reader) sharing this knowledge. This new knowledge will ultimately add itself to the large web constituting the artificial mythology, thus enlarging and fleshing it out, enlightening the dark unknown. Therefore, one has to ask how much this cumulative power is in fact really benefic for each individual tale. Separately, all of them achieve on various degrees to produce a sense of *cosmicism* (or a least of uncertainty and weirdness) without the presence of the mythic background. The background forces them to be seen as pieces of a larger vista, thus "dwarfing" their importance as individual works. Only through small and quick references has the artificial myth-cycle the quality not precisely to empower the individual works, but to radically change their reach as literary pieces by ripping them of their exceptionality and placing them in a superfluous mythic pattern.

4. Becoming a Mythology: The Works of a Micro-Community, the Lovecraft Circle

a. The Birth of the Mythology: A Game of Cross-References

As was seen previously, for something to become a myth, it has to become familiar to the community; to be part of the custom, of the experiences of every member of the society it appeals to. Likewise, each time Lovecraft added something new to the pseudo-mythology it became more recognizable, reliable and common; a pseudo-myth that could be shared and expanded. Gradually, people could define and give shape to this new amusing pseudo-mythology. And this is how it started to change, to grow into something completely different and original. Once this micro-community—later called the Lovecraft Circle—started to rely to the knowledge of this pseudo-myth, they felt familiar with it and desired in turn to honor what would now become a strong communitarian bond between them.

In order for a pseudo-mythology to get rid of its artificial connotation, the Lovecraft mythology needed the adding up of other voices. Only then would the game of variations and adaptations really start and let the mythology expand in other directions. It is only when Lovecraft, the myth-teller was joined by others that it became a common creation; first only through quick allusions to each others' inventions would the exchange and evolutions really

start. Lovecraft and the others discovered little by little not only that they could foster their friendship through an extensive correspondence, but also that they could refer to that shared devotion to horror and fantasy pulp writing and honor it in their very tales. To refer to another's creation by linking the story to a previously appreciated tale would at first mainly be a way for the Lovecraft Circle to testify their bonding. It is what was meant by Frank Belknap Long when he introduced his tale "The Space-Eaters" (written September 1927/published July 1928) by a new invented quote from Lovecraft's own creation, the *Necronomicon*.[42] It is also what Lovecraft meant when he said after reading the manuscript of Clark Ashton Smith's "The Tale of Satampra Zeiros" (written 1929/published November 1931): "As for me-Tsathoggua made such an impression on my fancy that I am using him in the 'revision' (i.e. 'ghost-writing') job I am now doing—telling of some things connected with his worship before he appeared on the earth's *surface"* (*Selected Letters* vol. III: 95 [To Clark Ashton Smith: December 19, 1929]). This story is "The Mound" (ghost-written for Zelia Bishop) where not only Tsathoggua but also "Tulu" (obviously Cthulhu but recorded differently by the narrator as he hears it) would appear in. Added to that is the new god-like entity Shub-Niggurath that Lovecraft first created only to feature in his revisions and then introduced in his owns. In doing this, Lovecraft achieved at the same time to appeal to Smith's talent and to blend both of their imagined creations into one tale. He realized that in including Tsathoggua into one of his creations he would strengthen the idea of a whole lost body of ancient myths forgotten or unknown to man. But it is even more complex, since he merges both writers' hack mythologies, but under Zelia Bishop's name. What it suggested is that this ancient mythology would be known and referred to by three voices instead of one. Lovecraft could not have missed realizing how this process would deepen and empower both his and Smith's creations. For him, it was to give "an air of verisimilitude by wide citation," thus suggesting how this could offer a more realistic and probable aspect to an artificial mythology. What follows is the Providence writer saying to Robert E. Howard in a letter previously quoted that he would want to "adopt" his "Kathulos" to link it with his Cthulhu (*Selected Letters* vol. III: 166-167 [To Robert E. Howard: August 14, 1930]): the whole process of cross-references was

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[42] Even if the epitaph would be omitted in the *Weird Tales* publication, it still is "the first concrete 'addition'" to be witnessed (Joshi, *Rise* 2008: 120). The tale is also famous for being one of the first to introduce Lovecraft himself as a bombastic, dogmatic and sometimes ridiculous character of the story. Whole passages from Lovecraft's letters to Long are put into the text and are meant to give a taste of *cosmicism* to the whole. The tale is one of the first amongst a long list of tales that would later use Lovecraft as a character, in turn changing him notably into a recluse prophet or a half-mad visionary.

established.[43] Not only Lovecraft but also the other members of the Lovecraft Circle recognized the various potentials induced by it: by linking their work with Lovecraft's, their short stories could be given more importance while being otherwise conventional tales—such was the case of Derleth. On the case of Smith and Howard, having a more mature and personal style of their own, they took it similarly as Lovecraft: a way of showing their respect to each others' work and sharing a common mythical background, certainly not central to their tales but orbiting over them. Robert Bloch, a later and younger participant, would use it as a way of showing his respect to Lovecraft, his senior and mentor in the art of writing. Whatever the reason for the use of the Lovecraft mythology, from this point on a creative outburst of additions and precisions was to be undertaken by many of Lovecraft's writer friends. New fictive books, imaginary places and extraterrestrial beings would rejoin the list already started by Lovecraft. Each writer would want to add new elements to the mythology, thus at the same time accentuating their individual contributions and empowering the take their fakery would have on reality.

Moreover, as Lovecraft was so keen on developing a blurring effect of relationship amongst his later tales and revisions, he demonstrated a lack of consideration for his literary property. As for him it would only be a narrative apparatus, so he never felt restrained in letting it appear under a different name than his. This triggered a blurring of authenticity concerning the pseudo-mythology: Lovecraft did not appear to be the only writer referring to it, but other writers (in fact his revision clients) also would. For the readers, there was not a single creative entity behind it but a multiple one, with various versions. There is not a good or a bad version, a wrong or a right one; there are as much truths as there are versions. It applies also to each achievement of the Lovecraft Circle. Each new element did not have to be acknowledged by Lovecraft to be included in the mythology; they shared as much rightfulness to be added as any other, as long as the micro-community would be appealed by them; hence the transformation of an artificial private mythology into an equally artificial communitarian one. Anybody could wear the suit of the myth-teller and give his own adaptation to the community, and this was definitely a very seductive aspect of the process. Lovecraft was right when saying that "an artificial mythology can become subtler & more plausible than a natural one, because it can recognize & adapt itself to the information and moods of the present" (*Selected Letters* vol. IV: 70-71). But it not only adapted to its historical time but also to the

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[43] For a more complete rendering of the development and evolution of the whole exchange see Joshi's chapter 4 in *The Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos*.

style and personality of each new voices added by the Lovecraft Circle. And this is what potentially lies in a mythology: a bonding power for the community as well as a mean to express one's own individuality through it.[44]

b. Weird Tales: *A Fertile Ground*

While this may be true, one must not forget the specific influence of the editorial aspect. Each writer of the Lovecraft Circle would write and try to publish his tales first and foremost in the main American pulp fantasy magazine, *Weird Tales*. Other possibilities were given to them, such as *Astounding Stories* or *Strange Tales* but contributions would primarily be submitted (and often rejected in the case of Lovecraft) to the former. It is not a surprise when Joshi argues that "in a very real sense, the Cthulhu Mythos, in its first two or three decades, could well be called the *Weird Tales* Mythos" (*Rise* 2008: 22). All the different writers and their mythology would be linked through the magazine. The editorial policies and decisions of the publishers would then have a large impact on the display and accessibility of their work. Abiding to the policies of what first editor Jacob Clark Henneberger would call "The Unique Magazine," writers had their text modified in order to fit into the desired format. It is in fact well known that Lovecraft would endure numerous publication difficulties during his career. Some of his short stories were deemed too long and were published in an abridged version in *Weird Tales*. For example, the April 1929 issue would contain a significantly shortened 20 pages version of "The Dunwich Horror." As the obscure references to Lovecraft's pseudo-myth present in the text were all kept, one effect of this cut version is that it gives much more textual space and presence to them—while the original version would diffuse them inside a longer plot. "The Dunwich Horror" would appear to the *Weird Tales* readers as being all the more centered on the pseudo-myth features, weakening the author's stylistic desire. Another facet of how *Weird Tales* would affect the reception of short stories in general is contained in the peritext of commercial advertisements classic to any American

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[44] Paul Buhle gives an alternative but not exclusive reason for the union of the Lovecraft Circle under a same political and cultural disappointment: "In purely literary terms, the contributions of Lovecraft and his friends evoke the critical approach of a Lucács [Georg (György) Lukács (1885-1971)], who would seek to make the author's struggles the truest and most eloquent tale of all. For their time, the task was impossible to accomplish: to explain to an America in the midst of an industrial expansion and locked in the forms of nationalism—democratic and undemocratic—the illusory character of the entire project for the ultimate goal of human wisdom and happiness. And like their predecessor Poe, these writers were none too clear-minded about the cultural or political alternatives for society. Like the last of many an old radical impulse, their conceptions caused them to turn their backs on the present and the future, able to express their vision only for a burning moment in the space of a tale, in a fragmentary line of a poem. A philological study, following Vico [Giovanni Battista Vico (1668-1744)], might suggest that their use of words (as they believed themselves) had at its best moments the character of a universal myth, more on the order of ancient, oral poetry than of modern literary Realism and Experimentalism" (1980[1976]: 207).

pulp magazine. It is in seeing for example the final page of "The Call of Cthulhu" in the February 1928 issue that one realizes the strong peritextual presence of advertisements concerning Occultism or telepathy classes, encyclopedias of obscure secrets, fortune-tellers or "X-Ray Kathoscope" allowing the owner to see through clothes and so on. In fact, the weird stories the readers are discovering seem to illustrate and justify this kind of advertising. On the other hand, the peritext contributes to an empowerment of the short story as the climactic ending is followed by the promotion of concrete marketing of occult knowledge or items. It follows that, for the publication of "The Call of Cthulhu," the peritext contributes to "the solid realistic framework" (*Selected Letters* vol. III: 192) Lovecraft desired in his short stories.[45] Accordingly, the editorial aspect and the difficulties it supposes should not be put aside in the course of studying these authors' reception by the audience. The readers of pulp fiction would be the foremost persons to propose a reaction to the birth of this phenomenon. They were the first myth-hearers, and this justifies an emphasis put on their relationship with not only the Lovecraft Circle but also *Weird Tales*.

