

Subverting a Mythology

Examining Joseph Campbell's Monomyth in the Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft

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## Introduction

By the time he died, American author Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) had written over fifty stories, sampling various genres both old and new and crafting a series of tales that continues to entertain and inform critics and readers alike. Writing before the genres of science fiction and fantasy were firmly established but borrowing from both, Lovecraft added horror to his fictional mix and helped pioneer the literary form called weird fiction. In his essay “Supernatural Horror in Literature,” Lovecraft himself defined the genre as:

something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspensions or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (1043)

Lovecraft contributed to this genre by writing two distinct sets of stories, both short stories and novellas, related by content but separated by tone, known as the “Cthulhu Mythos” and “Dream Cycle.”<sup>1</sup> While the latter takes place largely in dreams and contains greater elements of fantasy than the Cthulhu Mythos, it is the Mythos<sup>2</sup> that has largely attracted attention from critics for its statements of Lovecraft’s personal beliefs about mankind’s place in the universe.

Stories in the Cthulhu Mythos generally follow a similar pattern to such a degree that George Wetzel suggests “that the Mythos stories should actually be considered not as separate works but rather the different chapters of a very lengthy novel” (79). In the works, a male narrator usually relates a tale of horror sometimes avoided but oftentimes carried out with

terrible results, and the cause of these events inevitably points to one of several extraterrestrial races that inhabited earth long before humans gained dominion. Mythos tales, always bleak and unrelenting in their vision of man's position in the universe, reiterate several of the same themes, including man's cosmic insignificance, the failure of mankind's accomplishments, and man's powerlessness in the face of the unknown. Through these stories, Lovecraft makes assertions reflecting his religious and philosophical beliefs, criticizing and satirizing what he perceived as the failures of society, religion, and the modern civilization surrounding him.

While individual stories in the Mythos shed light on Lovecraft's beliefs, analyzing the Mythos as a whole adds a new level of interpretation. As a cohesive unit rather than a series of individual stories, the Mythos shows trends that take on a different meaning through repetition and recurring themes. The term "mythos" itself is an appropriate one if one borrows from Northrop Frye's definition: "The narrative of a work of literature, considered as . . . imitation of generic and recurrent action or ritual (archetypal narrative), or imitation of the total conceivable action of an omnipotent god or human society (anagogic narrative)" (*Anatomy of Criticism* 366). The Cthulhu Mythos can be considered a series of myths with Frye's definition of "myth" as "narrative in which some characters are superhuman beings who do things that 'happen only in stories'; hence, a conventionalized or stylized narrative not fully adapted to plausibility or 'realism'" (366). An exact definition of "myths" and "mythology" tends to remain elusive, but several authors have offered guidelines for separating myths from similar methods of storytelling or religious histories, including folklore, legends, and fairy tales. Martin S. Day humorously claims that "[d]efiners of myth are as varied and irreconcilable as delegates to the United Nations" but proceeds to say that "all theorizers about myth agree on one point: myth is non-rational" in the sense that it is inferior to factual scientific knowledge (2). According to Day,

myths are different from legends because the latter tell heroic stories of recent history rather than ancient times, while fairy tales are even further removed due to their focus on juvenile appeal and obviously fictional elements (17-18).<sup>3</sup> Folklore, too, is different from myth because it lacks a religious element necessary for a healthy mythology (20). A different definition from Lewis Spence runs parallel with Lovecraft's philosophical reasons for writing the Mythos. Spence writes, "It has been said that the chief divisions of myth correspond to the chief problems which the universe presents to the curiosity of untutored man," listing some of mankind's most pressing questions of identity, origin, and purpose as among the topics most frequently addressed by myths (35). One of the key themes of myth is that of addressing the human experience in some way, from origin stories to world endings.<sup>4</sup>

Mark Schorer defines "myths" as "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" (360). Concerning philosophical meaning in his mythology, Lovecraft often includes statements of man's purpose, sometimes beginning a story with lines reflecting his philosophical view of humanity.<sup>5</sup> Mixed with these moments of philosophy are stories of fictional characters and their experiences with fantastical creatures that back up his rather dim view of mankind's significance and role in the cosmos; Lovecraft was always more concerned with developing grand ideas rather than trying to please the pulp audience's desire to see action, spectacle, and romance. Pertaining to the non-rationality of the myths, the characters in most stories struggle to come to terms with what they find, unable to comprehend the strange nature of the alien forces around them, making non-rationality a key theme in the Mythos. In addressing difficult questions of

meaning and simultaneously telling stories of mythical beings, the Cthulhu Mythos falls squarely in most definitions of a mythology.

In placing Lovecraft's work in relation to myths, Mark Lowell – as well as others – have noted the relationship between the Mythos and the works of Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), a renowned mythologist who worked largely on worldwide myths and comparative mythology.<sup>6</sup> Campbell was an influential mythologist whose psychoanalytical study of myths and cultures was influenced by psychiatrist Carl Jung. Although Phillip Shreffler points out that Lovecraft was not fond of Jung's type of psychoanalysis, another area of Campbell's work has brought the Mythos under Campbell's mythological microscope (4).<sup>7</sup> Campbell's most famous and influential contribution to mythology was the invention of the "monomyth" first introduced in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.<sup>8</sup> Rather than a particular set of myths or stories specific to one culture or time period, the monomyth is instead an extremely broad outline that encompasses commonalities shared by myths around the world, from ancient history to the present day. It is a tool that categorizes similarities, often broadly and with numerous liberties, in order to portray all religions as essentially the same. According to the monomyth, all religions and the myths that gave rise to them are fundamentally identical, telling the same stories with the same characters, and demonstrating mankind's collective unconscious (*Thousand Faces* 3). As proof, Campbell offered the worldwide existence of spirits and demons, and narrowly focused but widespread tales of such incidents as universal floods and mankind's creation by the gods (*Wild Gander* 44). In the academic circles of mythologists, the monomyth was well received and lauded for its apparent proof of mankind's shared identity and religion's apparently manmade origin.

Many Christians, however, have not been as receptive to Campbell's uses of mythology. In proclaiming all religions as equally valid, Campbell denies any belief supremacy over the others. He says in his attack on religious belief that "the democratic ideal of the self-determining individual, the invention of the power-driven machine, and the development of the scientific method of research, have so transformed human life that the long-inherited, timeless universe of symbols has collapsed," siding with Nietzsche's metaphorical belief that the gods are all dead (*Thousand Faces* 387).<sup>9</sup> Christians have taken issue with Campbell's tendency to see all religions as essentially identical and as offering the same message or advantages to daily life. Mary Lefkowitz even posits that if any religious culture receives less attention from Campbell, it is the Judeo-Christian one (429). Christians may also notice Campbell's emphasis on behavioral patterns rather than actual doctrine; Lefkowitz says, "[i]n urging that we follow only the pattern of Jesus' life and not his teaching, Campbell places great emphasis on the rebirth or return at the end of the hero's journey" (433) rather than incorporating biblical values into our daily lives. The mythic cycles espoused by Campbell prefer truths common to every religion over beliefs specific to only one, and as a result, refuse to acknowledge biblical ideas of exclusive truth, such as salvation through only Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup>

Noticing that virtually all mythologies contain heroic characters, Campbell proposed "the hero's journey" as the core of his comparative mythology, an expansive description of a heroic character undertaking a quest for the sake of his fellow man.<sup>11</sup> According to Campbell, "[t]he standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (*Thousand Faces* 30). He offers a terse description of the hero's journey: "[a] hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural

wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man” (30).<sup>12</sup> Critics have noted that the hero’s journey has survived Campbell and found its way into modern culture, including popular culture.<sup>13</sup> Because the hero’s journey is so prominent in works of fiction, it is not surprising to see critics analyze Lovecraft’s stories through the monomyth. However, this comparison tends to reveal incongruities between the Cthulhu Mythos and the monomythic outline. Rather than fitting nicely within the monomyth, Mythos stories almost always deviate from or subvert various elements of the hero’s journey, which is somewhat surprising given the similarities between the two men.

Superficially, Lovecraft and Campbell had some things in common. Both denied the truth of religion, especially Christian religion. Campbell wrote, “[n]ow it can hardly be said of the Christian cult, which sprang into being in this environment and was carried thence to Europe, that it was ‘brought forth’ from . . . any of the peoples on whom it was impressed. Its borrowed symbols and borrowed god were presented to these as facts” (*Creative Mythology* 629).

Lovecraft was even more vociferous in denouncing Christianity and bragged about having done so from a young age. S. T. Joshi finds evidence that Lovecraft had rejected the family’s Baptist religion by the age of twelve if not younger (*A Life* 26). For both men, religions were a source and result of myths and the creativity of human beings. In Campbell’s words:

Wherever myths still are living symbols, the mythologies are teeming dream worlds of such images. But wherever systematizing theologians have appeared and gained the day . . . the figures have become petrified into propositions. Mythology is misread then as direct history or science, symbol becomes fact, metaphor dogma, and the quarrels of the sects arise, each mistaking its own

symbolic signs for the ultimate reality – the local vehicle for its timeless, ineffable tenor. (*Wild Gander* 73)

As a lover of both history and science, Lovecraft's questioning of the world around him led him to become skeptical of anything he could not experience firsthand or at least verify scientifically. Lovecraft self-published treatises on astronomy in his early teens and followed scientific discoveries, including Einstein's theories of relativity and voyages to Antarctica, throughout his whole life (Joshi, *Decline* 51). His love of philosophy sprang from ancient Greek philosophers who espoused materialism, leading Lovecraft to become a materialist despite being born into a religious home. As a child, Greek literature led Lovecraft to adopt the pagan religion briefly yet seriously, resulting in what Joshi calls "an infatuation with the classical world and then a kind of religious epiphany," and even though he later abandoned all religion in favor of materialism, this strange behavior certainly affected his later views on religions he saw as equally fanciful (*A Life* 25-26). Psychologically, early deaths in the family, including Lovecraft's father, and Lovecraft's own imagination propelled him into youthful solitude. By the time he adopted materialism as his worldview, science was beginning to astound people with calculations on the size and age of the universe, and Lovecraft began to see a diminished importance placed on man that would find itself one of the pillars of his fiction. He applied his youthful solitude onto the whole of humanity and even the earth, feeling alone and isolated no matter how many friends he would make later in life. The inevitable extinction of the sun and any possibility of human life on earth certainly affected Lovecraft, even though he knew it would not happen during his lifetime. Lovecraft's adoption of the idea of entropy suggested that everything would eventually disappear, including humans and their religious ideas (*Decline* 8).

By itself, a mutual unbelief in religion does not create a significant connection between Lovecraft and Campbell. Instead, critics point to Lovecraft's knowledge and love of myths as an important origin for the Mythos. It was no accident that Lovecraft created pantheons of godlike creatures and recognized certain mythological patterns, even those he satirized. Joshi traces Lovecraft's involvement in mythology from the young age of five when he "discovered a seminal book in his aesthetic development: the *Arabian Nights*" (*A Life* 18). Soon after, Lovecraft found more inspiration from the supernatural elements in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and the supernatural and mythological influences peaked when he "finally came upon the *Metamorphoses* itself around this time, doing so in a way that felicitously united his burgeoning love of classical myth with his already existing fondness for eighteenth-century prosody" (22). The impact of this classical work cannot be underestimated, and the supernatural elements in them clearly sparked something that excited him in spite of his materialist worldview, opening a world of imagination and otherworldly elements that he believed could only exist in fiction, not reality. Joshi writes, "Classical antiquity was, however, more than a literary experience for Lovecraft; it was both a personal and even a quasi-religious one" (*A Life* 25). Stricken by the immaculate verses of Ovid's work, the young Lovecraft fully embraced classical literature and all the mythology packed into it. Of these myths read by Lovecraft, Campbell refers to stories from both the *Arabian Nights* and *Metamorphoses* in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* as containing examples of the hero's journey and the monomyth. Due to his extensive reading of such stories, Lovecraft clearly understood the concept of a mythological hero from a very young age even before Campbell had published his works.

With the shared attraction to myth, the connection between Lovecraft and Campbell seems strong, but Lovecraft's Mythos only bears superficial resemblances to the monomyth.

Critics have noticed numerous instances of mythological borrowings in the Mythos,<sup>14</sup> but Lovecraft subverts many of these for just as many reasons. Lowell sees mythological archetypes used both earnestly and satirically. In Lovecraft's "The Music of Erich Zann," Lowell finds an instance of earnest mythical archetypes as the titular character becomes "the herald of which Joseph Campbell speaks," part of the hero's journey where the hero is guided by the herald or some other helping figure (48).<sup>15</sup> However, instances of faithful adherence to mythic archetypes are rare in the Mythos; Lovecraft usually seeks to supplant the importance and strength of the hero, the gallantry of the protagonists, and the positive aspects of the supernatural encounters. Lowell says,

The hero of the monomyth returns with a boon that revitalizes both himself and his community. Lovecraft's hero is destroyed by what he has gained; Campbell's hero profits.