What *Weird Tales* allowed was to regroup for its very first time the Lovecraft mythology amongst common pages. Thus, the mythology was not utterly lost in a mountain of other literary works for the readership. On the contrary, *Weird Tales* allowed it to be centered on a precise readership, on the community of fantasy fanciers. Moreover, for the mythology to be edited in such a magazine strengthens the idea of a marginalized micro-society of readers and writers. The readership was then more inclined to participate in discussions about the weird genre and was very rapidly aware of the links created between the authors of the Lovecraft Circle. On page 248, in the February 1928 issue (the one including "The Call of Cthulhu"), a reader wrote in "The Eyrie: a chat with the readers:" "Too many of your newer writers seem to imitate Lovecraft, who is unique in his eery tales. Anybody trying to wield Lovecraft's thunder appears ridiculous. His tales can not be beaten for weirdness." Already at this early stage of the expansion of the Lovecraft mythology, the readers prove themselves aware of the process of influence, reference and adaptation that is slowly building up. This was allowed by the grouping of every writer associated with the Lovecraft mythology in a single magazine. The regular readers could easily link the stories between themselves and would quickly see the redundant mythic pattern behind them. As a result, *Weird Tales* helped

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[45] It should be added that interestingly the final paragraphs of "The Call of Cthulhu" were cut from the text at page 179 and put at the end of the magazine at page 287. Hence, the readers had to read the conclusion of the story on one of the pages mainly devoted to merchandising. This fact not only underlines the relation of pulp magazine with consumerism but also demonstrates the conditions in which the Lovecraft mythology was presented at first.

to build a feeling of complicity and fidelity; both the readers and the writers sharing this common knowledge of an artificial long lost ancient mythology. But this was naturally only considered as sheer fun.

c. The Lovecraft Mythology: Roots in Creative Pleasure

If there is something that motivated the expansion of the Lovecraft mythology at its beginning it definitely was pleasure; pleasure to write, to compose, to adapt and to vary. It is important to bear in mind how the Lovecraft Circle considered their exchange: as a game.[46] Returning to the letter (quoted previously) where Lovecraft would speak of this system of cross-references: he uses words such as "sheer fun," "good fun" and "amusing" (*Selected Letters* vol.III: 166-167). The Providence writer certainly considered the existential and aesthetic claims contained in his writings in a very serious way and to that extend his artificial mythology was to be taken as seriously since it would be the tool through which these claims were conveyed. On the contrary, what Lovecraft did undertake for his pleasure would be this game of cross-references, inviting other writers to join him in after some time. Again, pleasure should be seen as another reason for the Lovecraft Circle's writers to join in the group creation. This situation led to the proliferation of in-jokes in relation with the Lovecraft mythology amongst tales and letters. Mythical characters such as the writer of *Cultes des Goules*, Comte D'Erlette and the priest Klarkash-Ton are simple jokes on the names of August Derleth and Clark Ashton Smith. All of this was happening on a micro-level, a sort of writing game where everybody in turn has to add a new imaginary creation. Each new invention was more meant to make the other writers smile than to convey any terror or awe. Interestingly enough, it is in this game that Lovecraft found the Epicurean revelries and sheer aesthetic pleasure he meant his tales to let the readers attain. On the other hand, this shared pleasure would deeply leave its mark on the Lovecraft mythology during the following years. It let the door open to imitations and pastiches by writers who did not at the least share his *cosmic* vision. In initiating this game, Lovecraft would lose his creation and most importantly degrades what it first stood for, *cosmicism*.

d. Loss of the Pseudo-Myth: The Unbounded Lovecraft Mythology

Will Murray's essay "An Uncompromising Look at the Cthulhu Mythos" argues on how at a precise moment, Lovecraft would lose control over his artificial creation, only for it

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[46] See Carter: "Some of the members of the Lovecraft Circle to whom I have written assure me of this. Nobody, they tell me, took the Mythos seriously (least of all Lovecraft), and they began to vie with one another to build up the pantheon and add to the gradually evolving mythology. This they did very much as a sort of game, and it is quite significant that after Lovecraft's death the game lost its savor for many of them" (1972: 97).

to be changed and adapted by other writers. The critic makes a clear difference between how Lovecraft treated his pseudo-myth in his revisions and the works bearing his name; this difference being that in the revisions the author would allow himself the fun of cross-referencing while keeping a serious approach in his own fictions. Murray proceeds to locate the moment when this arrangement was changed:

> Between 1928, when "The Dunwich Horror" was finished, and the writing of his fourth so-called Cthulhu Mythos story, "The Whisperer in Darkness", something major had gone awry.
> H.P. Lovecraft had lost what is perhaps a writer's most precious right—that of primacy over his own material . . .
> In "The Whisperer in Darkness" Lovecraft first incorporated the inventions of contemporary writers into one of his non-revisory stories. And thus the barriers between his serious fiction and his revisions fell crashing forever. From this point on, Lovecraft, Long, Smith, Howard, Robert Bloch and others all borrow freely from one another's stories. And the underlying rationale for the Cthulhu Mythos, still in a nascent stage, becomes diluted and distorted—if not entirely ignored amid the fun and games. (*Uncompromising* 1986: 29)

Murray considers that the pseudo-mythology that Lovecraft developed in his tales stopped to progress the very moment that it evolved into a mythology. Lovecraft could not, and certainly did not desire to keep to his pseudo-mythology while so much was happening with it around him. But this had the effect of immersing him into the game, and the loss of control upon his creation made it hard for him to retrieve its former serious quality.[47] The artificial mythology would in fact be used by writers who did not in the least understand or agree with Lovecraft's mechanistic materialism and *cosmicism*; while to convey these ideas was in fact its very basis. But Lovecraft did never ask other writers to use it as he had designed it for;[48] his take as an individual on its creation would diminish, and finally the logic of myth would only consider him as one out of many interpreters of it. By a simple process of playful references did Lovecraft let his creation evolve (but maybe too far for him). Even before his death in 1937, the Lovecraft pseudo-myth was not bounded by the writer's vision anymore, but could be adapted into the moods of the time and the stylistic evolution of writing.

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[47] See Murray: "To put it in harsh terms, others writers ran off with Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos before he could bring it to full realization. Rather than be left in the dust of his more prolific fellow scribes, Lovecraft attempted to keep pace with them" (*Uncompromising* 1986: 30).

[48] See Schultz: "As we know, Lovecraft primarily borrowed terms—and only terms—from other writers, and he invited nearly anyone who wished freely to make allusions to things mentioned in his stories. He continually urged writers to develop their own ideas in their own milieux, but he never urged them to write about what was essentially his unique vision. No great artist tries to make other artists use the products of his vision in their works. What Lovecraft did was urge writers to make glancing references to his own or Smith's or Howard's myth-creations, merely to magnify the expansiveness of what they may have been writing about" (*Who Needs* 1986: 50).

III. Expansion and Adaptation: Becoming the Lovecraft Mythology

1. Blurring of Significance: A Mythology for the Taking

During the decades following Lovecraft's death, the mythology lost its primary *cosmic* sense. With the death of its founder occurred the fading of the specific and unique vision he had adapted the pseudo-myth into. In fact, it is not surprising to see that there were so few followers of his particular kind of modernism, but that so many were seduced by a self-rewarding writing game. Lovecraft himself realized how unique and rare his perceptions of the cosmos and his anguishes about humanity were. The followers would nonetheless speak of cosmic outreaches and extraterrestrial entities, thereby keeping on the surface a slight sense of what Lovecraft would want the readers to feel: meaninglessness on the cosmic scale. As most of the tales that followed would be straightforward imitations of Lovecraft, this was to be expected. But the rationale of the pseudo-mythology, that is what the American author wanted his mythology to transmit on a deep level, was to be forgotten or subverted as the variations and adaptations took place. While reading John Fiske's *Myth and Myth-Makers* could he have not guessed this turn of events? Indeed, the comparative mythologist argues:

> The primitive meaning of a myth fades away as inevitably as the primitive meaning of a word or phrase; . . . It is only in its callow infancy that the full force of a myth is felt, and its period of luxuriant development dates from the time when its physical significance is lost or obscured. It was because the Greek had forgotten that Zeus meant the bright sky, that he could make him king over an anthropomorphic Olympos. . . .
> Since, therefore, the myth-tellers recounted merely the wonderful stories which their own nurses and grandmas had told them, and had no intention of weaving subtle allegories or wrapping up a physical truth in mystic emblems, it follows that they were not bound to avoid incongruities or to preserve a philosophical symmetry in their narratives. (2009 [1972]: 25)

While it is still unsure whether the Greeks were not themselves aware of the nature of myth and whether they did or not believe blindly in it, Fiske underlines an important element concerning its evolution. The pleasure of myth-telling supersedes the primary sense of a myth and allows it to subsist only partially. The seducing power of telling and adapting subverts any deep reflection on the mythical object. It was because Lovecraft's followers forgot what lurked behind Cthulhu, Azathoth or the *Necronomicon* that they could transform the Lovecraft mythology; expand and adapt in their own way. In this case, the content was put aside and the form only repeated, imitated or derived. Some distance must be taken from Fiske's argument at this point. The mythologist suggests that myth can only evolve in a linear line from "full force" to loss of "significance." This simplistic rendering certainly does not include the complex cultural changes that force a myth to be reevaluated. The culture and the context in

which the Lovecraft mythology grew were decisive; and one has to be aware of the different revolutions it underwent, which enabled it to remain as inspirational as it still is.

a. A Mythology for Money

One of the major changes since Lovecraft's death was the way the mythology was commercialized in order to survive. Lovecraft, as it is widely known, despised having to confess that he wrote for money. He would always consider it as a hobby and never acknowledged a financial dependence on it. He would have wanted to remain an erudite gentleman and not be included in the hard working society America had become. For him and almost all the other members of the Lovecraft Circle (obviously except August Derleth), the mythology was so frivolous that it could not be conceived as a profitable product. Still, the achievement and pleasure invested by the Lovecraft Circle into its creation appealed to the small audience of pulp fiction. The readership was mesmerized by the thrills of waiting every month for a new reference to it. Their interest would be aroused by both the empowering given to the mythology through cross-references and the editorial policy of pulp magazines. Fidelity was gained and followers proliferated; the mythology became interesting in terms of profit. Emphasizing the fact that this was pulp fiction, Edward Lauterbach argues: "Perhaps because the Cthulhu stories were popular in pulp magazines, chiefly *Weird Tales*, other writers may have wished to cash in, to sell a story to pulp editors, by using references similar to those of the Lovecraft school, thus appealing to the Lovecraft audience" (1980: 98). At this point myth-telling was no longer inspired by pleasure but by money-making. Motivated by selfish or altruistic reasons, a majority of followers snatched the mythology from the realm of carefree creative pleasure where Lovecraft set it, only to cast it into a coarse modern reality. It was to be re-asserted through the machinery of another modern myth: ruling capitalism. This lead August Derleth and Donald Wandrei's successor at Arkham House, James Turner, to write that "before Lovecraft's time, the market for tales of batrachians anthropophagy had always been rather limited; in the decades after his death, the pastiching of Cthulhu & Co. evolved into an industry of cyclopean proportions" (1998: X, introduction). Indeed, imitation and pastiches of Lovecraft's style were to become common in the following years. With the take of capitalist reasoning on the mythology, the aesthetic and stylistic quality Lovecraft associated his pseudo-myth with would be tuned down; while the consumerist need for more privileged addition and expansion would rule the mythology. The situation produces many "pastiches" written in Lovecraftian style. By dismissing the search for artistic uniqueness, writers working in this vein proved to be affidavits of a society repressing the imagination and

artificial fantasies; a situation which Lovecraft battled against in his works. For young or unconfident writers, the Lovecraft mythology would now combine a seductive invitation to join the game of myth-telling while only asking them to respond to the consumerist need and not to artistic demands. Speaking the rough language of capitalism was the price to pay for the mythology to leave the private circle of a micro-society and expand its influence. Lovecraft would not have objected to capitalist idioms inspiring more people than *cosmicism*. Thus, they took hold of the Lovecraft mythology and changed its form according to social predominance.

b. An Incomplete Mythology: A Need for Structure

Lin Carter's book *A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos* is interesting to the analyst not for its questionable data but for how it shows the way of thinking and understanding the Lovecraft mythology according to this new dimension. Carter, disciple of August Derleth more than of Lovecraft, argues on the righteousness of this approach. For him, the Lovecraft mythology evolves through an informative accumulation. Thus his definition of a worthy tale to include in the mythology is as follows: "The tale must, I think, present us with a significant item of information about the background lore of the Mythos, thus contributing important information to a common body of lore" (1972: 26-27). The fact that the word "information" appears two times in his definition demonstrates how he considers myth-telling: as an accumulation of new elements. Carter's obsession was in completing the mythology, in organizing the books and the pantheon. Turner refers to that urge when he writes his introduction to the revision of Derleth's *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*: "The years following Lovecraft's death, beginning with Francis T. Laney's 1942 glossary of Mythos terminology, inaugurated an era in which Cthulhu and his cosmic cohorts were scrutinized, analyzed, categorized, systematized, bent, folded, stapled- and mutilated. Thus by the 1970s, in a notably superficial book on the Mythos, an American fantasist opined the presence of 'lacunae' in Lovecraft's conception, regarding which it was incumbent upon himself and others to 'fill in' with new stories" (1998: X). Lovecraft wrote weird tales hence the strong presence of the element of the unknown. Logically therefore, his tales were suggestive, just as his pseudo-myth. Unknown and unknowledgeable were inherent qualities of the Lovecraft mythology's first form. It follows that these qualities were to be reasserted by this urge for structure.[49] Lovecraft mythology was considered as incomplete in its form while these authors

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[49] See Mosig for a more radical approach: "Lovecraft wisely allowed his fictional entities to remain mysterious and nebulous—the strongest emotion of mankind being fear of the unknown, the entities were to play the role of the Unknown and the Unknowable. Not so Derleth and his disciples. By their systematic attempts at categorisation and over-explanation, they committed the cardinal sin of any writer of weird tales—the over-

did not consider its content and message. The unknown, unfitting to the consumerist urge, was dismissed over a want of structure, logic, and clarity.

Hence in the following years where a movement such as structuralism would emerge, a process artificially transformed the Lovecraft mythology into a meaningful object through its structure. The emerging structuralist trend would also express itself through it; thus feeling the need to artificially reveal as much elements and links as possible. At the very moment when the mythology was given a name it lost its fragmented quality and required a definite structure. To give it a name was to entrap it into a process where it now had to be defined and articulated in order to be understood. The term "Cthulhu Mythos" would designate a phenomenon which was completely unstructured, and meant to be so.[50] Some like George Wetzel would become frustrated by the seemingly unfinished state in which Lovecraft left his pseudo-myth: "There are other half-finished concepts and still unsolved mysteries in the Mythos which only study will disclose, and some that no amount of study will ever unravel, because he died leaving some further tales unwritten which could contain the gradual unfolding of a particular mystery" (1980 [1955]: 80). This time, it is the word "mystery" that appears twice; it supposes that Lovecraft's unknown is something to discover, to unravel; something that Lovecraft intended to reveal would he have lived longer. The unknown is now taken as what should be discovered and structured, not what is meaningless or maddening to pursue. And if Lovecraft could not finish and structure his concepts, it is the task of other writers or myth-tellers to do so. Just like private eyes in detective pulp fiction, they have to use the material, the proofs and facts left by the Providence writer to artificially bring the light on the mystery, to know the unknown.[51] In all likelihood, the fear of the unknown Lovecraft had induced in his stories and his pseudo-myth was above the taking for post-World-War II

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explained and dissected Unknown ceases to be mysterious and terrifying, becoming merely absurd and ridiculous" (1980: 109).

[50] See Schultz commenting on an exchange between Derleth and Lovecraft with the former proposing to baptize their common creation "The Myth of Hastur" after having his first proposal "The Myth of Cthulhu" rejected: "In fact, Derleth seems to have missed the entire point of Lovecraft's statement, otherwise he would not have devised another term in which he merely substituted the word *Cthulhu* for *Hastur*. Quite simply, Lovecraft recognized that a formal designation and structure would have been the worst thing for a mythic background that was fragmented and unstructured and only hinted at for effect. Only Clark Ashton Smith seems to have considered the possibility that Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology was intentionally unstructured for the purpose of creating a greater sense of realism, and that occasional ragtag references by other writers contributed to that sense" (*Who Needs* 1986: 45-46).

[51] See Price: "For some enthusiasts the lore of this mythology, often called the 'Cthulhu Mythos,' has superseded the stories in which it appears, so that Lovecraft's tales have become merely source documents, raw materials for the systematician's art. Readers have debated which stories belong to the myth cycle and whether stories may properly be said to 'belong to' it at all. Post-Lovecraftians have sought to spin the web of Lovecraft's mythos ever more elaborately, both by writing new fiction that draws on the mythology and by adding new mythologoumena to the system" (*Artificial* 1991: 247).

writers and thinkers who would have preferred to bring the mythology to the soothing ground of a structuralist approach: their new tales were meaningful as part of the uncovering of a universal structure, and not of a boundless unknown.

2. A Mythology to Adapt for the Audience: The Case of August Derleth

a. Lovecraft and Derleth: The Horrors of Two Opposites

In the same way as Lovecraft would privately construct his pseudo-myth, it took only one individual writer to stimulate these radical changes: August Derleth, creator alongside with Donald Wandrei of Arkham House, and publisher of Lovecraft's work after his death. In fact, both figures of Lovecraft and Derleth are equally responsible for the influence and expansion of the mythology while having contributed to it in a completely antagonistic way. All Derleth's takes on the mythology and what it should become were in fact subversive. As he took on the responsibility of publishing Lovecraft's work—which at the time of his death was given a rising popularity among pulp fans—it is no surprise that his actions will have a large impact on the representation and image of the Lovecraft mythology; through his politic of publication and own writings, Derleth shaping it as he saw fit, tried to recover the control Lovecraft had on it at the beginning—the irony being that this responsibility was undertaken by the most non-Lovecraftian member of the Lovecraft Circle. When speaking of the sense of *cosmicism*, Lovecraft wrote to Clark Ashton Smith that to find it among its friends was "rarer than hen's teeth;" and adds that Derleth "simply don't know what it's all about" (*Selected Letters* vol. III: 196).[52] It would then seem logical that Derleth's take on the mythology would suppress largely the existential and aesthetic qualities of its debut. Joshi sums up all the major differences to be found between the two men:

> Indeed, it becomes evident that, for all the mutual respect that the two figures had for each other, they were nearly antipodal in temperament: Lovecraft the archaic, gentlemanly, diffident, self-consciously "amateur" writer; Derleth the modern, aggressive, overtly self-

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[52] Lovecraft: "The true function of phantasy is to give the imagination a ground for limitless expansion, & to satisfy aesthetically the sincere & burning curiosity & sense of awe which a sensitive minority of mankind feel toward the alluring & provocative abysses of unplumbed space & unguessed entity which press in upon the known world from unknown infinities & in unknown relationships of time, space, matter, force, dimensionality, & consciousness. This curiosity & sense of awe, I believe, are quite basic amongst the sensitive minority in question; & I see no reason to think that they will decline in the future—for as you point out, the frontier of the unknown can never do more than scratch the surface of eternally unknowable infinity. But the truly sensitive will never be more than a minority, because most persons—even those of the keenest possible intellect & aesthetic ability—simply have not the psychological equipment or adjustment to feel that way. . . . Among the individuals of my acquaintance, it is rarer than hen's teeth. You have it yourself to a supreme degree, & so have Wandrei & Bernard Dwyer; but I'm hanged if I can carry the list any farther. Loveman's sense of the unreal is a strictly human, classical, & traditional one—albeit exquisitely developed—& Long's is precisely the same at an earlier stage of development. Munn & Talman & Derleth simply don't know what it's all about" (*Selected Letters* vol. III: 196 [To Clark Ashton Smith: October 17, 1930]).

confident professional writer who spread his work far and wide in both pulp and mainstream markets. In several others ways they were far apart, as the correspondence reveals: Derleth was rather slipshod in his writing, preferring quantity production to the meticulous crafting of any single item, as was Lovecraft's wont; he was a strong believer in occultism, telepathy, spiritualism, and other forms of charlatanry whose truth-claims Lovecraft habitually shot down; he was religiously orthodox (a Catholic), whereas Lovecraft was an avowed atheist; and in his taste for weird fiction Derleth tended to prefer relatively conventional ghostly tales to the innovative "cosmic" work of such writers as William Hope Hodgson, Donald Wandrei, and Lovecraft himself. This last trait—which Lovecraft recognized when he dismissively referred to Derleth as a "self-blinded earth-gazer" (*SL* 3.295 [*Selected Letters* Vol. III: 295])—may have had considerable influence on Derleth's misconstruals of the Lovecraft Mythos. (*Rise* 2008: 176-177; my brackets)