This is the fundamental difference between Campbell and Lovecraft: completion of the mythic cycle, though painful, is ultimately a positive, life-generating act for Campbell; for Lovecraft, this completion is a negative, life-destroying act. Lovecraft saw the abyss, the realm of the human unconscious, as revealing the true irrelevance of humanity in the greater scheme of things. Campbell's myth world may be dark and mysterious, but it is ultimately positive. Lovecraft's myth world is cold and negative, with no place for humanity in it. (49-50)

Lovecraft, then, has built an anti-mythology centered not on celebrating the gods and their representative heroes, as in myths, but as deprecating them because "for Lovecraft . . . this realm of myth contains only sorrow, insanity, and death; by entering it one realizes the truth of

humanity's insignificance in the universe" (48). For all his borrowings from myth, Lovecraft found it necessary to twist elements from the classic authors he loved to better suit his purpose.

Others have noticed the discrepancy between Lovecraft's works and a classical mythology, further driving a wedge between Campbell's monomyth and Lovecraft's Mythos. Richard Tierney breaks fiction into three categories: human centered, human evolution centered, and cosmos centered, placing myths into the first category (193-4).<sup>16</sup> Tierney places Lovecraft in the last category, where the characters in the story are ignorant about the universe and less than heroic and important (194). The emphasis on mankind's insignificance is important in contrast with Campbell's heroes, who perform great deeds of valor and courage and bring attention to their humanity. Where myths and the religions related to them often focus on morality and ethics, Peter Cannon notices how "Lovecraft, in affecting a cosmic viewpoint, was indifferent to man and his moral plight. Human beings remain entirely subordinate to mood and supernatural effect in his work" (162). Thus, the tone also differs between the two, as myths are generally triumphant and uplifting, and even when the hero dies, as in the case of Hercules ascending his funeral pyre, the death is glorious and heroic, drawing attention and honor to mankind and the hero's past deeds. Of course, even myths themselves have distinct differences, and Lovecraft's different tone may not be enough for some to discredit his works as mythical in the vein of Campbell's monomyth. Instead, specific points of the monomyth must be analyzed in the Mythos to determine its compatibility with Campbell's mythic archetypes. Such an investigation will yield valuable information on the role of three important issues in the Mythos: the identification, purpose, and role of the hero, the identification of the mythic boon, and an investigation of the supernatural entities.

Campbell wrote numerous books about myth, but his works after *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* tended to reflect that influential work on comparative mythology. The monomyth and the hero's journey receive the most attention, and consequently the most comparisons with Lovecraft's Mythos stories. Campbell's works lists four distinct, broad steps the hero must take, in addition to several other important themes in mythology, including an entire section on the virgin birth of the hero in various myths (ix-x).<sup>17</sup> Aspects from all of them likely appear in the Mythos, in some form or another throughout the various stories, but one seems to have brought critics to differing opinions. The identity of the hero in the Mythos stories is a difficult question that has several possible answers. Compared with mythic stories of Greek heroes, Lovecraft's characters inevitably fail to rise to such greatness, possessing not only mere mortal strength and wisdom, but also fighting against forces every bit as powerful as the gods ruling in Olympus, if much more malevolent. Lovecraft's stories often contain two main characters and therefore two potential heroes – the narrator and the narrator's friend, often a scientist and the person who actually drives the action in the story, and about whom the story is focused. Determining which of these two types of characters the hero is can be a difficult task. In some of the stories, the narrator is excluded from almost all of the action, relating the events from a secondhand perspective, reading a letter from a friend, or even doubting the very reality of what he claimed to have experienced. The scientist acquaintances usually fare far worse, often ending the story insane or dead. Whether either of these two commonly recurring characters types can be the hero is a question that most critics have not attempted to answer; most generally choose one or the other, if not both, and label them the hero without pausing to inspect the characters for any heroic qualities. Paul Buhle, for example, gives the label "hero" to the scientist friend in Lovecraft's short story "From Beyond," but the so-called "hero" demonstrates little in

the way of heroic character to justify Buhle's label (203). The protagonist in that story is, if possible, even less deserving of being called a hero; he is not even given a name, a common ploy by Lovecraft to draw attention away from the narrator and to the atmosphere. Fritz Leiber offers an alternative that dismisses human characters as the heroes of at least two stories in favor of certain alien races, citing the aliens' "unending struggles for survival and to increase their store of knowledge, their wise, rational, enlightened, and even 'humane' cultures" as more deserving of our attention (148). It may be that there are no individual heroes in the stories. The Mythos stories deviate from the hero's journey and monomyth, leading to a sense of satire on the mythic outlook that raised both gods and men to a level above a scientific outlook. While Campbell identified myths and then dismissed them as outdated and unscientific, Lovecraft toyed with and engaged the notion of myths and what it might mean for an atheist to discover a world of supernatural beings and their interaction with humans.

With a lack of recurring characters and the unheroic actions of both the narrators and the people driving the action, the category for potential heroes in the Mythos stories may need broadened even further to include non-traditional candidates for heroism. Many elements of Campbell's heroes described in the hero's journey never happen with a single person in the timeframe of each story, but some of the heroic elements begin to appear over time. Lovecraft's Mythos stories tend to happen during a relatively short period, but they often refer to times in the distant past or future, telling of man's creation and struggle in ancient history and its continuing struggle and eventual dissolution in the eons to come. In a sense, Fritz Leiber may be right; the reasons he thinks the alien races are the heroes in two of Lovecraft's stories might be better applied to the human race portrayed by the Mythos as a whole. Where the individuals of the Mythos stories fail due to powerlessness, short lifespans, and a lack of knowledge, the entire

history and future of humanity offers a better chance of covering those shortcomings and presenting a superior heroic journey. If humanity is indeed Lovecraft's hero, that conclusion will indicate several statements about the Mythos as a whole and Lovecraft's plan for it.

One main difference between Lovecraft's characters and his fictional history of humanity is the horrific fate that befalls many of his characters, a fate tied directly to knowledge of something either terrible or beyond mankind's comprehension. Even outside the Mythos, Lovecraft carried on this idea of mankind's superiority over animals because of knowledge and understanding, even if it could lead to terrible consequences.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, this knowledge is often what drives the plot of these stories, as educated men of science or the humanities seek out information on various topics, from man's history to otherworldly power. Other times, they stumble across such knowledge, but the results rarely change; the knowledge brings about disaster. Yet, even faced with known danger, the scientists insist on pursuing their goals, thinking they will be rewarded. Knowledge becomes something positive in their eyes, a boon to mankind.

For Campbell, part of the hero's journey includes the "boon," a beneficial gift given by someone with either superior knowledge or power to the hero. Campbell says, "[f]or those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or an old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragons forces he is about to pass" (*Thousand Faces* 69). This is the boon. Sometimes, the boon is a simple item given to a single person, such as the ball of thread given to Theseus to assist him in the Minotaur's lair. Perhaps the most famous boon is the theft of fire committed by Prometheus for the sake of all mankind, not just a single hero. In the Mythos, many of the characters treat knowledge as this latter boon, something that will benefit all of mankind if only the main

characters can decipher the mystical meaning of a particular revelation. Knowledge almost becomes a tangible thing that people think they can control or wield, a weapon of immense power. And like the fire of Prometheus, it has the power to help or hinder, illuminate or burn.

Regardless of the hero's identity in the Mythos, the boon must be present and recurring, and knowledge is the best option to fit this description. The central question becomes an issue of the role of knowledge in the Mythos stories. Knowledge can take more than one form, depending on the context of the story. Sometimes, the goal of the protagonist or the narrator telling his story is to learn something purely scientific, such as interdimensional travel or even an innocent expedition into an unknown but presumably safe place. Other times, the main characters behave like the "mad scientist" types who search for occult information knowing the danger they face. In some stories, knowledge is kept a secret, and the *Necronomicon*, an occult grimoire brimming with dangerous information, is mentioned in nearly every story as an object worthy of fear and restriction. If the *Necronomicon* is one embodiment of pure knowledge, its treatment in the Mythos raises interesting questions about the purpose and safety of knowledge, as well as its use by humans.

In addition to just knowledge itself as the boon in Lovecraft's stories, the means of reaching it deserve equal attention. Campbell notices that the boon may be protected instead of freely given, and the hero, as in the case of Prometheus, must attempt some heroic deed to recover the boon (*Thousand Faces* 181-2). The action surrounding the boon can call into question the worth of the boon itself, and the actions after receiving the boon may do the same thing. Self-destruction in the search of knowledge is common in the Mythos, and characters often regret having learned of something horrible. In some cases, knowledge of the occult or supernatural leads to ethically wrong actions for personal gain or simple chaos. In cases

involving knowledge as the boon, Lovecraft employs ideas that conflict with modern scientific propositions – ideas that portray any sort of knowledge as a good thing, an idea shared by Lovecraft in real life. If Lovecraft truly appreciated and praised knowledge, his use of it in the Mythos suggests a conflict with the inevitably positive boons of ancient myths. Knowledge becomes a weapon of satire against Lovecraft's proud fellow man in addition to a device to drive the plot along. The question of knowledge as the boon becomes a matter that spills over from the Mythos into Lovecraft's contemporary world and his philosophical thought, making statements on men in both fiction and reality.

In Campbell's monomyth, divine characters often give the hero the boon. Zeus, Athena, and other gods of Olympus gave magical weapons, shields, helmets, and sandals to their chosen heroes. Even in the Old Testament, God grants divine gifts to his chosen heroes and judges, as in the great strength he gave Samson.<sup>19</sup> In myths around the world, divine beings rule in their own domains, and gods and goddesses interact with their chosen ones with great frequency. The close relationship between myths and religions only reinforces the link between mythology and divine elements. Lovecraft, a staunch atheist, did not believe in any sort of divinity, making his inclusion of godlike beings in his Mythos somewhat confusing. Critics of Lovecraft's work have not come to a consensus regarding the identity of these creatures. Joshi regularly calls them aliens, but other critics casually refer to them as gods. Some critics, such as Shreffler, use both words interchangeably, perhaps referring to the strongest of these creatures as gods and their subordinates as aliens. Since both "gods" and "aliens" carry massively different connotation, these words cannot be haphazardly applied to Lovecraft's creations. Misidentifying the creatures can lead to erroneous assumptions about the purpose of the stories and Lovecraft's intentions for them. By identifying the nature of these creatures, a reader can glean knowledge about

Lovecraft's beliefs about mankind's role in the universe and the presence of supernatural creatures, tying the literature directly to the author's religious views.

Whether the beings in the Mythos are gods or aliens becomes a central question that naturally stems from the monomyth. If the creatures are not gods, then the Mythos suddenly ceases to become a true mythology, instead falling into the realm of staunch science fiction and losing its overlap with the genre of fantasy. However, the effect on the genre of these stories is far less important than the implications within the Mythos itself. The supernatural beings raise questions that can be identified only by their similarities with either deities or amoral alien creatures. Campbell made statements on religion by pointing out the similarities of divine beings in myths, but Lovecraft managed to make nearly identical statements through very different means. Even if the beings in the Mythos are aliens and not gods, this does not invalidate Lovecraft's stories as a mythos, but it does indicate his purposeful subversion of the gods in even the myths he loved so much as a child. The consequential decision of labeling the creatures as gods or aliens pulls the Mythos in two distinct directions, including making statements about Lovecraft's personal beliefs.

Using the monomyth as a point of reference, the first chapter of this thesis will address the question of the hero, including doubts regarding the hero's identity and whether the Mythos stories can even contain a heroic character. It will suggest that the portrayal of humanity throughout the Mythos, in addition to mankind's historical development, possesses the most heroic characteristics and comes closest to matching Campbell's definition and examples of a hero in the monomyth. The second chapter will similarly question the identity of the boon in the Mythos and whether Lovecraft even allows for the possibility of anything beneficial to exist. Knowledge will be presented as the boon, and in light of forbidden and disastrous knowledge,

this chapter will draw conclusions about how Lovecraft portrayed knowledge in his stories. The third chapter will address the confusion between labeling Lovecraft's creatures as either aliens or gods and the consequences of both labels. It will postulate that Lovecraft's monsters are more appropriately associated with aliens and the reasons that they must be extraterrestrials rather than deities. The overall thesis will analyze the compatibility of Campbell's monomyth with Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, make note of the incongruities, and seek to synthesize potential similarities, in addition to defining three of Campbell's terms ("hero," "boon," and "gods") as they relate to the Mythos.

## Chapter 1

## Heroic Aspirations: Finding a Path for the Hero in the Cthulhu Mythos

Of the similarities shared by mythology and literature, the presence of a hero is one of the oldest and longest lasting, still present in today's postmodern culture that has largely abandoned the idea of a savior. Victor Brombert declared that "[t]he heroic age is gone, and the unheroic hero of our times grimaces, self-conscious and despondent" but goes on to say that "so long as man projects an image of himself in myth and art, so long as he somehow tries to justify this image or to deplore it, the notion of the hero is certain to stay alive" (11). Even though our occidental, secular culture largely denies saving figures in our daily lives, having grown increasingly skeptical in the abilities of governmental, religious, and other authority figures, we still love them in the arts; almost every genre of literature and film still bears the marks of the ancient heroes and their timeless fight of good against evil. Brombert argues that people still love this type of hero because "[t]he hero . . . is the poetic projection of man as he unavoidably faces the lack of meaning of life" (12), allowing people to see themselves as greater than they actually are, a comforting thought in an increasingly atheistic world many view as ultimately hopeless and uncaring.

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes, accomplishing any number and variety of tasks, and Joseph Campbell laid out his vision of the mythical hero's journey in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* to give a general outline for heroic action. He writes, "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (30). Many heroes of both ancient and modern literature follow this pattern, but the characters in Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos stand out

in resistance to Campbell's pattern. Heroics are seldom found in Lovecraft's stories, and even when they are, they are occasionally carried out by characters or forces that defy the hero's journey and most other definitions of heroes. Attempting to identify the hero or heroes in the Cthulhu Mythos therefore necessitates a look into the various definitions of heroic action given by critics and authors and an assessment of the characters' actions within the Mythos.

A survey of Lovecraft's Mythos stories presents an immediate problem when determining the hero: his characters tend to subvert clearly defined labels and roles. Despite following a somewhat repeating pattern, these stories can make even identifying the main character a chore. Lovecraft's favorite story, "The Colour out of Space," nicely demonstrates this phenomenon. The story is narrated by an anonymous man, a rather simple reservoir surveyor who takes no part in the action of the story. He hears the tale after the matter from the town's unhinged recluse, Ammi Pierce. This man tells the story of a farmer, Nahum Gardner, and his family and how an unidentifiable alien meteorite affects them and their farm. Rather than carrying out any sort of heroic action when the meteorite strikes and releases its strange presence on the farm, Nahum goes about his business in a decidedly un-heroic fashion until the alien presence has destroyed his land, family, and ultimately Nahum himself. Pierce and some others go to investigate, finding only the farmstead's remains and a glimpse of the alien creature, described only in terms of color (597-98), leading to Pierce's madness.

The Mythos therefore presents at least two recurring types of characters: a narrator, often unnamed and taking little to no action, and the victim who carries out the bulk of the action and who is often dead, dying, or insane by the end of the story, although these may also be the fates for the narrator as well.<sup>20</sup> Some stories, such as "The Colour out of Space," also include a secondary narrator who recounts the story to the primary narrator, widening the gap between the

primary storyteller and the action to further downplay the narrator's involvement; the secondary narrator may also diminish the action of the main character with idle or insane speculation, leaving the main character little to discover or investigate. Since none of these character types fit well into Campbell's idea of the hero's journey, it is prudent to define the roles of main characters, protagonists, and heroes as they appear in literature. With that established, they can be measured against Campbell's archetypal hero.

Since narrators present the events of Lovecraft's Mythos stories, the definition and role of the narrator factors into each story. Because the narrators may also be the protagonists, the term "narrator" will exclude any character who inhabits this double role. Therefore, the narrators of Lovecraft's fiction must not be the central character. Instead, they tell the central character's story, either as a witness or as someone relating the actual witness's story. When they are not also the narrators, the protagonists or main characters generally become the human subject of each story. Rather than automatically being labeled heroes, the protagonists earn their labels simply by commanding the most attention and carrying out the majority of the action.

"Protagonist" is a more useful term in most cases than hero or heroine because it implies no particular characteristic or personality features. The main difference between a protagonist and a hero is that the audience expects heroic qualities in a hero whereas "a protagonist may be heroic, cowardly, good, bad or indifferent" (Bulman 176), even capable of playing the role of an antihero.<sup>21</sup> These definitions are useful because they reveal only the possibility of overlap between the three roles; the narrator is not the main character, who in turn is not necessarily the protagonist.

Although "narrator" and "protagonist" are clearly defined, the idea of the "hero" is not; its definitions are numerous and occasionally conflict with each other. The first step is to

establish what a hero *is* before one can know what a hero *does*. Campbell offers one such definition: “[t]he hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one’s visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought” (*Thousand Faces* 19-20). Dorothy Norman says that heroes “provide both miraculous bridges between one era and another, and unexpectedly clear markings that distinguish disparate epochs” (4) because of their significance to their cultures. She also describes heroes as courageous (55). Bulman gives a more straightforward definition: “From a literary point of view, the hero is the central character in a novel, play, story, or poem” (111) but adds that “the word hero has more meanings than the literary one so the characteristics associated with heroism in the popular imagination are often associated with the literary hero. These characteristics include bravery, enterprise, courage, fighting for a cause and strength, although not necessarily just physical strength” (111), indicating that heroism requires certain characteristics. A key ingredient of the hero is his relatability with the reader. In Bulman’s words, “The hero then can take many forms but probably the one constant is that the reader will admire and possibly identify with the character. The hero’s main qualities are positive . . . Good triumphs over evil through the agency of a hero” (112). This combination of descriptions paints the hero as laudable, physically and mentally able to meet his challenge, and the destroyer of evil. Yet before they can even attempt the actions of a hero, Lovecraft’s characters fail to meet even the general descriptions.

Bulman’s descriptions of the hero never satisfactorily match the protagonists or narrators in the Cthulhu Mythos, especially in the courageous descriptions Bulman offers. Rather than being laudable, many of Lovecraft’s characters are either incredibly ordinary people, such as

Nahum in “The Colour out of Space,” or above-average intellectuals and scientists, such as the exploration team in *At the Mountains of Madness*. Unlike Bulman’s heroes, Lovecraft’s characters do not possess immense strength or some laudable cause other than frantic self-preservation. The fact that many of the narrators are unnamed demonstrates Lovecraft’s intention to keep them at a very human level of achievement and character. In regard to character traits, specifically courage, Lovecraft’s narrators and other characters are sorely lacking. Grown men faint with alarming regularity. The narrator admits in “The Unnamable” that he “had mercifully fainted before I could learn what it meant” (261). In “The Call of Cthulhu,” a group of police breaking up a cult’s ritual comes upon a scene that disturbs them. Lovecraft writes, “Four of them reeled, one fainted, and two were shaken into a frantic cry which the mad cacophony of the orgy fortunately deadened” (365). Screaming, fainting, and running from terrors seen or invisible are all too common behaviors for every type of Lovecraft’s characters. Ellen Brinks points out that men fainting is a gothic tradition and symbolic of men struggling with the “alien” presence of femininity (12); Lovecraft substitutes literal aliens as the cause of fainting, but the weakness is apparent in both cases. Rather than facing monsters with heroic courage, Lovecraft’s characters usually run, provided they have not already fainted.

Only in the last section of Bulman’s heroic description, the destroyer of evil, do a few of Lovecraft’s qualify. The narrator appears to destroy the soul of Ephraim Waite, the villainous soul-swapper in “The Thing on the Doorstep,” although it requires him to destroy his best friend’s body. The most notable instance of a mortal defeating a monster occurs in “The Dunwich Horror,” in which the unusually heroic Dr. Armitage destroys the immensely powerful and destructive half-brother of Wilbur Whateley, himself partially monstrous. These instances are rare, however, and S. T. Joshi criticizes “The Dunwich Horror” severely for following “an

elementary ‘good vs. evil’ struggle between Armitage and the Whateleys” (*A Life* 449).

According to Joshi, then, the stories are not meant to portray heroic characters, as that would lessen the atmosphere of horror Lovecraft so carefully created in each story.

When main characters do not exhibit explicitly heroic traits, authors often intend to juxtapose them with archetypal heroes by creating antiheroes. While this subversive action fits Lovecraft’s attitude toward fiction, and especially romantic characters, Bulman’s definition of an antihero fails to match the vast majority of his characters.<sup>22</sup> Bulman says of antiheroes:

A hero is said to have the positive characteristics of courage, bravery, enterprise, integrity and both physical and moral strength, or at least some of these qualities, which will eventually help him to overcome any weaknesses he possesses. The anti-hero is quite simply the opposite of the hero. He or she . . . is ineffectual, passive, negative, petty and often ignominious. (18)

Lovecraft’s characters do not tend toward heroic or antiheroic character traits because they are generally normal human beings, not larger-than-life or abnormally gifted. When a character is gifted, it is generally with an above average intellect and scientific aptitude, but these characters are no more resilient to fainting spells and fleeing in terror than any others. Regarding character traits, Lovecraft’s creations do not exhibit heroic attributes. At the same time, they are not overly cowardly, evil, or bad people, disqualifying them from being labeled antiheroes.

Admittedly, not all heroes begin their lives endowed with heroic traits; they often develop them in the moment of crisis when actions separate heroes from victims. The hero’s journey also focuses exclusively on actions, not character traits, and if Lovecraft’s characters have any hope of being considered as heroes, their actions must ultimately trump their lack of heroic qualities. What characters do in moments of difficulty becomes the ultimate test of heroism, and many

authors have voiced opinions on what kinds of action makes a heroic character. Not surprisingly, the consensus is that heroic actions make a character heroic. Campbell himself is far more generous in his description of the hero's journey, which states that "[t]he standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (30). For Campbell, the hero becomes a hero solely by undertaking the journey itself; heroic actions such as monster slaying and other deeds of great valor are purely optional, but in myths, universally present.

In Lovecraft's Mythos, characters' actions almost never reach the level of the mythic hero. When they do, it is usually with a stipulation. In "The Call of Cthulhu," the terrified sailor Johansen uses his ship to ram the monstrous Cthulhu, but only as a last resort in order to escape; Johansen is later killed unceremoniously, presumably by Cthulhu's cultists. The geologist William Dyer bravely leads his surviving crew into the alien city in *At the Mountains of Madness*, but the horror they find forces them to flee and issue a warning against every returning. In such stories as "The Unnamable," there is literally no action whatsoever except a simple conversation interrupted by the attack of an invisible monster. The humans in these stories rarely commit any significant acts of bravery, but when they do, they are usually followed by fainting or a frantic escape. Any brave action carried out by the characters, such as exploration in an alien environment, is usually countered with a scene of magnified terror and resulting cowardice, if not outright insanity or death. Unlike the heroes of ancient myths, these characters never face their supernatural foes with undaunted courage, nor are they capable of permanently defeating their most powerful enemies. Given the historic context, Lovecraft knew that the time of heroes had ended; according to Peter Thorslev, "the Romantic Age was our last great age of heroes"

(16). With Romantic themes in literature practically gone, the options for heroic traits fell to a new low. Thorslev writes that even though Romantic heroes, specifically Byronic heroes, did not go on grand adventures of physical strength and heroism, they still had what he terms “heroes of sensibility,” who are heroic not in action but in “[their] capacities for feeling, mostly for the tender emotions – gentle, and tearful love, nostalgia, and a pervasive melancholy that ranges from autumnal musing to ‘grave-yard’ moralizing” (35). In contrast, Lovecraft’s characters experience only emotions of fear and horror, and their professions lean toward the rational and scientific, not the sublime or aesthetic. Not only do the characters lack a physical opportunity for heroism, but they also lack the emotional capability as well.

As a skilled writer, Lovecraft purposefully avoided turning his characters into outstanding heroes. Joshi believes that this is because Lovecraft feared abnormalities in people that made them lesser or, surprisingly, greater than an average person. He writes, “If the subhuman inspires horror in Lovecraft, the superhuman can as well – such entities are just as much violations of the norm of civilised man as those who are reversing the course of evolution” (Joshi 125), suggesting that Lovecraft looked down on heroes that might stand above mankind. Joshi contrasts the devolving, subhuman human specimens in some of Lovecraft’s stories to the ageless, supernaturally enhanced humans in others; cannibalism in “The Picture in the House” is the cause of longevity. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, interbreeding with an alien race (the Deep Ones) gives supernaturally long life. In contrast with the ageless, immortal gods of Olympus, Lovecraft’s superhuman characters extend their lives through shadowy means and are no more heroes than the devolving monster in “The Beast in the Cave.”