Indeed, it would have been difficult to find a more opposite writer to Lovecraft. The openness with which Lovecraft did build up his pseudo-mythology and invited other writers to make references to it left Derleth and other followers free to handle it in whatever way they wanted, getting in the game as fellow myth-tellers. But as Derleth was also Lovecraft's main publisher, his understanding and vision was to superimpose on his friend's writings. As Lovecraft's pseudo-myth was so much intertwined in his story, to misinterpret it would lead to a complete change in Lovecraft's achievement. Underlining Derleth's influence as publisher, Robert M. Price demonstrates it in saying that "Derleth would preface every book of his own and every Arkham House collection of Lovecraft's tales with introductions forewarning and forearming readers with a misinterpretative framework based on his own misreading of Lovecraft. No reading of the Lovecraft stories themselves would yield a good-vs.-evil scenario with Elder Gods smiting Old Ones to save the human race. But once Derleth told you in advance that Lovecraft so intended his stories, you tended to assume he was correct" (*Artificial* 1991: 254-55). Because of that, the readership, other writers and critics were majorly convinced that there never was an adaptation of the mythology on Derleth's part. Critics would never see (until later on) that Derleth was also a myth-teller, adapting Lovecraft's unpopular cosmic vision to a more trendy and sellable format. A personal misunderstanding—unquestionably a convenient one on Derleth's part—would turn into a shared conviction;[53] thus proving how the modernism with which Lovecraft originated his pseudo-mythology with was at the time not fit to become mythology material for the American culture. His pseudo-mythology was principally designed to appeal to his private existential and aesthetic experience; it could only be understood and adopted by a small number of people (among which Clark Ashton Smith and Donald Wandrei) sharing Lovecraft's modernist vision of the world. When he decided to

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[53] See Joshi: "In hindsight, it becomes astounding how Derleth could have developed so erroneous a view of the Lovecraft Mythos and propounded it for so long; and yet, with few exceptions, nearly every reader, critic, and writer accepted the Derlethian point of view to the extent that subsequent contributors to the Mythos ended up writing unwitting pastiches of Derleth rather than Lovecraft" (*Rise* 2008: 177).

assume the popularization of the Lovecraft mythology, Derleth adapted it to a terminology he could understand, along with the large majority of American culture: one of profit, safety and conservatism.

Richard L. Tierney's essay "The Derleth Mythos" (1972) would be the start of a revolution in terms of the Lovecraft mythology's critical approach. First hinted at by Fritz Leiber's essay "A Literary Copernicus" (1944), Tierney would reveal the misunderstanding Derleth tainted the mythology with. Later on, several Lovecraftian scholars like Joshi and Schultz using Tierney's terminology proposed to make a clear distinction between Lovecraft and Derleth's achievement: namely, "The Lovecraft Mythos" and "The Derleth Mythos." For them, the Lovecraft mythology had been so deeply transformed by Derleth's adaptation that a clear dismissal of every misunderstanding was needed, as well as a "clean" return to Lovecraft's texts in order to restore the Providence writer in the academic field. Without contradicting the necessity of such a process, this study does not agree with so radical a split between the two different forms of the concerned mythology. Bearing the qualities of myth, the Lovecraft mythology only evolved and adapted itself according to the cultural context; there never was two "Mythos," but rather there were two versions of a single mythology. In fact, Lovecraft's works were still read by Derleth's followers, the difference being that they understood and interpreted them in Derlethian terms—more fit to their culture and customs. In addition to that, Lovecraft himself would also be responsible (involuntarily would say David E. Schultz) for a major aspect of "The Derleth Mythos:" cross-references and additions. As a result, the phenomenon started by Lovecraft must be considered as containing both "Mythos," both "Mythos" a possible form of what literature and culture did make of it: the Lovecraft mythology.

b. Derleth's View: An Effective Interpretation

What are then Derleth's concrete changes of the mythology? Before his death in 1971, Derleth wrote a final essay in which he summed up all his work as Lovecraft's main publisher. He described in it Lovecraft as an artist and the reception of the Lovecraft mythology, along with his specific understanding of it:

> Of course, there had been a following of sorts during Lovecraft's later years; ever since his tales first appeared in Weird Tales in the mid-1920s, his [Lovecraft] audience had grown; furthermore, he had himself contributed to his cult-status by encouraging his writer-correspondents themselves to write tales in the Cthulhu Mythos he had devised—a sort of primeval good-evil conflict in terms of the ultimate horror, actually not unrelated to the basic Christian Myth pattern, though Lovecraft's Elder Gods and Ancient Ones were infinitely more imaginative than the Bible.

Eight other writers added considerably to the Cthulhu Mythos, which brought about a greater proliferation of the mythology—each author having his own following which was thus added to the growing body of Lovecraft admirers—though the tales themselves, however entertaining, and whether pastiches or more original, added nothing to Lovecraft's reputation. The important factor, however, lies in keeping the tales before an audience. These invited contributors were presently joined by imitators, most of whom Arkham House quickly put down. (1997: 16-17)

We will leave the task to Joshi, Schultz or Murray to prove the over-enthusiastic confusion made by Derleth when he induces that Lovecraft would demand more than cross-references to other writers. This study will rather dwell on two important modifications appearing in this passage: firstly, how Derleth, zealous businessman, introduced commercial means in the expansion of the mythology; and secondly, his paralleling of the Lovecraft mythology with "the basic Christian Myth pattern,"—thus misunderstanding the extraterrestrial entities' godly nature. Both point ultimately leading to an intense proliferation of new narratives based on these new readings.

At the center of the constantly building reputation of what he called "The Cthulhu Mythos," Derleth had to—and always did—take in consideration the readership's needs. While having to cope with Lovecraft's hardly accessible themes and aesthetics, his task was to sell it to a hungry audience of pulp fiction readers. He therefore had to subjugate to the underground market of pulp fanciers rather than the artistic or intellectual upper circle. Moreover, after Edmund Wilson's article on Lovecraft, the academic world majorly labeled the New Englander a clumsy writer—up until its recent reassessment. Wilson's opinion would in fact prove to be benefic to the Lovecraft mythology. The fact that Lovecraft would be ostracized by the world of literary critics helped the American author and his legacy to become all the more attractive for the pulp pop culture. The mythology would continue to evolve with the participation of new writers and readers. Henceforth, it was to be through the canons of the pulp that Derleth had to resize it. While Lovecraft showed an aversion for the consumerist needs of the pulp for productivity through his entire carrier, Derleth easily fed the readers with tales that did not use the unique Lovecraftian touch (as he was unable to imitate it) but instead some expected and redundant formulas pulp readers were accustomed with. As an adapting myth-teller, this was faithful to his style and approach to writing. In fact, he was probably the fittest member of the Lovecraft Circle to foster a myth primary destined to stir an extremely small community. As one of the many anti-Derlethian scholars, Dirk W. Mosig wrote: "While Lovecraft's hapless protagonists were left alone and defenceless in their chilling confrontations with an incomprehensible Reality, Derleth supplied his heroes with

ridiculous star-stone amulets which played the role of garlic and the crucifix in the hackneyed vampire tale, not to mention interventions by rescuing Elder Gods which arrived with a timing reminiscent of the U.S. Cavalry in cheap Western films" (1980 [1976]: 108). Derleth—unconsciously or not—adapted the Lovecraft mythology in order for it to be appreciated and adopted by pulp pop culture; star-stones, elementals, Elder Gods all served as devices that would help the myth to spread in its native soil.

The second and largely criticized addition or adaptation from Derleth's part was to consider the mythology parallel to Christian myths, including "good-evil conflict" and anthropocentric fight of divinities for example. Fervent Christian believer, Derleth certainly saw what he wanted to see in the Lovecraft tales. For him, while he "simply" didn't "know" what *cosmicism* was about, he would mould the mythology in the shape of Christian myths. Fritz Leiber, keen early analyst of Lovecraft, wrote in 1944 that "such a pantheon and such a chief deity [Azathoth] can symbolise only one thing: the purposeless, mindless, yet all-powerful universe of materialistic belief" (1980[1944]: 54). Derleth made his pantheon symbolize the anthropocentric prevalent universe of Christian belief. But this derivation forced him to adapt or subdue Lovecraft's materialism; the extraterrestrial entities were not understood as illustrations of a godless materialistic world; instead they became gods to a Manichean conflict of religious flavor.[54] It was Robert M. Price who demonstrated that the very idea of considering Cthulhu and the other entities as gods in Lovecraft's tales was already an erroneous one. Lovecraft meant the readers to understand that humans faced with the realization of their meaninglessness, proved by the existence of these beings had to retreat to religious language.[55] Thus, for example, the introduction in "The Call of Cthulhu" of a cult dedicated to Cthulhu's worship. But Lovecraft made clear that this worship had no interest whatsoever for the creature; Cthulhu would rise when "the Stars are Right." So, reacting

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[54] Leiber would be among the first to warn Derleth that his vision completely altered Lovecraft's:

> Although they stem from that period in which Lovecraft mixed black magic in his tales and was attracted to Dunsanian pantheons, I believe it is a mistake to regard the beings of the Cthulhu mythos as sophisticated equivalents of the entities of Christian daemonology, or to attempt to divide them into balancing Zoroastrian hierarchies of good and evil.
> Most of the entities in the Cthulhu mythos are malevolent or, at best, cruelly indifferent to mankind."(1980 [1944]: 53)

Derleth was never to change his perception of the mythology.
[55] See Price: "What has escaped August Derleth, Lin Carter, and others is that Lovecraft does not intend to take (even in the purposes of the story) the cult of the Old Ones as a 'true religion' in opposition to the bland 'false religions.' No, Lovecraft means that even the characters who are most aware of the Old Ones cannot face the terrible human-minimizing implications of the existence of the overshadowing aliens and take superstitious refuge in religion, deifying the Old Ones as gods who care about their human worshippers and will reward them" (*Artificial* 1991: 249).

exactly like the blinded humans "Derleth and others wrote would-be 'Lovecraftian' tales on the premise that in Lovecraft's fiction the religion of the Old Ones was meant to be true, that Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, and the Old Ones were indeed supposed to be gods, that ancient texts like the *Necronomicon* and the Pnakotic Manuscripts were true prophetic and inerrant scriptures teaching a true (albeit chilling) theology of those gods" (Price, *Artificial* 1991: 250). This of course radically changed the perception of the Lovecraft mythology, and its potential influence. The mythology took the form of a traditional western religion, with its mythic narratives: the tales of Lovecraft and of his followers.