Robert Bloch offers another view that takes into account the historical context in which Lovecraft wrote. Having lived during the events of World War I, Lovecraft witnessed the

aftermath and the harsh economic conditions that followed. While he died shortly before World War II, another worldwide conflict would have come as no surprise to someone who saw that “[n]o heroes appeared on the scene to offer succor or solutions” (xix). The stark hostility of the real world affected Lovecraft and his characters greatly, and his narrators, rather than facing and exposing the real world and all its horrors, shrink back in terror from what they cannot or will not confront. In Bloch’s words:

His narrators are usually scientists or scholars of a high intellectual order who addresses the reader with obvious authority. At the same time they exhibit an equally obvious flaw – not stupidity per se, but an overcautious tendency to voice unreasonable reservations regarding the fantastic facts they so convincingly and objectively present. As a result the reader soon becomes convinced that what they doubt is actually a dreaded reality. And when, at the end of the story, the narrator is forced to recognize the existence of what lurks behind his hints of horror, the reader shares the ultimate terror of truth. (xxi)

Most mythical heroes find a positive truth in their destinies, overcoming adversity along the way, but Lovecraft’s narrators recoil in fear, shrouding a truth that diminishes not only the importance and power of the hero, but of the entire human race.

Roy Pickett says that a hero should be a “unique, major character . . . who faces a significant conflict in a literary work. This definition is more inclusive than the conventional one which narrowly limits the meaning of ‘hero’ to only those characters who perform deeds of great daring,” emphasizing the need for that character to play an important role in a memorable way and avoid “the stock or stereotyped characters” (vii-viii). Lovecraft defied the rule of good writing that encourages writers to give attributes to their characters that make them interesting,

relatable, and complex (Stone and Nyren 9). Lovecraft's narrators are one-dimensional, especially those narrating the events of the stories. Knowing that a narrator with limited omniscience could only describe a certain amount of detail, he employed this type of storytelling to avoid the possibility of describing a character beyond what the narrator can simply observe, and to make the narrator, already an honest person, even more credible.

Because of the constant threat of his characters standing out and diverting the audience's attention from the main idea and atmosphere of each story, Lovecraft took great pains in hammering out any potential distractions. Virtually all of Lovecraft's characters, especially the narrators, are unmarried, live comfortably and peacefully, and are by all accounts quite boring to the average reader, especially a reader of pulp fiction who expected daring characters living lives of drama and action. Jean Owen encourages writers to name important characters and leave minor characters nameless (72), possibly to separate major and minor characters, and possibly to give flavor to a named character whose name might contain special meaning.<sup>23</sup> Lovecraft took the technique of unnamed characters to an extreme when he denied names to a large portion of his narrators, even when these narrators are the main characters, in an effort to siphon attention away from the individual humans and direct it toward the atmosphere and general ideas at work. Bulman suggests that narrators must be developed characters to be interesting (142), but Lovecraft had the opposite intention in mind, often going little farther in describing his narrators than giving them an occupation, general age range, and intellectual history.

With the passive narrators disqualified for the role of the hero, the main characters – when separate from the narrators – become the next best candidates. These main characters often suffer from a monomaniacal obsession with something that predictably leads to their doom. This is readily apparent in stories that follow the pattern of “From Beyond” and “The Whisperer in

Darkness” where a scientist or intellectual makes a discovery that leads to madness, then death. Main characters generally suffer from a lack of personality even worse than the narrators who can at least voice their own thoughts, and because the narrator is telling the story, the main characters can sometimes fade into the background as the narrator describes his own life and background, leaving the main character less developed. Arthur Hoffman says to “build . . . characters around one or two traits; give them as many minor traits as will round out the picture” (123). Even when portraying the main characters, Lovecraft stopped at a single defining trait, usually scientific obsession, and refused to elaborate on anything else that might have rounded out their personalities. In “The Hound,” for instance, the doomed main character’s trait is his obsession with grave-robbing, and before the narrator can relate more information about his friend, the main character is “seized by some frightful carnivorous thing and torn to ribbons” (220). The nature of the short story is partly to blame in that it limits the extent of character development, but Lovecraft wrote in this form precisely because he could get away with forgettable characters. Narrators and main characters tend to blend in the Mythos works, preventing any of them from becoming popular and overshadowing the atmosphere of horror.

If the narrators and main characters cannot be considered heroes, this comes as no surprise despite the sort of magazine and audience receiving Lovecraft’s works. Writing largely for pulp magazines, certain audience expectations should have swayed the character action and development in the Mythos stories. Bulman calls pulp fiction the “novel-length stories or short stories of a sensational nature. They are stories with plenty of action, clear heroes and heroines and often a woman in danger. They pay scant heed to social realism. The subject is usually a crime and the hero a detective . . . but pulp fiction also embraces science fiction” (181). This description fails to match the Mythos stories on several major accounts. Not only are the action

and heroes absent, but Lovecraft avoided female characters as much as possible.<sup>24</sup> Keenly aware of the damsel-in-distress cliché, Lovecraft did not even find it worth subverting, avoiding it entirely in his male-dominated stories. Philip Shreffler remarks that, in contrast to Poe's inclusion of women in his horror stories, "Lovecraft almost completely eschewed the introduction of women into his fiction," which he attributes to Lovecraft's "Puritan upbringing and his lack of experience with women" (30). Lovecraft may have also avoided female characters because they were less likely to be scientists and professors in a time when men ruled the academic world, and he and his readers expected masculine characters in those professions. Additionally, the presence of a female, either as a spouse or love interest, would have added a degree of character development in regards to the narrator or central character; the narrators especially are inevitably unmarried.

In the matter of social and character realism, Lovecraft had the opposite problem: his stories were often too realistic save for the single element of otherworldly horror. In his stories, he carefully crafted realistic locations rather than interesting characters, going into painstaking detail to make the environments appear as realistic as possible. His tendency to take real locations, rename them, and insert them into his stories created believable settings at the cost of character and action. Philip Shreffler says it best:

Lovecraft has been much criticized for his apparent disinterest in strong, flashy elements of plot. Indeed, plot is sometimes so deemphasized that one may read forty pages or so of one of the longer stories in the course of which nothing much happens. . . . These long passages . . . are given to physical depictions of setting. And it is this, rather than plot, that contributes to the total effect in Lovecraft's fiction. (29-30)

Unrealistic heroes, then, find no place in Lovecraft's fiction. The settings are too real for an unreal plot carried out by an equally outlandish main character, and with the exception of the horror element, Lovecraft purposefully wrote the stories to be as realistic and unheroic as possible. Even when surrounded by heroes in the pulp magazines, Lovecraft's heroes remained decidedly uninteresting men of thoughts and ideas, not action, never rescuing a damsel or solving a crime.

Even though the Mythos tales are all connected by various means, often the mention of a forbidden book, otherworldly force, or location, they lack a consistently appearing main character even among those who survive their ordeals. The closest Lovecraft comes to reusing characters is the mention of prominent, local family names that occur from one story to the next, but he avoided reusing important characters. His reasoning for this was simple: he did not want his readers becoming accustomed to recurring characters lest these characters gradually transform from vulnerable, frightened, everyday men of science to action heroes or detectives. Hoffman mentions several characters that have endured, including Sherlock Holmes (126), a character Lovecraft knew well. Joshi writes that Lovecraft "did some actual detective writing at this time" when he was very young, and Lovecraft directly referenced Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as a source (*A Life* 55-56). Lovecraft certainly knew the power of a memorable recurring character and the popularity that could follow, but a character like Sherlock Holmes in his stories would have defeated the purpose; a character can only be scared and survive near-death brushes with supernatural forces for a limited time before audiences lose interest in the unrealistic character.<sup>25</sup> Or, perhaps worse, the kind of audience the pulp magazines appealed to might have loved such a character, and clamored to know more about him. The ever-changing main characters and narrators in the Mythos tales prevented a single character from becoming too popular or drawing

attention to himself. Compared to the Greek heroes of mythology who often completed heroic task after task, Lovecraft's characters are fortunate if they even survive one trial with their sanity intact, destroying any hope of repeated heroic action.

Clearly, the heroes found in Campbell's model of the hero's journey never appear in Lovecraft's work. Even with a definition of hero less influenced by mythology and more suited to fiction, characters in the Mythos never amount to more than microscopes used to scrutinize Lovecraft's universe of horror. While there is a possibility that the Mythos stories simply do not have a hero in any form, there are more candidates for heroism than just the narrators and main characters. The Mythos covers a wide swath of time, describing the human race from the beginning of its creation and revealing the fate of earth long after humanity's extinction. People groups larger than their individual representatives therefore offer the last chance of heroic action in the stories.

One option for heroism rises, surprisingly, from extraterrestrial beings and not humans. If heroism is defined solely by heroic actions, various alien races described in several Mythos stories come far closer to achieving a heroic label. *At the Mountains of Madness* contains the best description of the various wars between two major races, the Old Ones and the Elder Things.<sup>26</sup> Lovecraft's descriptions of the interplanetary wars resemble historical struggles with the attention to land gained and lost, technological advancements used in combat, and motive for fighting:

During the Jurassic age the Old Ones [actually the Elder Things] met fresh adversity in the form of a new invasion from outer space – this time by half-fungous, half-crustacean creatures from a planet identifiable as the remote and recently discovered Pluto . . . To fight these beings the Old Ones attempted, for

the first time since their terrene advent, to sally forth again into the planetary ether; but despite all traditional preparations found it no longer possible to leave the earth's atmosphere. Whatever the old secret of interstellar travel had been, it was no definitely lost . . . In the end the Mi-Go [a sub-category of the Old Ones] drove the Old Ones out of all the northern lands, though they were powerless to disturb those in the sea. (776)

This epic history of alien races is similar to a history of the Greeks or Romans. Fritz Leiber, Jr. sides with the aliens as the overall heroes of the Mythos. He writes, "The extraterrestrials are the real heroes of these stories. Their unending struggles for survival and to increase their store of knowledge, their wise, rational, and even enlightened 'human' cultures, are Lovecraft's finest vision of mind embattled against space and time" (*Through Hyperspace* 148). Certainly, Leiber appreciated the humanlike attributes portrayed by the Elder Things in their search for knowledge, and their war against invading races takes place on a scale unattainable by humans, especially in the pre-atomic, pre-space exploration period in which Lovecraft wrote. Although Lovecraft does not relate any instances of individual heroism from the aliens, their overall actions appear much more eventful than the relatively short history of the human race. Since both races lack heroes on the individual level, their collective efforts compete for the label of heroism.

But while Leiber makes a compelling case for calling the alien races heroes, the Mythos as a whole does not support any of the alien races as heroic in action or description. *At the Mountains of Madness* depicts the violent history of these races, but other Mythos stories do not give nearly as much attention to the alien races; some stories, such as "The Thing on the Doorstep," deal with the powerful beings via fleeting references. The alien races themselves never appear apart from human discovery or interaction, and while Lovecraft could have written

entire stories about the rich worlds of aliens he had invented, he never took his attention away from people and the humanity affected by the extraterrestrial threat. As speculative fiction,<sup>27</sup> Lovecraft's stories borrowed from and contributed to science fiction, but he never neglected the horror elements infused throughout his works. Because of his focus on humanity's struggles on earth, his horror is the kind that requires human interaction; a story featuring an all-alien cast would inevitably seem less terrifying to an audience, as people naturally relate more to what scares themselves than what scares beings that might be terrifying in their own right. The aliens themselves appear less often than the readers of pulp magazines might have expected or desired, and the stories rely instead on anecdotal evidence, things unseen, and dreams to portray the vast majority of the creatures. "The Call of Cthulhu" is unique in that it is the only story to portray physically the titular creature, although nearly every story mentions Cthulhu or his cult.

Despite the bloody history related in *At the Mountains of Madness*, the aliens have a comparatively weak presence in the actual proceedings of most Mythos stories. Shreffler feels that Lovecraft "is at his horrific best when he only hints at demonic presences rather than when he describes them at length" (13). The glory years of the Elder Things and Old Ones have ended by the time humanity becomes the dominant race; indeed, it is only because the alien races have withdrawn that humans are able to flourish. The aliens are therefore unable to do or be anything heroic, and they are presented as crippled by environmental factors or astral abnormalities. The scientists in *At the Mountains of Madness* find the Elder Things frozen in Antarctica where their progress has stopped entirely due to the weather. The fearsome shoggoths, created by the Elder Things to help with manual labor, never leave the Antarctic ruins, forever confined to the ancient city. Although given sentience by their masters, a civil war between the shoggoths and Elder Things causes the latter to strip the former of their abilities. The shoggoths are far less heroic

than their masters and are portrayed as mindless killing machines incapable of producing or understanding rational thought. The narrator in *At the Mountains of Madness* relates how “we remembered that the daemonic shoggoths – given life, thought, and plastic organ patterns solely by the Old Ones, and having no language save that which the dot-groups expressed – *had likewise no voice save the imitated accents of their bygone masters*” (802). The shoggoths become pale imitations of their long-frozen masters, unable even to comprehend the idea of heroism and what it means to be a hero.