But granted that all of Derleth's adaptations made violence on Lovecraft's work as an artist, it is still important for this study to see how, in reality, Derleth is the main actor of the Lovecraft mythology's expansion testified today. Without the transformation made on it by Derleth, would it still be as large a phenomenon as it proves to be? While Lovecraft would certainly disagree on the sacrifices that were made to popularize his writings, it remains certain that Derleth's actions brought an ever-growing interest for the Lovecraft mythology that allowed the works of the Lovecraft Circle not to fall into oblivion. What is of course debatable is the legitimacy Derleth had in changing so radically Lovecraft's vision and artistic achievement? But on the point of view of the expansion of the literary phenomenon, and of the energy invested to create a large body of narratives, Derleth could not have been a better actor. On the one hand stands Lovecraft who wants to force the readers to join in his conception of nature and experience, to adopt his pseudo-myth; on the other hand Derleth, more a businessman than an artist, who focuses constantly on the readership's point of view. Derleth never created something new but always adjusted to what the audience would respond to: and is not that the principal quality one could expect of a myth-teller? Through his writing of tales and articles, he artificially imposed to the mythology to adapt as closely as possible to contemporary society. Derleth removed the revolutionary modernism in Lovecraft and returned the mythology to the conventional form of previous western religious myths. In making the mythology a continuation or adaptation of an archaic mythical narrative long settled in western culture, he made it resonate with people's beliefs (on the contrary of the weird tale whose purpose is to shatter them). In doing this he allowed the Lovecraft mythology to survive by its recomposing and reshaping, but whether this politic is artistically convincing is not for this study to decide. And yet the following process leads to the conclusion of illustrating how complex it is for a new progressive mythology to be adopted by a culture already immerged in others.

3. A Constant Re-Adapting through Myth-Writing: The Lovecraft Mythology up to the Present

Even if his contribution had a major influence, it would be a misstep to only take in consideration the works of August Derleth. In fact, he would only constitute an extreme example to show how the Lovecraft mythology could take multiple forms through the eyes of various artists depending on their background and the historical context of the time. The literary phenomenon will never stop changing along with the increasing amount of writing it induces. It also proved to change along with the social, artistic and cultural upheavals, never to stop producing new tales and writers. With the readership and writers wishing to submit their own vision, the Lovecraft mythology was not anymore confined in the pulp fiction market. The 70s and 80s marked the era of the popularity's growth of the horror genre with best-selling authors such as Stephen King, Peter Straub (editor of the Library of America volume of the *H. P. Lovecraft: Tales*) or Anne Rice. It followed that the Lovecraft mythology would be reattributed to consumerist needs on a larger scale.[56] But, each writer (and that includes those labeled as "imitators" or "pasticheurs") proposed a re-investiture of the mythology. The post-war trauma turned the horror fiction concerns from the outside to the inside, with an interest in the inner evil of each human being: the psychological horror tale which Robert Bloch (amongst others) would apply to the mythology.[57] Beginning with "Cold Print," Ramsey Campbell, taking after the work of Fritz Leiber in supernatural horror, brought to it the anxieties derived from urbanism and the isolation of individuals in modern setting. Paralleling King's view of Lovecraft expressed in *Danse Macabre,* authors associate the mythology with Freudian psychoanalytic sexual traumas.[58] Roger Zelazny, in his acclaimed

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[56] See Joshi: "In the 1970s and 1980s, several horror writers sought to capitalise on the popularity of both the best-selling genre of supernatural fiction and the resurgence of interest in Lovecraft, as testified by proliferating paperback editions, film and television adaptations, role-playing games, and the like" (*Rise* 2008: 247).

[57] See Morrison and Dziemianowicz:

> Most writers in the post-Lovecraftian era knew that horror fiction didn't have to be pulp fiction. . . . And if approached with high seriousness, it could embrace almost any scientific or philosophical idea. And so Bloch, Matheson, Beaumont, and others began to mold the tale of terror to post-war terrors. Not surprisingly, many of Lovecraft's concerns got lost in the process. In the post-war scientific view of the universe, for example, the indeterminacy that so paralyzed his narrators became accepted fact. And the indifference of natural law to human concerns seemed pallid compared to the human potential for evil revealed by the war.
>
> Horror fiction changed. The evil within came out; the Other was demonized. . . . This shift in the locus of terror from the extra-dimensional Out-There to the Freudian In-Here made inevitable the growth of the non-supernatural novel of psychological horror, arguably the dominant form today. (1992: 9)

[58] See King: "But sex will amost [sic] certainly continue to be a driving force in the horror genre; sex that is sometimes presented in disguised, Freudian terms, such as Lovecraft's vaginal creation, Great Cthulhu. After

short story "24 Views of Mt.Fuji, by Hokusai," demonstrated how, by a trivial reference to the mythology, one could subtly bring the stakes from the domestic to the global. And very recently, Neil Gaiman illustrates—on the mode of parody—the "Demythologizing" of Robert M. Price, making Cthulhu dictate his memoirs in "I Cthulhu or What's A Tentacle-Faced Thing Like Me Doing In A Sunken City Like This (Latitude 47° 9' S, Longitude 126° 43' W)?." Naturally the list is as long as there are tales inspired by the Lovecraft mythology. But what the works of Gaiman and others notably denote is how, starting from the 70s, the view of the scholars on Lovecraft, Derleth and the mythology influenced or rather supported new readings while excluding others.

a. The Revolution in Criticism: Return to Lovecraft

Coinciding with the horror "boom" of the 70s, a new era for Lovecraftian criticism started what would increasingly prove to change consideration of Lovecraft and thus also of the works following his legacy. Joshi locates the start of this new era in the publication of Tierney's short article "The Derleth Mythos," which accuses Lovecraft's publisher for the misunderstanding inflicted on Lovecraft's work (*Rise* 2008: 225). This article was powered by Derleth's publication of Lovecraft's *Selected Letters* (starting 1965). For Joshi, the irony is that this small article eclipsed Lin Carter's study of the mythology in pro-Derlethian terms just a few months after its publication. Tierney's article is followed by Mosig's "H.P. Lovecraft: Myth-Maker" in 1976. Joshi then goes on saying that "Mosig had by this time become the spearhead of the *new Lovecraft scholarship movement*, garnering such disciples as Donald R. Burleson, Peter Cannon, David E. Schultz, and myself. Mosig's essay was largely a follow-up and expansion of Tierney's, emphasising Lovecraft's mechanistic and atheistic philosophy and showing how a proper understanding of that philosophy required a rejection of the central tenets of the Derleth Mythos" (*Rise* 2008: 226). Criticism thus fostered on the idea of dismissing or countering everything that was written by Derleth and his followers to return to a "pure" understanding of Lovecraft as a visionary writer. In order for the greatness and modernity contained in Lovecraft's work to be accepted by the readership but also by the academic world (let us not forget Edmund Wilson's influence), an extreme return to the roots of Lovecraft as an author was necessary. Granted that this new scholarship would prove to be profitable to reveal many factual details concerning Lovecraft and his friends (Joshi's numerous annotated versions of Lovecraft, his authoritative bibliography *H.P. Lovecraft: A*

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viewing this many-tentacled, slimy, gelid creature through Lovecraft's eyes, do we need to wonder why Lovecraft manifested 'little interest' in sex?" (1993: 85).

Life or anthologies of criticism), the new scholarship had, in order to bring back the audience and fans to their understanding, to do away with what the Lovecraft mythology had become after Derleth. The enthusiastic fans had to be purged of the seductive approach Lovecraft's publisher brought to it. And this also meant adopting a very aggressive point of view against what Derleth made so popular: "The Cthulhu Mythos." Murray's "An Uncompromising Look at the Cthulhu Mythos" and Schultz's "Who Needs the 'Cthulhu Mythos'?," both published in Joshi's journal *Lovecraft Studies*, argued on the very responsibility of Lovecraft in the cross-referencing game and tried to demonstrate the damages received by his work because of it.

It followed that, supported by another Lovecraftian journal, *Crypt of Cthulhu*, some other scholars would prefer to join Robert M. Price who considered the views of this "new scholarship" proposing a far too extreme approach of Derleth's ideas. Price's followers suggest that one should not forget the dimension of creative pleasure introduced by the Lovecraft Circle and testified by Lovecraft's later writings. Furthermore, justified by his status as a New Testament scholar, Price's moderation of Derleth's interpretation appears as obvious. We are presented with two different approaches: one seeking to expurgate Lovecraft's work from any other disruptive interpretation and focus only on what the New Englander (supposedly) thought his tales to mean, in order to restore him as a visionary writer. The other, while still expressing the need to clarify Lovecraft's personal achievement, argues that Derlethian's ideas—not so much antagonistic and disruptive—could still be witnessed in his writings. Joshi's view would only deem worthy to be written or read the tales of the Lovecraft mythology that attest of a prolongation or reinvestigation of Lovecraft's aesthetics and philosophy, of *A sense of cosmicism* (*Rise* 2008: 17), as the scholar interprets it. Price, not completely disagreeing with this, still thinks the "pastiches" and "imitations" some pulp fictions worthy to read and exist—as they are the legacy of the Lovecraft Circle's urge to pleasure and openness in creation.[59]

Up until the present, these two approaches of the Lovecraft mythology coexisted and inspired the writers who wished to use their pen to propose an interpretation of it. Anthologies of tales would defend themselves to be from one side or another. Thus, for example, an anthology such as *The Starry Wisdom* clearly (though not confessed) is an indirect product of Joshi's "new scholarship," and proudly defines its aim as treating the Lovecraft mythology "in the same informal way in which Lovecraft himself intended" (Mitchell, 1996: 9,

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[59] See Price's introduction to *The New Lovecraft Circle*.

introduction). Still, *The Starry Wisdom* proves to bring the mythology on a contemporary stage by including writers from various contemporary movements such as surrealism or occultism. The purpose of the anthology—being to return to Lovecraft as an author and dismiss the Lovecraft mythology—is in itself the legacy of Joshi's work. On the opposite, tales and anthologies expressing Price's apologies of fun are largely published and find an audience. *High Seas Cthulhu* for example, as an anthology of tales mixing the Lovecraft mythology to the "swash-buckling" adventure genre, testifies the surviving of the pulp genre in the contemporary times—through the Lovecraft mythology. What this uncontestable difference of interpretation illustrated by both books reveals is how wide the potential of the Lovecraft mythology now is. And it was partly brought to it by this conflict in scholarship. But whatever the approach, it seems that this creative potential was never fully acknowledged by the new critics who were overtly busy in exposing Lovecraft as an author. To refuse an analysis of the Lovecraft mythology, its expansion through new tales would lead the new scholarship to miss its main interest: to expose the instability of a unique and authoritarian interpretation.