Even the more powerful monsters fare little better than the Elder Things. The Great Old Ones, the most powerful of the Old Ones, exist either in a state of death or in another dimension apart from earth. Captured cultists in “The Call of Cthulhu” reveal that the Great Old Ones “all died vast epochs of time before men came, but there were arts which could revive Them when the stars had come round again to the right positions in the cycle of eternity” (367). Rather than being all-powerful creatures, the Old Ones rather unheroically exist in a sort of sleep beneath the ocean, unable to retake the earth. The cultist explains:<sup>28</sup>

When the stars were right, They could plunge from world to world through the sky; but when the stars were wrong, they could not live. But although They no longer lived, They would never really die. They all lay in stonish houses in their great city of R'lyeh, preserved by the spells of mighty Cthulhu . . . But at that time some force from outside must serve to liberate Their bodies. The spells that preserved Them intact likewise prevented Them from making an initial move, and They could only lie awake in the dark and think whilst uncounted millions of years rolled by. (367)

Rather than performing any sort of heroic deeds, even terrible Cthulhu and his superiors fail to exert their dominance, trapped in a helpless state of undeath and immobility. If the aliens could have once been considered heroes, that time has long since passed.

With individual heroes and the alien races disqualified, the last possibility for heroism in the Mythos is humanity. This may seem strange, as humanity as a whole narrowly escapes desolation time and time again, often through sheer luck and by no heroic action, but the whole of mankind avoids some of the pitfalls that individual humans fall into while simultaneously circumventing the problems faced by the alien races. Unlike the individual characters, the human race is always alive at the end of each story, continuing its own heroic journey. Fritz Leiber attempted to label the aliens as heroes because of their struggle for survival, but the Mythos focuses on the human struggle, not the aliens, throughout the Mythos stories. *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Shadow out of Time* are the only two stories to genuinely fit Leiber's framework, and the history of the aliens also contains the history of the human race, indicating that Lovecraft never forgot about the human element at the core of his stories. In contrast with two stories relating the histories of certain alien races, every one of the Mythos tales includes humans as main characters and their brushes with horrors capable of ending the human race. Just to what extent these horrors appear varies, but the human interaction never falters. A mere two stories that include details on the alien races cannot compare to the entirety of the Mythos with its championing of the human race; Leiber's argument for the alien protagonists actually fits mankind much better.

As the monomyth is a large outline, Campbell never expected every myth to match every stage of the hero's journey. Comparing humanity and the alien races to the journey, humanity emerges as the clear victor. Admittedly, Lovecraft did not match very many stages accurately,

often subverting mythological elements he knew from Greek mythology, but humanity begins the hero's journey in a manner somewhat consistent with Campbell's framework. The first stage, the miraculous birth, gives a good example of the difference between Lovecraft's treatment of the extraterrestrials and humans, as well as his satirizing of the stereotypical hero. David Leeming describes the first stage of the journey, saying that "[i]n Part 1 the hero . . . begins his 'high adventure' by being born. The conception or the birth or the events immediately following the birth (or all three) are miraculous or unusual in the extreme" (7). Lovecraft never gives an adequate description for the aliens' origins, only that they came from space. Their creation is, appropriately, a mystery. Humanity's origin, however, is described in detail in *At the Mountains of Madness* when the geologists discover that the human race was a happy accident, an accidental, unwitting, and unremarkable creation at the hands of the aliens. Humanity's evolution only happens because the aliens were busy fighting themselves before descending into a form of stasis, leaving humans to inherit the earth.

From this example, Lovecraft clearly meant to put mankind at the center of his mythos, even when the alien races are described; it could even be argued that the aliens' description in *At the Mountains of Madness* is simply the origin story for humanity dating far back before humanity existed. Lovecraft was indeed very fond of giving ample background information before reaching the main idea, and the aliens are perhaps just a segue into a history of humanity. In regards to the subversive element, Lovecraft clearly satirized the miraculous creation of man as depicted in the Bible, as well as numerous other stories of creation from other cultures. Even though he purposefully portrayed humans as insignificant, the fact that he gave them an origin and unusual manner of "birth" shows that he did want them at the center of attention. The aliens, with their unknown origins, become something of a footnote in the history of mankind's ascent.

As the human race matures and undertakes its adventure of sheer survival, the alien races continue to fall into the background, frozen in time and completely incapable of being or doing anything heroic.

At other stages, humanity matches or surpasses their alien rivals. As the weaker race, they better qualify as the heroes against a stronger extraterrestrial force. In mythology, the hero is usually weaker than his foe and in need of a helper, whether in the form of a person or an object. Audiences have long cheered for the underdog, and even mighty heroes such as Hercules faced powerful opponents. Tellingly, the gods of the Greek pantheon are not considered heroes because they are too strong and lack a reason for a journey; the journey itself suggests a need for improvement or a desire for something that will enhance the hero's life or the lives of his fellow man. While the alien races do fight against each other, their fights have ended by the time mankind becomes the dominant species. Humans are then left to survive against overpowering forces, and the fact that they are not immediately wiped out at the first hint of alien contact suggests a tenacity and survival instinct seen in mythological heroes. Of course, Lovecraft never paints humanity in a heroic light or bestows on them any unusual heroic traits, but their fight against stronger opponents is consistent with the hero's journey. From a practical storytelling perspective, audiences do not want to see an overpowering god trampling down mere mortals, and Lovecraft, though he subverted other elements of mythology, kept his focus on the weaker race intact.

One of the possibilities in myths has been the eternal happiness of the successful hero, the "happily ever after" ending commonly seen in fairytales, and a religious expectation for everlasting life. As a materialist, Lovecraft learned that life on earth would eventually end if not for any sort of divine interaction, and his atheistic views pictured the extermination of the human

race, a fate he detailed in *The Shadow out of Time* when a mind-swapped professor sees the future of earth as inhabited by extraterrestrials who have long replaced humans. However, the extinction of the human race does not disqualify man from achieving the heroic label because Campbell allowed for the possibility of death as a potential ending for the hero's journey. He writes in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* that "[t]he last act in the biography of the hero is that of the death or departure. Here the whole sense of the life is epitomized. Needless to say, the hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror; the first condition is reconciliation with the grave" (356). The first half of Campbell's statement disqualifies the Great Old Ones, deathless aliens who cannot be destroyed, only temporarily banished or put into a death-like sleep. His comments, written after Lovecraft's life, indicate an awareness of mankind's fragility, a matter central to the Mythos stories. Humanity in the Mythos follows only the first half of Campbell's statement – that they are mortal and vulnerable to death – but subverts the second part, that their death will have meaning, and that the hero will accept it bravely. Of course, Lovecraft's characters do not exhibit bravery, and at a time when space exploration was on the horizon and calculations had shown earth's miniscule size in a massive universe, the narrators and main characters of the Mythos tales cannot expect to show bravery against such discoveries. The alien threat makes bravery all the more impossible, and death lurks in the hidden reaches of the earth, from the American swamplands to the Antarctic wastes.

Lovecraft's ultimate subversion of the hero, then, comes at the very end, when death proves more than just a final test. The mythic hero must ultimately die, and for a man who rejected any hope of an afterlife, Lovecraft saw no reason to look forward to the end or expect any sort of spiritual purgation or reconciliation. With the mythic cycle over, materialism predicted nothing but a blank afterlife ready to consume humanity. If the human race fights

against its inevitable destruction, it fights not just against aliens, but against its own bleak view of the future, an appropriately modern view that Lovecraft worked into his stories to reflect his own hopelessness in the future and any prospect of a modern hero.

## Chapter 2

### Lovecraft's Boons: Detriments in Disguise

As the history of human invention and discovery has shown, people have a natural inclination to seek anything that might prove useful or helpful. Whether for sheer survival or artistic curiosity, people have discovered new and easier ways to interact with their surroundings. Improvements in the quality of human life have never stopped, from the invention of fire to the creation of modern medicine and all its benefits, and these advantages have given mankind a sense of accomplishment and feeling of superiority over previous generations. Not all have seen advancements as universally good, however. Lovecraft, a sworn materialist, lived during a time of tumultuous scientific discoveries and radical shifts in knowledge about a universe far larger than man could comprehend,<sup>29</sup> and he approached such discoveries with trepidation and suspicion for fear of what this new information could mean for mankind's view of itself.<sup>30</sup> His fears worked their ways into his literature, especially the Cthulhu Mythos, where the supposed boons given to and discovered by mankind often turn out to have negative results. With no benevolent God or gods in the mythos to help humanity along, only the amoral aliens remain, and anything received from or discovered about them falls drastically short of a purely helpful boon. Contrasted with the mythological boons described by Campbell, these supposed benefits in Lovecraft's works have the opposite intended effect, leading to feelings of horror and an increased feeling of human insignificance.

While the term "boon" might encompass anything beneficial, it harbors a narrower meaning in the context of Campbell's monomyth. Using figurative language, Campbell gives at least some guidelines for the labeling of a boon when he says that "the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure . . . who provides the adventurer with amulets against the

dragon forces he is about to pass” (*Thousand Faces* 69). Campbell says that “[t]he supreme boon desired for the Indestructible Body is uninterrupted residence in the Paradise of the Milk that Never Fails” (*Thousand Faces* 176), but not all boons need be so lofty and final as Paradise; boons may be something small and material like an amulet rather than abstract and grand. A higher power may give the boon to the hero, or the hero may, as in the Prometheus myth, steal the boon away from its rightful owner. In its broadest form, the idea of the boon seems to include the involvement of a higher power, a hero, and something beneficial. Since higher powers are present in the Mythos in the forms of the various extraterrestrials, and if the human race can be considered the hero of the stories, only the boon remains unidentified.

Unsurprisingly, the task of locating the boon in Lovecraft’s work is difficult, largely because of the cynical and horrific nature of Lovecraft’s stories. Campbell does note the occasionally problematic nature of the boon and how either the hero or the population at large reacts to its discovery. He lists three potential problems that may complicate the journey: the hero may not want to return to the people and give up or share the boon, he might have stolen the boon (as in the case of Prometheus) and be in trouble for theft or another crime, or he might not be accepted by those around him upon his return (*Thousand Faces* 36-37). The theft of the boon, or the undeserved ownership of it, does appear in Lovecraft’s stories, and the human race may find itself in danger after making a particularly awful discovery and unwittingly acquiring Lovecraft’s twisted version of the boon. Clearly, the boon is not simply a magical talisman given by a goddess in every case. In fact, the higher powers in Lovecraft’s works rarely give anything to mankind, and when they do, it is usually either something negative or a trade that benefits the extraterrestrials even more than the humans. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the town drunk tells the narrator of a deal struck between an island tribe and the Deep Ones:

Wal, as I says, the natives met the things on the little volcanic islet – goin’ thar in canoes with the [human] sacrifices et cet’ry, and bringin’ back any of the gold-like jools as was comin’ to ’em. At fust the things didn’t never go onto the main island, but arter a time they come to want to. Seems they hankered arter mixin’ with the folks, an’ havin’ j’int ceremonies on the big days. (829)

In exchange for gold and jewels, the islanders must sacrifice “heaps o’ their young men an’ maidens to some kind o’ god-things that lived under the sea, an’ gitting all kinds o’ favour in return” (829). This eventually leads to interbreeding with creatures and further tipping the balance in favor of the Deep Ones.<sup>31</sup> The town drunk finally relates the ultimate fate of these islanders: “Obed [the trader] he faound the island people all wiped aout between v’yages. Seems the other islanders had got wind o’ what was goin’ on, an’ had took matters in their own hands. . . . Folks all wiped aout, no trace o’ no gold-like things, an’ none o’ the nearby Kanakys ud breathe a word abaout the matter” (831). The Deep Ones are far more gracious than the Old Ones or Elder Things,<sup>32</sup> but they still fail to selflessly give any sort of worthwhile boon to mankind. Instead, mankind’s boon must be something people discover or create on their own.