IV. For a New Approach of the Lovecraft Mythology

1. The Lovecraft Mythology: A Second Definition

At this point in the work it appears that the term "Lovecraft mythology" designates a very large but also confusing phenomenon. A redefinition of what is meant and designated by Lovecraft mythology proves to be necessary. Granted that the first study of the phenomenon included its two principal features—mythic framework of artificial links (locations, books and pantheon) and group writing—it was nonetheless a definition more based on the writers than on the readers. This is already problematic because, as was previously seen, the Lovecraft mythology expanded through myth-hearers (myth-readers). In seeing how this phenomenon acts on the reader of the present, one can suppose general qualities; not what Lovecraft or Derleth precisely intended as writers but rather how the mythology worked on them as readers of it. In fact, what is impressive in the Lovecraft mythology is not the body of narratives that has been written but the energy it has brought to other readers to write, adapt and develop it, thus presenting their personal definition of it. However, recent scholarship never stopped focusing on the authors or myth-writers of the Lovecraft mythology. There obviously still exists a need to distinguish it from Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology. Recent scholarship's claims have been to restore Lovecraft as an author and its pseudo-myth as his greatest achievement. Because it is a myth artificially created, the analyst has the feeling that in going back to the moment of its creation he will unravel the artifice. Starting from the publication of Lovecraft's correspondence, critics have the strong belief that since they are faced with written material—a convenient proof of each aspect of the mythology—they can produce an authoritative approach and understanding of it.[60] But, myth is not defined by its creation but by its utterances. It is in repetition and adaptation that myth is born. To confine oneself to

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[60] More generally, it is the same general belief that Michel Foucault speak of when he writes:

> Modern literary criticism, even when—as it now customary—it is not concerned with questions of authentification, still defines the author the same way: the author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications (though his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design). The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing—all differences having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation, or influence. The author also serves to neutralize the contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts: there must be—at a certain level of his thought or desire, of his consciousness or unconscious—a point where contradictions are resolved, where incompatible elements are at last tied together or organized around a fundamental or originating contradiction. Finally, the author is a particular source of expression that, in more or less completed forms, is manifested equally well, and with similar validity, in works, sketches, letters, fragments, and so on. (*Author* 1991:111)

It follows that it is precisely in this critical stance that Lovecraft criticism would be interested in not only his writings but also the Lovecraft mythology.

Lovecraft the "Myth-Maker" in order to reveal what he has launched is to dismiss who really created the Lovecraft mythology: readers. To grasp the phenomenon, one should see the result or effect of it rather than its origin. The Lovecraft mythology is created by its re-writing and therefore reading. New fictive materials and tales are only proofs of this appropriation. To conclude, a new definition of the Lovecraft mythology must include myth-readers and not only myth-writers.

2. Post-Structuralism and the Lovecraft Mythology: A Rare Combination

a. The Death of Lovecraft, Author

Historical events show the birth of post-structuralism slightly preceding the Lovecraft "boom" and the new scholarship of the 70s. The conference at Johns Hopkins University would take place in 1966 including figures such as Derrida, Barthes and Lacan; and it is in Derrida's lecture "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences" that the manifesto against structuralism was laid. Two years later, Roland Barthes published his famous article "The Death of the Author" (1968) changing the views of the approach on any text. Joined by major works of Foucault (*Madness and Civilisation*, 1972*)* or Derrida (*Of Grammatology,* 1967), post-structuralist views were notably establishing the limits of structuralism in terms of authorship, work and interpretation. A text was not anymore an object to define rigorously but rather an unknown regrouping of possible interpretations. Post-structuralists argue that the incoherent belief in the idea of "author" is an authoritative source of meaning for a text. Roland Barthes writes in "The Death of the Author:"

> The image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions; criticism still consists, most of the time, in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of the man Baudelaire, Van Gogh's work his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice: the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his "confidence." (para. 2)

Barthes will continue announcing that to metaphorically achieve "the death of the Author" leads to "the birth of the reader" as a basis for the production of meanings in a text.[61] Post-structuralists will thus rather focus on the multiple other meanings a text is given—notably by readers or cultural standards. Referring to Saussure's terminology, this will lead them to consider the need for an historical "diachronic" approach to an object rather than a descriptive "synchronic" one. To be more precise, what is to be focused on is rather the interpretative

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[61] See Barthes' final sentence in "The Death of the Author": "we know that to restore to writing its future, we must reverse its myth: the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author." (para.7)

evolution of the object (from its appearance to the moment of analysis) in order to try to achieve a better understanding of the present views on it. These theoretical concepts were also to be applied to myth. The concept of myth would not anymore be conceived in a structuralist way—a pattern revealing a universal value similarly applicable to any culture at any time. Post-structuralists saw myth as an ever-changing object fluctuating according to change of myth-hearers (or myth-readers) traversing its multiple potentials for meanings with their reading of it; Thus objecting to the idea that ancient primitive cultures could rely on myth as contemporary ones do—an idea that justifies the underlining of a unique meaning or signification in a given myth.

The Lovecraft scholars have nonetheless decided to confine themselves to the structuralist approach of the Lovecraft mythology.[62] Why is it then that the Lovecraft mythology—that proved so strongly over time to be interpreted by a large readership—has merely been seen with a structuralist point of view? What has escaped the critics is how in analyzing the fictional elements of the mythology (such as a book or an unknown entity) they already unconsciously participate in an approach of structuralizing Lovecraft. By focusing on what the entities or books really meant for Lovecraft or how he created them, one has to adopt the descriptive structuralist stand; their desire is to reveal who created them, how, and most importantly what they meant for its creator.[63] It follows that recent critics are not interested in what the texts prove to mean but what they *should* mean. This is a waste considering how many narratives demonstrated the mythology's infinite potentiality of meanings. A structuralist approach (by far the major trend in Lovecraft studies) will try to describe the phenomenon at the precise moment of its utterance, forgetting the fact that it still is a self-based view. From a strong desire to re-establish Lovecraft's authorship, the scholars felt the need to strengthen the audience's view of Lovecraft as an author. Because of his temporary abandonment by the academic world, critics chiefly focused their analysis on Lovecraft as a biographer would do, describing his life, philosophy, ideas, or choices. This methodology

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[62] Even Donald R. Burleson, who applied deconstructivism on Lovecraft and defended the idea of the American writer being a precursor in that field, mainly examined Lovecraft's writings—but not the literary phenomenon he partly produced. His interest lies more in linking Lovecraft the author, with post-structuralism. See the essay: Donald R. Burleson, "Lovecraft, précurseur de la théorie de la Déconstruction."

[63] See Foucault: "Literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author function. We now ask of each poetic or fictional text: From where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design? The meaning ascribed to it and the status or value accorded it depend on the manner in which we answer these questions. And if a text should be discovered in a state of anonymity—whether as a consequence of an accident or the author's explicit wish—the game becomes one of rediscovering the author. Since literary anonymity is not tolerable, we can accept it only in the guise of an enigma. As a result, the author function today plays an important role in our view of literary works" (*Author* 1991:110).

would be empowered by the publishing of his *Selected Letters*, new written material for scholars. Based on the uncovered biographical facts and evidences, every analysis of "The Cthulhu Mythos," "The Lovecraft Mythos," or even "The Derleth Mythos," takes its arguments from the pretended authors' point of view and applies it to the analyzed object. This suggests that the scholarship has approached the Lovecraft mythology by focusing their efforts in trying to understand how the literary phenomenon would be seen through Lovecraft's eyes.

The finest example to demonstrate this stance will be Joshi's book *The Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos* (2008). While looking historically at a selection of works directly related to the Lovecraft mythology or inspired by Lovecraft, the basis of Joshi's analysis was to criticize Lovecraft's followers from Lovecraft's supposed perspective. Powered by a previous book *A Subtler Magick: The Writings and Philosophy of H. P. Lovecraft* (1999) in which he categorically demonstrates Lovecraft's *cosmicism* throughout his life and in his works, Joshi will judge every following work on its reliability or not in expressing what he argues to be the author's "essence" (*Rise*, 2008: 289). Thus, a tale of the Lovecraft mythology is only deemed worthy of critical interest when it contains certain elements of the late authoritative take on his works. Attacking the large corpus of Lovecraft so called "imitations" or "pastiches," Joshi proposes that "the very essence of the Lovecraft Mythos is not amenable to 'imitation' in any obvious or superficial sense because it must have already found logement in the author's aesthetic and philosophical compass. Imitations of the Lovecraft (or Cthulhu) Mythos can be effective without the cosmic quality, but there will always be a sense that something vital is lacking" (*Rise*, 2008: 289). Without "the cosmic quality," one cannot produce a work worthy of being influenced by Lovecraft; or rather does not aesthetically produce a sufficient meaning as a heritage of the Providence writer. When praising Fritz Leiber's choice of refusing to use the Lovecraft mythology's main features—such as the books or the extraterrestrial pantheon—in his early tales while still expressing a "cosmic quality," he writes: "These tales are a model for the benefits of pastiche and the intelligent assimilation of literary influence—but of course this can only occur when a writer actually has something of his own to say. The great majority of Cthulhu Mythos pastichists have nothing to say, and one wishes they would acknowledge the fact by actually saying (or writing) nothing" (*Rise*, 2008: 168). This attitude of dismissal for misuse of Lovecraft's work was the main reaction concerning "imitations" that would apparently only use the author's

popular mythic framework to empower their own creation.[64] But even more significantly, this approach followed by the large majority of Lovecraft scholars applies an importance on authorship extended to all writers of the mythology. Joshi concludes his book in writing:

> What should be apparent is that working in the Lovecraft vein is by no means a recipe for aesthetic disaster. In the youthful writer, sedulous imitation can serve as a valuable stepping-stone to the development of literary skills that can be put to better use elsewhere; for the experienced writer who seeks to mine Lovecraftian conceptions in a work purporting to have independent aesthetic value, the exercise can result in an augmentation of power and distinctiveness if those conceptions are used within the framework of the author's own aesthetic vision. Samuel Johnson's blunt axiom, "No man ever became great by imitation," remains true more than two centuries after its utterance. But those writers who do something more than *mere* imitation of Lovecraft have a chance to produce work that will live, and deserve to live. (*Rise*, 2008: 289)

When the critic speaks of "the author's own aesthetic vision" he speaks for an approach entirely focused on the contemporary concept of "author" as a solid source of meanings;[65] thus, he conveniently undermines the fact that writers are foremost readers, especially in the case of the Lovecraft mythology. What needs to be avoided in approaching the Lovecraft mythology is any attitude leading to a rough classification based on antagonistic qualifications such as "good" or "bad." As the Lovecraft mythology is a contemporary myth, one of its qualities is to consider every utterance as worthy of any other one within it. The exact authoritative version of the myth of the birth of Athens or the creation of Rome is nowhere to be found. Therefore to subjectively classify the quality of these tales rids them of this essential quality: there is not one "truth," one "structure," one "interpretation."

Accordingly, the recent criticism can certainly not start to hint at the complex and multiple possibilities offered by a contemporary myth such as the Lovecraft mythology. What

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[64] The popular horror writer Ramsey Campbell demonstrates the same views in his introduction to the anthology *The Starry Wisdom*. Campbell considers like Joshi that there is a "good" way of using the mythology:

> Let me be clear. Lovecraft is important not because of the number of good writers he influenced – after all, he influenced many more bad ones, and is doing so still – but for his own achievements. He achieved far more with his invented mythos than anyone else did, because for him it was a metaphor for the Indescribable. It was misused by almost all his imitators, who attempted to fill in the gaps by describing what he left out; I was one such. It was only one way he united the British and American traditions of the field, taking Blackwood and Machen across the Atlantic to be joined with Poe and Chambers in his work. What he sought in all these writers, but seems never to have given himself enough credit for achieving, is that finest quality of terror which is awe. He tried to build on those qualities he most valued in the field. His achievement was to take his genre forward, but most of his imitators try and drag it back. (1996: 7)

This point of view is interesting as it shows how not only critics but also writers set about to write and use the Lovecraft mythology.

[65] In systematizing Joshi's point of view, the same problem of imposed definite meaning appears; this is why any authoritative view of Lovecraft as an author must be discarded. What this study proposes to do is to suggest the limitations of the recent criticism on the Lovecraft mythology and accentuate on the new possible meanings revealed in doing so.

this study would expect the post-structuralist views to do is to allow the analyst to widen its scope and consider this literary phenomenon anew. As any other artist who confronts his work to the world, Lovecraft lost his creation—a part of it being his pseudo-myth. At the beginning of his article "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes argues:

> It will always be impossible to know, for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes. (para.1)

The writer is destined to lose his product to the multiplicity of meanings and interpretation navigating through the space of the text. Meanings are to be given by the reader, proposing through his eyes and experience a new set of possible interpretations. As a result, the restrictive concept of "author" needs to be dismissed in order for the analyst to focus on readers. On the subject, Barthes furthermore adds:

> Once the Author is gone, the claim to "decipher" a text becomes quite useless. To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing. This conception perfectly suits criticism, which can then take as its major task the discovery of the Author (or his hypostases: society, history, the psyche, freedom) beneath the work: once the Author is discovered, the text is "explained:" the critic has conquered; hence it is scarcely surprising not only that, historically, the reign of the Author should also have been that of the Critic, but that criticism (even "new criticism") should be overthrown along with the Author. (para. 6)

A proposition for the Lovecraft criticism would be to surpass, or "overthrow" the supremacy of Lovecraft's assumed perspective; to dismiss the "structure" built upon him the "Author," and start releasing his work on Lovecraft's prized "chaos," this time being one of meanings. In fact, it is in liberating the analysis from this strong concept of "Author" that the Lovecraft narratives can really be considered as a mythology.

b. Lovecraft, "Founder of Discursivity?"

Should we want another designation for Lovecraft when put in perspective with the Lovecraft mythology, a more appropriate term could be what Michel Foucault called "founder of discursivity." He defines this group as "unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and rules for the formation of other texts" (*Author* 1991:114).[66] This designation is handy in the aspect that it strongly

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[66] For the whole passage : "In the course of the nineteenth century, there appeared in Europe another, more uncommon, kind of author, whom one should confuse with neither the 'great' literary authors, nor the authors of religious texts, nor the founders of science. In a somewhat arbitrary way we shall call those who belong in this last group 'founders of discursivity.' They are unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and rules for the formation of other texts. In this sense, they

underlines the importance of the texts that followed these "founders." With it, what Lovecraft becomes important for is opening the way to various re-writings and re-readings of his works through different means. But in calling him a "founder of discursivity" are we not falling in the same trap again? Previously, the idea that the Lovecraft mythology could only have emerged through the acts of several writers had denied the posture of considering every other works outside Lovecraft as imitations. More than one actor was needed for the pseudo-myth to become a concrete myth. This is important to bear in mind as the main characteristics of the Lovecraft mythology (and indeed any mythology) are the possibilities of variations and re-interpretations. Although it is not completely wrong to designate Lovecraft as a "founder of discursivity,"—since he certainly is the main actor at the origin of the Lovecraft mythology— in fact, the danger lies more in giving too much significance to this idea of "founder." By giving it more significance, critics tend to believe that in going back to the original text of this particular person he will be able to explain and even reform the whole view that one has on this "discursivity." For this reason, critics select elements as key elements to the reading of Lovecraft and judge all the Lovecraft mythology based on those. The idea that it is in the very texts of the "founder" that hides the reason for an expansion of discourse is demonstrated here. Continuing his classification, Foucault adds later:

> We can understand the inevitable necessity within these fields of discursivity, for a "return to the origin." This return, which his part of the discursive field itself, never stops modifying it. The return is not a historical supplement which would be added to the discursivity, or merely an ornament; on the contrary, it constitutes an effective and necessary task of transforming the discursive practice itself. Reexamination of Galileo's text may well change our knowledge of the history of mechanics, but it will never be able to change mechanics itself. On the other hand, reexamining Freud's texts modifies psychoanalysis itself, just as a reexamination of Marx's would modify Marxism. (*Author* 1991:116)

It appears that this process of modification is irrevocable in a context where one gives the responsibility of a whole set of discourses to a single author. The position of Lovecraft scholarship is then understandable as there lays in the return to the original author's texts a promise of "transformation." Anyone unsatisfied with the state of the Lovecraft mythology and how it has evolved may try to return to the originator's work in order to transform the perception of its very foundations. As long as one continues to give Lovecraft the status of unique creator of the mythology, the perception of every other works will be labeled as an imitation or a tribute, and not an interpretation. While there is value in trying to restore

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are very different, for example, from a novelist, who is, in fact, nothing more than the author of his own text. Freud is not just the author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* or *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*; Marx is not just the author of the *Communist Manifesto* or *Das Kapital*: they both have established an endless possibility of discourse" (*Author* 1991:113-114).

Lovecraft's works to the front stage, any analysis of the phenomenon that followed his death cannot be perceived as a continuous retrospection upon his legacy. Foucault would write that "unlike the founding of science, the initiation of a discursive practice does not participate in its later transformations" (*Author* 1991:116). This is why Lovecraft should be considered as any other contributor in the building-up of the mythology. Surely it was most of his artificially created myth that would influence writers up to the present, but he was also a reader of his own work. Is it not the reason why he never presented a clearly constructed pseudo-myth, but always seemed to transform it as he went along in his tales? In a mythology's expansion every myth-telling, in participating to the discursivity, not only transforms the initial discourse but also adds a new foundation to it. While having instigated the movement, Lovecraft can (and should) simply be considered as one of the many myth-tellers in the Lovecraft mythology. In fact, by giving him the status of "founder of discursivity" there lurks a risk to give greater credit to his tales than to others. Every myth-teller has as many reasons to tell his tale as any other; this is the promise of the Lovecraft mythology.

2. The Lovecraft Mythology: Surviving thanks to the Pleasure of Writing

a. The Value of Interpretation

While he refers to Derrida's theories in the introduction to *The New Lovecraft Circle*, Robert M. Price writes about "pastiches" or "imitations:" "All those terrible fannish Mythos yarns are so bad not because they must be, not even because their young authors are poor writers, but rather, at the bottom of it, because they are poor readers! They have picked up nothing in Lovecraft but all the tongue-twisting names and the twisting tentacles, merely beasts and bestiaries. Mythos names, we often hear, and rightly, do not a Lovecraftian story make" (2004: XVIII, introduction). Here, Price defends the idea that new writers in the Lovecraft mythology inherit the works of the previous participants. He reminds us that before the act of writing is the act of reading. Indeed, myth-telling implies a first stage of acquisition and reception. For post-structuralism the reader is the one in which the unity of a text is achieved, and not in its author.[67] Similarly, the main object of a myth is not its teller but its hearer. What it implies for the Lovecraft mythology is that whenever a writer proposes a new

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[67] See Barthes in "The Death of the Author:" "a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted" (para.7).

piece of writing it will be a way for him to lay down his own reading of the mythology. Each tale of the Lovecraft mythology contains proofs of the writer's own reading and understanding. As this is mainly a literary phenomenon, each reading will not only be influenced by the preceding works but also by the way in which they are visually introduced. There is a major difference between discovering Lovecraft's works in a densely annotated edition or in a pulp magazine. Added to this point is the fact that each reader brings along with him culture, experience and context in which he is told of the mythology. Hence, to say of any writer that he is a "poor" reader would only testify of the subjective idea that there is a "rich" way of reading the writings of the Lovecraft mythology. Through his desire to excuse and justify the existence of what critics call "pastiches," Price reveals a common trait in Lovecraftian scholarship: to defend the idea of a "correct" understanding of Lovecraft (newly based on his letters). While recalling the theories of Jacques Derrida, he stopped his line of thought at the idea of the primacy of the reader, only to pursue it with a judgmental consideration. What eluded him is that to put the reader at the center of the multiplicity of meanings is to underline that there are as many ways to read a text as there exist readers, or act of reading. Therefore, the very idea of considering a "good" or "bad" way of reading appears misleading. In the Lovecraft mythology, each new piece of writing represents a new reading, a new interpretation holding as much value as any discourse. Each work contributes to the transformation of the mythology, allows it to adapt itself to different cultures and social changes, to survive as a mythology worthy to preserve. Each time there is a new reading of the mythology it is re-actualized through the reader who will eventually feel the urge to participate in the process of transformation, variation and evolution contained in its mythic nature.