Throughout the Mythos stories, the characters seldom find themselves gripped by fear until the end, when an unseen horror finally manifests itself either in physical terms, as with a creature, or non-physical, as with a terrifying discovery of some ancestral secret.<sup>33</sup> In both cases, science may lead to the discovery, with scientific exploration a common theme in the stories. Contrary to what one might glean from his fiction, Lovecraft did not have any sort of bias or hatred of science; he loved science and studied it from an early age. Joshi details Lovecraft’s obsession with astronomy, an interest that spurred him to writing and a topic that fascinated Lovecraft his whole life (*A Life* 50-51). He was still avidly defending science in 1914 when he

wrote an essay titled “Science versus Charlatanry” for a newspaper in attack of astrology, taking up the cause of science against what he identified as a sham (*A Life* 115). An example of an author who combined science and literature, Lovecraft adhered to Matthew Arnold’s idea of the author who “will, at least, know also the great general conceptions brought in by modern physical science” (125), incorporating them into his stories instead of avoiding the sciences. Numerous other instances in Lovecraft’s life prove that he never let go of his love for investigating and enjoying the natural world, making science an excellent though difficult candidate for the boon, yet one that fits in with Lovecraft’s subversive themes.

Campbell also had a keen interest in science, but for a slightly different purpose. In his book *The Flight of the Wild Gander*, Campbell looks at human history as one of subjugation to myth and religion and finds mankind only recently freed from the bondage of religious and historical tradition. Man’s savior, in his mind, is science and rationality. He says:

Now it has been – as I have already said – chiefly to the scientific method of research that this release of mankind has been due, and along with mankind as a whole, every developed individual has been freed from the once protective but now dissolved horizons of the local land, local moral code, local modes of group thought and sentiment, local heritages and signs. . . . Moreover, not only in the sciences but in every department of life the will and courage to credit one’s own senses . . . have been the generative forces of the new age. (30)

Clearly, Campbell saw science – and the rational thought that accompanied it – as the liberators of what he perceived to be mankind’s backward and outdated mode of thinking. For Campbell, science has been the boon of the modern age, a boon discovered and embraced by man. In the Mythos stories, science also appears as a boon, but one with unintended consequences. Just as

Prometheus was punished for stealing the boon of fire, the human race's scientific quest for knowledge turns against it.

Science appears in several different forms throughout the Mythos stories. In "Cool Air," science is used to keep a dead man's tissue alive. Mathematics resulting in alternate dimensions are at the heart of "The Dreams in the Witch House," while brain transplants and interstellar travel in "The Whisperer in Darkness" demonstrate alien technology as far superior to anything man has discovered. Taken in isolation, all of these discoveries appear relatively benign, even beneficial, in their application to the real world; extending life in "Cool Air," exploring alternate dimensions in "The Dreams in the Witch House," and space travel in "The Whisperer in Darkness" are all laudable goals for modern science. On the superficial level, science does act as a boon, but Lovecraft saw scientific discovery as an inlet to horror, especially when the scientific discoveries happening in his own time began shaking some of his core beliefs. Joshi chronicles Lovecraft's beliefs in race and science and how new discoveries began yielding evidence against what he believed. Joshi says that Lovecraft was deeply rooted in the "later nineteenth century where so many of his philosophical and literary sources are to be found. Although compelled, in science and philosophy, to embrace Einstein, Russell, and Santayana, he would have been much happier had the age of Thomas Henry Huxley, Ernst Haeckel, and Oscar Wilde never passed" (*Decline* 138). The Mythos's treatment of science during the 1920s and 1930s reflected the same worries Lovecraft had about his changing intellectual surroundings.

As a boon in both the real world and Lovecraft's fiction, science attempts to perform two very important tasks. It provides an anchor and system of understanding the world around us, and this system tends to be more or less unchangeable and fixed. Thus, the first benefit of science is that it gives mankind a sense of stability, with scientific laws such as gravity staying

constant, at least in the realm of typical human experience. Harry Woolf says of scientific and inventive power that “[t]his power can make us surpass ourselves. We exercise some of it in the simplest act of acquiring knowledge and holding it to be true. For, in doing so, we strive for intellectual control over things outside, in spite of our manifest incapacity to justify this hope” (75-6). The other boon provided by mankind is its ability to discover and invent new things while at the same time staying true to the laws and stability it has already established. Science therefore tempers the fear of the unknown by creating a system of stable rules that man can fall back on and expect to see in their future discoveries; no matter how strange the invention or find, scientists quickly establish, label, systematize, and categorize whatever they discover, either fitting the new object into a known set of rules or creating a new set specifically for it. Aldous Huxley somewhat pessimistically finds that “[k]nowledge is power and, by a seeming paradox, it is through their knowledge of what happens in this inexperienced world . . . that scientists and technologies have acquired their enormous and growing power to control, direct, and modify the world of manifold appearances in which human beings are privileged and condemned to live” (9). Even a skeptic such as Huxley sees the attempt at rationality in science, claiming that “[f]or Science in its totality, the ultimate goal is the creation of a monistic system in which . . . the world’s enormous multiplicity is reduced to something like unity, and the endless successions of unique events of a great many different kinds get tidied and simplified into a single rational order” (9).

At the very least, Gunther Stent points out that the sciences have given mankind an “ever-greater dominion over hostile nature” even if they have not solved all of our other problems (48). As the mythological boons gave their wielders power, so science has given humanity a sense of control and mastery. In Stent’s words, “[s]ince Galileo gave it its start, modern science has gone

a long way in showing that nature is indeed accessible to reason and that, by the understanding thus obtained, man can gain extensive mastery over natural events” (138). With this mastery in mind, Lovecraft’s attitudes toward science become not openly hostile but anxiously fearful – not of science itself, but of what it may stumble upon. In the opening to “The Call of Cthulhu,” the narrator fears that although “[t]he sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little” (354), disaster will eventually happen when science invents or discovers something it cannot systematize or control. Thus, while science acts as a boon, its inability to categorize or control everything it finds in the Mythos world suggests an effort on Lovecraft’s part to subvert the benefits science proposes to bestow upon humanity.

Science’s inability to identify and organize everything it finds attacks its ability to provide stability, and the strange discoveries in the Mythos fiction defy any attempts to categorize their unknown properties. “The Colour out of Space” provides the best example of an object baffling the scientific community. The meteorite that falls from space proves difficult to identify, and Lovecraft uses a number of words to illustrate the scientists’ inability to give it a label. The narrator of the story writes, “It had acted quite unbelievably in that well-ordered laboratory; doing nothing at all and shewing no occluded gases when heated on charcoal . . . and soon proving itself absolutely non-volatile at any producible temperatures” (597). He goes on, “Stubbornly refusing to grow cool, it soon had the college in a state of real excitement; and . . . there was much breathless talk of new elements, bizarre optical properties, and other things which puzzled men of science are wont to say when faced by the unknown” (598). Ultimately, the scientists cannot even give a visual description of the specimen because “[t]hey had uncovered what seemed to be the side of a large coloured globule imbedded in the substance. The colour, which resembled some of the bands in the meteor’s strange spectrum, was almost

impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it a colour at all . . .

Conjecture was vain” (598). The “colour” refuses to fit into man’s way of perceiving the universe.

Yet by itself, a resistance against scientific organization is not quite enough to make a horror story or subvert science as a boon. Lovecraft takes this subversion a step further by attributing actual terror to what cannot be systematized. When the meteorite dissolves, “no residue was left behind, and in time the professors felt scarcely sure they had indeed seen with waking eyes that cryptic vestige of the fathomless gulfs outside; that lone, weird message from other universes and other realms of matter, force, and entity” (599). As the meteorite begins having strange effects on the farms, people begin avoiding it. Some instances show the human reaction to the decay: “April brought a kind of madness to the country folk, and began that disuse of the road past Nahum’s which led to its ultimate abandonment” (601) and “[n]o rural veterinary would approach his place, and the city veterinary from Arkham was openly baffled” demonstrate how people feared the strange happenings they could not explain. As Nahum’s farm begins to deteriorate and every living creature begins to die, Lovecraft clearly links the unknown object with the decay. It is not enough for the meteorite to challenge science’s ability to categorize it; it inevitably brings with it unexpected consequences, tearing away the scientists’ ability to control it. Lovecraft’s horror is not one of serial killers or easily categorized monsters, but one that stems from not even being able to identify the things bringing destruction. *At the Mountains of Madness* finds the geologists debating how the Elder Things are part vegetable and part animal, a debate that only ends when the thawed specimens reanimate and destroy the camp. Physical abnormalities in Mythos tales portend disaster, and the extraterrestrials are not simply beings from outer space that man can dissect and understand; Cthulhu and his ilk defy

comprehension even on a physical level, and science stands powerless to calm man's mind when faced with such an extraordinary force.

Realistically, very few people fear science itself. Instead, they fear man's abuse of science and that science might lead to atomic wars, extinction, and numerous other horrors written about in fiction and filmed in Hollywood. Lovecraft, however, did not fear even that, for his stories show that people do not always have to intentionally misuse science to discover horror, and simply using science in an innocently curious or even altruistic fashion may lead to disaster. Stent writes that science must have some limits to how much it can control and be of use for man (31), and many of Lovecraft's stories depict the moment in which science unwittingly discovers some horror and reveals its own weakness and inability to categorize or predict it. Huxley notes that "[s]cience sometimes builds new bridges between universes of discourse and experience hitherto regarded as separate and heterogeneous. But science also breaks down old bridges and opens gulfs between universes that, traditionally, had been connected" (111). The bridges Lovecraft's scientists build to outer space or secretive places on earth accidentally reveal unimaginable and impenetrable mysteries, and they find themselves unable to burn these bridges and save themselves. Thus, Lovecraft subverts the boon of science in order to make a statement on mankind's place in the universe.

Many writers of fiction, especially science fiction, wrote about the dangers of science, such as Aldous Huxley himself in *Brave New World* (1931). In that novel the horrors of genetic engineering are realized through the creation of test-tube babies, created as slaves to perform only certain tasks. Arthur Machen's novella "The Great God Pan," which heavily influenced Lovecraft, tells of a medical experiment that opens a woman's mind up to an alternate dimension to such a degree that she is impregnated by Pan as a result. Social order and medicine are but two

of many potential areas for scientific abuse, and fiction writers have covered virtually all of them. However, Lovecraft moved beyond the point of fearing science and saw it as a tool, a means that might ultimately lead to a dark end. Huxley writes, “[t]here is now no necessity for science to enter poetry except by philosophic implication, as one of the indispensable constituents in a tenable world view, or else by way of meaningful illustration or expressive metaphor” (62). By treating science as a way of addressing issues of cosmic indifference, Lovecraft bypassed the scientific alarmism afflicting many science fiction writers in order to reach a more philosophical level of discourse.

A keen reader of the Cthulhu Mythos will notice that scientific discoveries, while common during the later years of Lovecraft’s life, do not always appear in the Mythos. Sometimes, the characters make their discoveries by accident or bad luck rather than science driving them forward. Casey Fredericks writes, “[S]cience fiction taken as a genre, its explicitly mythical subgenre included, is concerned with new forms of cognition and speculation, not the sciences exclusively, which can help man to deal imaginatively with frontiers of the unknown” (62). In most cases, the narrator of a Mythos story actively pursues such speculation and knowledge until it is too late to turn back. This doomed pursuit happens in “The Call of Cthulhu” and “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family,” among many other stories. In these cases, science itself is not the impetus for discovery. Jacques Maritain noted in “Art and Scholasticism” that science is an intellectual virtue “whose sole end is to know” (5), and thus a subset of knowledge itself. In other words, the purpose of science is always knowledge, but the cause of knowledge is not always science. Knowledge, rather than the limited scope and usage of science, becomes the overarching boon of the Mythos stories in the absence of explicitly stated scientific invention and discoveries.

The idea of knowledge does not require a complicated definition or epistemological debate. Joshi notes that “[k]nowledge, science, curiosity – they are all facets of the same conception in Lovecraft, and emerge at the very beginning of his career” (107). Knowledge is simply what is known, and in the context of the Cthulhu Mythos’s boon, “knowledge” will be defined as what is learned that was previously unknown. Therefore, knowledge of the unknown is the boon, since the hero does not begin the quest with the boon, but must either retrieve or receive it. Likewise, humanity in the Mythos must discover knowledge of the unknown, a feat that usually, like the pursuit of science, leads to benefits in the real world, such as NASA’s numerous inventions in the name of traveling through unexplored space.