While in our case the figure of the author has to be strongly dismissed in order to grasp the status of the Lovecraft mythology, the writers still do hold a privileged position. They are closer to an archaic idea of storytelling than of to a contemporary one. Barthes makes this distinction when he writes that: "in primitive societies, narrative is never undertaken by a person, but by a mediator, shaman or speaker, whose 'performance' may be admired (that is, his mastery of the narrative code), but not his 'genius'. The author is a modern figure, produced no doubt by our society insofar as, at the end of the middle ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, or, to put it more nobly, of the 'human person'" (para. 2). As myth-tellers and adapters, they are closer to the status of performer that to the

one of contemporary authors. Their "mastery of the narrative code" can be judged, but what is really important is that the narrative has to be told in order to survive. Writing in the Lovecraft mythology does only require the writer "to perform" the narrative, to "re-act" it in one's own words. While dismissing the need to express a strong individuality, it suggests a more modest approach to the art of writing. What appears then as central when considering the Lovecraft mythology is to acknowledge the source for this creative force that leads writers, professional or amateurs to continue the production of narratives. In writing, they can honor the perpetuation and pleasure of myth-telling.

b. The Lovecraft Mythology and the Ritual of Writing: A Need for Myth

It is this inspirational surge leading to constant re-writing that defines best the Lovecraft mythology. In fact, it expresses its originality more than the mythic framework of obscure books and pantheon of extraterrestrial beings. It is the very reason of the existence and expansion of it, that allows it to survive but also what gives it a meaning. Lord Raglan would say that myth "is simply a narrative associated with a rite" (1957: 122). While presenting a quite extreme definition, Raglan accentuates the importance of the ritual when considering myth. While in contemporary times it is more difficult to give such a substantial importance to ritual—as it was demonstrated that the Lovecraft mythology had to be considered as any other one—its relation to ritual could be questioned. Raglan would continue writing that: "Ritual has been, at most times and for most people, the most important thing in the world. From it have come music, dancing, painting, and sculpture. All these, we have every reason to believe, were sacred long before they were secular, and the same applies to storytelling" (1957: 133-134). The art of storytelling, as Raglan says, can also be considered as part of the ritual. To tell the narrative over and over again allows it to live among the community and adapt to cultural changes. The ritual of the Lovecraft mythology can then easily be designated as the very need to write. Writing is the place where it is ritualized and re-actualized not only for the reader but for the community; for the myth-readers. Its mythic nature invites any reader to participate freely in the ritual of storytelling. It is a way of proving one's place in the community while giving a new form and a new life to the mythology. For, while Lovecraft's writings are being gradually included among the academic studies, the Lovecraft mythology is constantly threatened to come to an end. The ritual urge of writing constitutes then what Foucault would call one of its "modes of existence" (*Author* 1991:

117).[68] However, the rite does not consist only in a formal re-telling of the narrative but in a new interpretation. Interpretations contained in the readers are ritualized in the space of a tale. For this process to happen, there need to exist among the community bringing together the Lovecraft mythology a strong belief in the importance of writing and adapting. More generally, the mythologist Joseph Campbell writes:

> In all traditional systems, whether of the Orient or of the Occident, the authorized mythological forms are presented in rites to which the individual is expected to respond with an experience of commitment and belief. But suppose he fails to do so? Suppose the entire inheritance of mythological, theological, and philosophical forms fails to wake in him any authentic response of this kind? How then is he to behave? The normal way is to fake it, to feel oneself to be inadequate, to pretend to believe, to strive to believe, and to live, in the imitation of others, an inauthentic life. The authentic creative way, on the other hand, which I would term the way of art as opposed to religion, is, rather, to reverse this authoritative order. The priest presents for consideration a compound of inherited forms with the expectation (or, at times, even, requirement) that one should interpret and experience them in a certain authorized way, whereas the artist first has an experience of his own, which he then seeks to interpret and communicate through effective forms. Not the forms first and then the experience, but the experience first and then forms! (*Mythological Themes* 1988: 148)

Lovecraft, unfit for the cultural state of America at the time, was the one to take this "way of art" in order to give form to his experience. What the community of the Lovecraft mythology is now proving is how much it responds "with an experience of commitment and belief." As long as the readers/writers do not "fake it," the Lovecraft mythology can continue to evolve through its belief in the importance of narratives and interpretation. Lovecraft re-opened the way to our need of storytelling in redefining myth. By showing through the Lovecraft Circle how much pleasure could be gained in sharing narratives, he triggered this inspirational surge in other readers—and they created the Lovecraft mythology together. As long as the strong belief that these narratives must be retold for the sole pleasure of telling them remains, the Lovecraft mythology will linger.

Because Lovecraft was taking seriously not only his style, but also the creative pleasure, he became seductive to other horror or fantasy readers/writers. His works transpired the need for new narratives, new tales. When any other writer would want to "fill the gaps" the Lovecraft's unknown created, it would not only be in order to draw new elements to the mythology but also to feed the urging want for a new story when the previous one is finished. He managed to spark off the desire one has for new tales that nurture one's imagination.

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[68] See Foucault: "Perhaps it is time to study discourses not only in terms of their expressive value or formal transformations, but according to their modes of existence. The modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses vary with each culture and are modified within each" (*Author* 1991: 117).

Through him and his friends, this desire took the shape of myth-telling. Before him, John Fiske would write:

> We shall run no risk of being misunderstood when we define a myth as, in its origin, an explanation, by the uncivilized mind, of some natural phenomenon; not an allegory, not an esoteric symbol,—for the ingenuity is wasted which strives to detect in myths the remnants of a refined primeval science,—but an explanation. Primitive men had no profound science to perpetuate by means of allegory, nor were they such sorry pedants as to talk in riddles when plain language would serve their purpose. Their minds, we may be sure, worked like our own, and when they spoke of the far-darting sun-god, they meant just what they said, save that where we propound a scientific theorem, they constructed a myth. (*Myths and Myth-Makers* [1972]: 12)

Instead of directly speaking of their need for new stories opening imaginative vistas, all the writers of the Lovecraft mythology (Lovecraft included) created this literary phenomenon. Therefore it is not a creation of one artist but of a culture in constant need for new stories to hear or to read. Writing was a way to show and explain this need to others who themselves would hopefully feel it. Lovecraft, even usually portrayed as a recluse managed to trigger in other readers the urge to convey their interpretation, to deliver the form of their own imagination to others. Through the expansion of the Lovecraft mythology, he achieved the Dunsanian goal in making us forget our limitations and dwell in the province of fantasy and imagination. The Lovecraft mythology allows the readers to take "an Epicurean delight in those combinations of ideas and fancies which we know to be artificial" (Lovecraft, *Lord Dunsany* 2004 [1922/1944]: 61). While Lovecraft might not have shattered our conception of mankind faced with cosmos, the phenomenon that developed after him achieved what he had hoped to remind his own contemporary culture. And thus, the pen never stops writing…

"Art is not what one resolves to say, but what insists on saying itself through one."

(Lovecraft, *Selected Letters* vol. V: 19)

Conclusive Note

The particular take this study had on the Lovecraft mythology allowed us to underline its importance as a cultural mirror for contemporary needs. In shaping our view through the lens of post-structuralist's approaches to discourses, the accent was put on the readers' needs rather than the writers' intentions. The Lovecraft mythology continued to be fed by new tales or rather new interpretations because of the appeal it produces to the need of myth-hearing, to the need for narratives. It follows that what lies at the core of the Lovecraft mythology's development has nothing to do with stylistic talent. The real engine keeping it going is the pleasure of reading, of interpretation; the next step being the process of putting that interpretation into a tale, enacting the constant adaptation of the mythology. It is in fact the impulsion leading to this process that constitutes the distinctive quality of myth.

As was seen in the first part, myth's nature is to be impersonal—as it belongs to a community. Myth reveals its ever-changing nature in the punctual act of re-telling by a member of the community, himself proposing his own interpretation. There is no authoritative version of a myth and its ever-changing nature is what allows it to survive the social and cultural changes in the community. Lovecraft being himself a diligent reader had an idea of myth's nature and used it to create his artificial mythology. He webbed it with lacunas to pinch the reader's curiosity and also to create an aura of mystery and unknown in his texts. With its creatures of names unpronounceable, the Lovecraft mythology was to represent at the same time Lovecraft's serious considerations of cosmic terror but also pleasure in re-creating mythic patterns and sharing them among his friends. After Lovecraft's death, the Lovecraft mythology was taken through the molding of the consumerist strategies inherent to the genre of pulp fictions. It is in reshaping itself for a larger audience, putting aside the existential and aesthetical goals of Lovecraft for a more understandable mirroring of Christian myths that western culture would chose to adopt it. But to reduce the evolution to this unique change would be to ignore the several changes it went through up until the present. This study is in fact another stone to the edifice of interpretations constituting the phenomenon. Finally, what the mythology produces is a never-ending need for the telling of fictive and artificial narratives, testifying Lovecraft's success in allowing readers to rediscover the value of imagination and fantasy.

While trying to achieve a survey of the phenomenon, this study, dealing with issues of space and time, was partially meant to introduce a basis for further studies of the Lovecraft

mythology. Those would include a more detailed analysis of the evolution of the phenomenon by making a more precise historical line of events and changes. Rather than just Lovecraft, it will also be needed to see how other writers of the Lovecraft Circle contributed to the founding nature of the mythology. As one of the lacking elements of this study was the absence of any consideration for other media—an approach to the development of the Lovecraft mythology in films or comic books for example would be relevant. One of the main actors in the recent development being the internet, a study on possibilities offered by e-zines or fan fiction also offers itself. What needs to be kept in mind is how much the accent should be put on the new reading possibilities offered by writers and in what way they propose the Lovecraft mythology should evolve in the ever-growing macro-society. After all, the advantage of the Lovecraft mythology for the critics is that it interprets itself.

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