At first glance, knowledge should appear as a less dangerous boon than science, because simply knowing something without the need or application of science requires only the realm of thought or experience rather than a potentially dangerous invention or experiment. Lovecraft begins his essay “Supernatural Horror in Literature” with a powerful statement: “[t]he oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute” (1041). If the unknown is something mankind fears, then knowledge and discovery should provide the cure for this fear. Yet Lovecraft’s narrators seem as afraid of discovering the unknown as they are of the unknown itself. The opening lines of “The Call of Cthulhu” give a complete picture of this fear:

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but someday the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such

terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (355)

“The Call of Cthulhu” is not the only story to make this sort of statement. “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” makes a similar statement and provides a memorable example of a person’s reaction to a certain kind of knowledge, saying, “[i]f we knew what we are, we should do as Sir Arthur Jermyn did; and Arthur Jermyn soaked himself in oil and set fire to his clothing one night” (102). Arnold held that people “should know ourselves and the world” (82), but knowledge about the self does not always result in positive enlightenment. Both self-knowledge and knowledge of the unknown may potentially lead to disaster, and there is little knowledge not covered by these two categories.

Joseph Campbell wrote that “[t]he first function of a living mythology . . . is to waken and maintain in the individual an experience of awe, humility, and respect, in recognition of that ultimate mystery, transcending names and forms” (*Wild Gander* 609). Interaction between mankind and the horrible unknown in the Cthulhu Mythos does the opposite, with the exception of creating a sense of awe; some of the sailors in “The Call of Cthulhu” are dumbstruck with a sense of awe upon viewing Cthulhu moments before Cthulhu massacres them. This pattern of dark discoveries reflects what Casey Fredericks calls a “Frankenstein anxiety” where invention and discovery turn into a destructive force in the same way that power led Faust to his downfall (6-7). Fredericks notes that some science fiction writers attempt to subvert mythic frameworks or tropes (10), and Lovecraft clearly does this with a boon of knowledge, a cursed gift mankind gives itself, soon regretting its mistake. This knowledge is not to be taken lightly, and Lovecraft clearly does not mean to vilify knowledge of just anything, such as a realization that one has a

terminal illness; such a revelation certainly spurs fear and terror, but not the kind of cosmic terror Lovecraft had in mind when he wrote his stories. By choosing educated men as his narrators and main characters, Lovecraft convinces his readers that if something can terrify these men, men of science and not hysterical passion, then that thing is a monstrous knowledge that must terrify everybody. Writing about the narrator of “The Call of Cthulhu,” Joshi says that “it is clear that even this intelligent man finds the existence of Cthulhu simply inassimilable into his materialist scheme” (*Decline*, 83) because “Cthulhu is . . . a phenomenon . . . the narrator cannot help but react with horror because his current ‘materialist’ understanding of the universe has been shattered. It is not that the narrator is to be censured or belittled for his limited philosophical viewpoint . . . anyone can or will react in this way” (*Decline* 83). Like a boon that helps all of mankind, Lovecraft’s horrible knowledge terrifies all people, including the most intellectually stalwart scientists.

Mythological boons may take the form of magical items that defy nature, but heroes generally use this to their advantage, avoiding traps or defeating monsters using these supernatural gifts. In the Mythos stories, this same supernatural element is part of what horrifies mankind, and an affront to nature, especially materialism, proves a problem many narrators cannot handle. Joshi says that the monsters themselves in their physical presence are not the only cause of horror:

It is, however, not principally the vastness of the entities that people Lovecraft’s tales that is the chief cause of fear amongst those humans who encounter them; it is their mere existence, suggesting as it does some monstrous misconstrual of the laws of Nature whereby human beings are suddenly dethroned from rulership of

the earth by virtue of their intelligence or power over the natural world. (*Decline* 91)

The materialism of Lovecraft's characters therefore helps disorient them in the face of extraterrestrial creatures who exhibit abilities many would consider supernatural. In his retrospection, the narrator of "The Call of Cthulhu" laments, "My attitude was still one of absolute materialism as I wish it still were" (370). Unlike a hero who accepts the supernatural boon as helpful, knowledge that reveals the supernatural shakes the foundation of materialism. Together with science, materialism helps construct certain rules and regulations, certain ways of knowledge and belief, which Cthulhu and the other extraterrestrials destroy with their mere presence. One need not directly encounter Cthulhu in the flesh for fear to manifest itself; mere knowledge that the creature exists, and that it is an affront to what mankind thinks it knows about the natural world, is enough to drive characters mad.

Among Lovecraft's many subversions, this subversion of knowledge may be his most ambitious. In contrast with Maritain's view that orders of intellect and knowledge "perfect the intellect in its most proper function, in the activity in which it is purely itself; for the intellect as such aims only to know . . . The good or the evil of the subject, the needs and conveniences of the subject, matter little to it; it enjoys being and has eyes only for being" (5-6), Lovecraft tried to subvert the very notion of knowledge as a moral subject. Joshi carefully notes:

A question of ancillary importance in the whole idea of moral responsibility is the role of knowledge in Lovecraft's fiction. We have already seen that, in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, Ward's "I did it for the sake of knowledge" is his ultimate justification for his inadvertent loosing of Joseph Curwen upon the world – a justification we are evidently to accept as morally valid. (*Decline* 107)

Joshi, however, takes issue with equating knowledge with good morality. He says, “[i]t is a commonplace that most of Lovecraft’s protagonists are of the intellectual elite; it would therefore be a natural assumption that knowledge should appear as an ethical good in the fiction,” but this is not so because “Lovecraft expressed serious reservation on the ability of the human mind to endure certain kinds of knowledge” (*Decline* 107). And while the characters in Mythos fiction tend to look more positively on the pursuit of knowledge, what they find still horrifies them. Even while Lovecraft eventually changed his opinion of knowledge itself as morally ambiguous, replacing the mad scientists of earlier works with well-intentioned men of science in his later stories, the negative result of discovery persisted. In Joshi’s words, “[t]he darker side of knowledge – the inability of the human mind to endure certain kinds of knowledge, especially that which reveals our insignificant place in the cosmos – is encapsulated in the grandiose opening of “Facts [C]oncerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” (*Decline* 110), which reads:

Life is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it peer daemonical hints of truth which make it sometimes a thousandfold more hideous. Science, already oppressive with its shocking revelations, will perhaps be the ultimate exterminator of our human species – if separate species we be – for its reserve of unguessed horrors could never be borne by mortal brains if loosed upon the world. (102)

This statement certainly flies in the face of Campbell, who saw science as a replacement for myth and religion and a way of improving mankind (*Gander* 611).

Lovecraft’s boon then becomes not only something that instills fear, but destruction as well. Stent laments that science has not made life easier, perhaps raising more difficult questions

in the process (1), but he does not go as far as to say that knowledge will bring out mankind's destruction. If the mythological boon is one that leads to knowledge or possession of an ultimate good, Lovecraft's may lead to knowledge of an ultimate destruction, specifically the end of the human race. Concerning this kind of literature that describes the end of the world or of mankind, Fredericks discusses H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, saying that it "raises haunting questions about the identity of *Homo sapiens* when the fate of the species is considered in a cosmological framework. Here we deal not with the traditional religious issue of individual mortality . . . but with the end of both man and Earth as determined by the theory of evolution and an *impersonal* physical law of *entropy*" (70). This description could be applied equally well to Lovecraft's novella *The Shadow out of Time*, which follows a similar plot that finds the main character discovering mankind's extinction. Rather than leading to life and happiness, the boon of knowledge leads to an awareness of death and life's end, and although knowledge in itself does not bring about destruction, it makes the protagonist of the story aware of it. In a discussion on regression, Fredericks offers time travel as a means of discovering such a fate, and singles out the Cthulhu Mythos as an example of stories that "raise the possibility of retrogressive cosmology where the universe reverts to the control of violent, chaotic deities" (151). Psychologically, Lovecraft's characters cannot come to terms with what they learn, and knowledge mentally breaks them, sometimes to the point of suicide. The mental assault on mankind is especially necessary because the aliens have limited means of physically harming humans, relying instead on psychological warfare in conjunction with rare moments of physical interaction to weaken mankind's resolve.

Donald Burlison ultimately points out the association of knowledge with death and decay in Lovecraft's works, specifically in "The Colour out of Space." He writes,

Where light customarily sides with illumination, metaphorical as well as literal – that is, with vital and uplifting knowledge – here the light, the systemically inassimilable color, associates itself not with life and knowledge but with “the grey brittle death,” the eclipse of knowledge, the demonstration of the inadequacy of what purports to be knowledge, the potentially terrible consequences of new knowledge, the reduction of living minds (and by extension, their categorizing, system-building ambitions) to an ashen residue. (50)

The core problem is humanity’s limited power to master knowledge, as well as a psychological tendency to react negatively to what has not already been mastered by science. The Mythos does not seek to degrade science or knowledge itself, but the way man reacts to new and potentially horrible discoveries. Lovecraft’s science fiction stories therefore “attempt to deal with human knowledge and consciousness, especially to react to the explosive side-effects from the geometric growth in research that has taken place within the last century and a half” (Fredericks 62-3). Lovecraft turns the boon of knowledge into a time bomb, and it is only a matter of time from the beginning of each story before it detonates, and when the smoke clears, mankind has suddenly become aware of a new and hideous truth, ranging from terrible family secrets to cosmic horrors. Rather than a simple magical amulet, Lovecraft subverts the boon of knowledge so that it functions as a psychological weapon that wages war on mankind’s sanity, a war ironically carried out by humanity itself.

### Chapter 3

#### Monstrous Deities: Questioning the Divinity of Lovecraft's Gods

Lovecraft's protagonists, struggling through a subversive journey undermining their cosmic importance and cursed with a deadly boon of forbidden knowledge, faced the ultimate challenge: hostile forces far beyond the recognized areas of science or world religions heretofore practiced by mankind. At the time of Lovecraft's writing, the genres of fantasy and science fiction had yet to be firmly established. Even today, these relatively recent genres have continued the ancient tradition of telling stories about supernatural beings; traditional science fiction has limited Lovecraft's monstrous beings to science and corporeality, denoting them aliens or otherworldly creatures, while fantasy delves into the supernatural or spiritual realms, often creating new pantheons of gods unrestricted by scientific logic. The boundaries between the two genres are usually clear, but Lovecraft borrowed from both. In the Cthulhu Mythos, Lovecraft's pantheon of creatures has divided the critics who study them. The exact nature of the entities has been called into question, and critics have often noticed the inconsistent nature of the monsters, noting both alien and godlike abilities in the various stories. Because the monsters are worshipped by cults, and because they possess spectacular power and otherworldly natures, many critics have simply dubbed them "gods," which helps place them neatly into Campbell's monomyth, where gods help or hinder the hero and mankind in general. Campbell likely would have supported C. Scott Littleton's definitions of a "deity" as "a being with powers greater than those of ordinary humans, but who interacts with humans, positively or negatively, in ways that carry humans to new levels of consciousness beyond the grounded preoccupations of life" (378). However, a close look at how the entities are treated in the text, together with a glimpse of Lovecraft's religious and philosophical beliefs, seems to suggest that the monsters are no more

than aliens, depriving them of any divine nature. Their role instead appears to satirize both man and gods. Attacking the idea and role of gods, Lovecraft discussed these alien creatures in a way that strayed far from the monomythic pattern, especially the hero's interaction with gods or goddesses.

Campbell noticed divine beings in religions all around the globe. Regardless of religion, each faith believes in spiritual beings of greater power than humans, often living in a dimension or location unattainable by man's physical form. Most of the similarities to Lovecraft's creatures, however, end here. The physical descriptions, interactive roles with humanity, and behavior of Lovecraft's monsters create a wide gulf between them and the majority of the gods Campbell described.<sup>34</sup> The roles of religious gods, such as bestowing blessings and salvation to mankind or righteously punishing people for their sins, are never found in Lovecraft's stories. Although Lovecraft's monsters do share certain actions with deities, such as the creation of the human race, these rare similarities are subverted and twisted into satirical parodies of the originals. If Lovecraft's creatures are simply aliens and not gods, the Cthulhu Mythos becomes even less compatible with the monomyth.

A simple observation of the text cannot clearly answer the question of monstrous deities, as the stories in the Cthulhu Mythos often portray the aliens in different lights. Philip A. Shreffler notes that "in some of the stories these entities are described as purely supernatural creatures, while in others they are defined as perfectly concrete, perfectly physical beings from other planets. The basic difference will depend on whether Lovecraft chose to use the creatures in the framework of a pure fantasy story . . . or in the context of science fiction" (156). Shreffler freely admits that "one may be completely unable to understand what relationship each god bears to another, or whether they are really gods at all" (156). However, the texts do offer various clues

suggesting that the humans in Lovecraft's stories have ascribed godlike attributes to beings who are nothing more than aliens. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, Lovecraft chronicles the history of multiple alien races, describing them in purely physical, natural terms, telling how "[a]nother race – a land race of beings shaped like octopi and probably corresponding to fabulous prehuman spawn of Cthulhu – soon began filtering down from cosmic infinity and precipitated a monstrous war which for a time drove the Old Ones wholly back to the sea – a colossal blow in view of the increasing land settlements" (774). The physical conflict, settlements, and even mortality of the beings reinforce the idea that they are nothing more than material beings, though far surpassing man in longevity and knowledge. Textual descriptions of the beasts are rare but generally reflect the idea that "[m]ost of Lovecraft's monsters were equipped to live indefinitely in the thinness of space: by having extremely tough tissues, by suspended animation, or by having shape-changing powers like Cthulhu and perhaps travelling between planets and stars as a cloud of independent molecules" (Leiber, *Hyperspace* 144). Such physical descriptions place the entities in the genre of science fiction, not fantasy, because they lack a spiritual essence. The monsters are physical, and even when they exhibit supernatural tendencies, these unusual powers must still obey certain laws. In comparison to mythical gods, whose immortality and powers stem from their nature as spiritual beings, the Mythos aliens are far more similar to a race of physically and mentally advanced animals.

Campbell describes the relationship between gods and humans as something existing on more than just a physical plane. He suggests that myths point to an inner dwelling of the god inside the hero, that the god and hero are the same, and that religions point to the hero's journey as "a labor not of attainment but of reattainment, not discovery but rediscovery" (*Thousand Faces* 39) of some spiritual power or identity.<sup>35</sup> The physical realm is superseded by the

spiritual, indicating some connection between mortal man and divine god. In Campbell's words, "[t]he two – the hero and his ultimate god, the seeker and the found – are thus understood as the outside and inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world" (40). In Lovecraft's stories, there is no true spiritual connection between man and any higher power; the only possible connection seen in the Mythos is mental possession, which would not be a case of a mutually shared spiritual identity, but a forcibly swapped mental identity.<sup>36</sup> In "The Call of Cthulhu," the few who are able to hear the titular monster's call are not spiritual persons of the highest order but artists, one of which describes himself as "psychically hypersensitive" (357) and more attuned to cosmic or abstract ideas, yet otherwise insignificant. The story describes events simultaneously occurring with Cthulhu's awakening and how "on that date the dreams of sensitive men assumed a heightened vividness and darkened with dread of a giant monster's malign pursuit, whilst an architect had gone mad and a sculptor had lapsed suddenly into delirium" (373). Religious people appear to have no greater chance of interaction with the monsters than the non-religious do, and it is only through heightened mental or psychological ability, not spiritual capacity, that people can communicate with the creatures. Yet this communication, rather than being sought for as with Campbell's heroes, is generally undesired except by the most warped minds. The protagonists in the Mythos stories rarely seek any sort of intended interaction with the monsters.

Gods and spiritual creatures in myths generally rise above humanity intellectually, physically, and spiritually or morally, often reaching extremes of good or evil. Whatever traits they possess, Campbell stresses that mythological stories tend to dwell on superhuman traits or abilities, giving the example of God in the book of Job (*Thousand Faces* 147). In this passage of the Bible, God's virtues and power extend far beyond Job's capabilities of understanding,

indicating God's attributes of extreme wisdom, power, and morality. This is not the case for creatures in the Cthulhu Mythos. Admittedly, while the most powerful aliens possess numerous traits one might find attached to a deity – immortality, telepathy, and immense power, to name three – their spawn and lesser aliens certainly do not boast such qualities. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, the narrator describes the fresh corpses of the Elder Things, aliens that play the part of the terrifying monsters until their deaths, where the narrator finds them in a surprising condition: “Mauled, compressed, twisted, and ruptured as they were, their chief common injury was total decapitation. From each one the tentacled starfish-head had been removed; and as we drew near and saw that the manner of removal looked more like some hellish tearing or suction than like any ordinary form of cleavage” (797). These fearful monsters are yet mortal, victim to even more fearful creatures, “the horrors of which even the horrors are afraid” (Leiber, *Copernicus* 57), monsters of their own creation known as Shoggoths. In other stories, the spawn of the greater aliens devolve as they mate with humans. Their natures are not divine, immutable, or invulnerable, and the hybrid offspring “never died except they was kilt violent” (830), thus demonstrating immortality without invincibility.

This idea of immortality has existed in mythological stories from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* onward,<sup>37</sup> and Campbell notes that “[t]o this very day, the possibility of physical immortality charms the heart of man” (188).<sup>38</sup> However, many myths indicate that even the gods are finite, waiting for some catastrophe or eventual dissolution into nothingness.<sup>39</sup> Campbell writes, “[t]he gods are symbolic personification of the laws governing this flow [of power]. The gods come into existence with the dawn of the world and dissolve with the twilight. They are not eternal in the sense that the night is eternal” (261). Among the most powerful of Lovecraft's entities, at least one is immortal.<sup>40</sup> The *Necronomicon*, an occult grimoire, suggests that the alien high priest

Cthulhu is immortal and eternal, though not wholly invulnerable to temporary injury or setback.<sup>41</sup> Despite this immortality, even the most powerful of Lovecraft's monsters are not so overpowering that they cannot be temporarily evaded, disabled, or banished, and with their spawn even less formidable, it seems from the text that Lovecraft did not intend to depict his creatures as deities, only aliens. Unlike the gods Campbell describes, Cthulhu and his superiors will not dissolve through the eons but last forever. Yet at the same time, the lesser creatures are not so fortunate even when they boast abilities generally reserved for deities. Given Lovecraft's disbelief in any sort of supernatural entities, his inclusion of godlike beings in so many stories may seem puzzling. His reasons for depicting such monstrous entities reflect his philosophical beliefs and religious disbeliefs, as well as the message embedded in the Mythos, a message that steers decidedly away from any religious mythology that Campbell could have identified.

Concerning Lovecraft's metaphysical views, S. T. Joshi succinctly points out that "[t]here is no evidence that Lovecraft was anything but a materialist for the entirety of his life" (*Decline* 81). After Lovecraft's death, his good friend August Derleth attempted to change the Mythos into an allegory of good and evil to reflect his own Catholic background (Joshi, *A Life* 639), thus establishing a system of rules more akin to religion and mythology, but Lovecraft's atheism had no room for religious allegories or moralistic teachings. Shreffler describes Lovecraft's naturalistic world as a "blind, dead, uncaring beast that occasionally blundered against men and, without any particular malice, exterminated them. This kind of thing happens often in Lovecraft . . . in which it is the encounter with monsters, which are only innocently going about their business of being monsters, that destroys men" (23). Critics have correctly identified the amoral actions of Lovecraft's aliens. As Joshi mentions,

Lovecraft's myth-cycle . . . is not an indication that Lovecraft was some odd mystic who created mythical "gods" and beings in an attempt to escape "reality," but a crystal clear reflexion of his cosmic outlook: the very indifference of these incalculably powerful entities to the inconsequential creatures called human beings is the source of terror in Lovecraft's tales. These beings – labelled "gods" by men because they seemed to reflect "godlike" powers – are not interested either in the preservation or the destruction of men, but exist merely to further their own ends. ("Lovecraft Criticism" 1)

Like Lovecraft, these aliens forego the good/evil dichotomy in favor of naturalistic responses to their surroundings.

The naturalistic tendencies of the extraterrestrials do occasionally show elements of religious traditions, but these traditions generally serve a utilitarian purpose. "The Call of Cthulhu" describes a cult forming around Cthulhu who becomes trapped in a death-like sleep beneath his sunken city R'lyeh. The narrator writes about how "those first men formed the cult around small idols which the Great Ones shewed them; idols brought in dim aeras from dark stars. That cult would never die till the stars came right again, and the secret priests would take great Cthulhu from his tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth" (367). Speaking in a language filled with religious terminology, the narrator certainly seems to draw parallels to organized religions. George T. Wetzel notes the similarities between such communicative devices used in both Greek myth and the Cthulhu Mythos, including the tiers of gods ranging from messengers to high priests, as well as psychic communication (80-81). However, the outcome of Cthulhu's resurrection will be far different from the rule of the Olympic gods, and during Cthulhu's reign "[t]he time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become

as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and reveling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel” (367). Rather than transcend into a more spiritual awakening or heavenly bliss, the reawakening of Cthulhu portends a devolution of humanity and destruction of all morals, a far cry from the Olympic sense of justice and good triumphing over evil. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, the narrator describes the Elder Things in language even further removed from religious terminology. He declares, “Scientists to the last – what had they done that we would not have done in their place . . . What a facing of the incredible, just as those carven kinsmen and forbears had faced things only a little less incredible! Radiates, vegetables, monstrosities, star-spawn – whatever they had been, they were men!” (798). In describing the Elder Things using certain terms equally applicable to humans, such as calling them scientists, Lovecraft pulls the aliens down from their thrones to the level of corporeal creatures.

In the Mythos stories, the narrators and cults borrow religious terminology not because the aliens are gods, but because humans have no other label for such powerful creatures.<sup>42</sup> The cultists in “The Call of Cthulhu” mistake slavery and manipulation for worship, unaware that their lives are no more important to the aliens than the lives of any other human. Joshi notes that the cultists are “pathetically deluded about the nature of the ‘gods’ they worship” (*Unbelievers* 151). Dirk Mosig observes that the aliens “are *not* mere symbols of the power of evil, although they may appear to be inimical to man, in the same way that man would appear to be inimical to ants, should these get in his way. The Old Ones are above and beyond mankind – they transcend man, and care no more for him than he does for ants” (107). When Cthulhu is temporarily and accidentally freed by sailors and not cultists, the alien does not stop to see if his cultists have

done their duty in freeing him; instead, he slaughters those around him indiscriminately, intent on sparing nobody. Far different from typical caring or fair gods, the aliens' actions belie their labels as divine beings. Cthulhu's actions do not match those his cultists attribute to him, and if he "teaches" his cultists new ways to slaughter, it will only be because they are on the receiving end of his chaotic wrath.

The idea of giving human attributes or physical characteristics to gods so that they may interact in a physical realm dates back thousands of years, but Lovecraft's twist on the relationship between god and man subverts what Campbell often saw as peaceful or beneficial meetings between the two. In his outline for the hero's journey, Campbell identified a common trope: the meeting with the goddess, where the goddess can stand for almost any supernatural character, often a deity. Interaction between the two often yields good results for the hero, sometimes including the passing of the boon or other valuable information, or even marriage with the goddess herself (*Thousand Faces* 109). Lovecraft subverts this meeting in two ways. First, Campbell suggests that this meeting with the goddess is a beneficial meeting with an upright deity. Nowhere in the Cthulhu Mythos does Lovecraft portray any interaction with a "good" entity. At best, humans are overlooked for their cosmic insignificance. At worst, they are routinely destroyed. Unlike the Greek and Roman gods who commingled with humans as in the story of Zeus and Leda, the idea of marriage between a heroic individual and any of the monstrous beings is absurd for several reasons, including the lack of any explicitly female members of Lovecraft's pantheon. Campbell describes the mythical marriage as something not bearing physical properties, but a spiritual union, referring to "a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World" (109). Lovecraft's monsters, bearing physical and mental traits but not spiritual attributes, cannot match this description. Even

Lovecraft's human characters cannot reach the level of the "hero-soul" if they abide by Lovecraft's denial of the human soul, an idea he rejected based on its lack of empirical and physical proof (Joshi, *Decline* 11). Clearly, the hostility of the aliens and their monstrous physical forms exclude any suggestion of a peaceful union between them and mankind.

The second subversion of Campbell's description stems from the timing of this marriage, which he specifically states occurs "when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome" (*Thousand Faces* 109), essentially stating that the hero's journey has ended, his obstacles destroyed and peace restored. The Cthulhu Mythos lacks any sort of permanent triumph for mankind, as any sort of success on man's behalf is temporary and utterly meaningless. The narrator in "The Call of Cthulhu" cannot celebrate Cthulhu's temporary setback, stating, "Who knows the end? What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men. A time will come – but I must not and cannot think!" (379). This sense of dread permeates the ending of virtually all of Lovecraft's stories, devoid of happy endings for the protagonists, who are often unable to overcome even a single obstacle, much less the "ogres" that face them. Given the percentage of dead, insane, or doomed protagonists at the end of the stories and the lack of an eligible goddess, this stage of the hero's journey can only meet with failure. Barring the marriages with the Deep Ones in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, which are described as perverse and leading to a devolution of mankind, marriage with the creatures appears all but impossible, undesirable, and impossible on anything more than a physical level.

Lovecraft had reasons for including aliens in his stories, even if these reasons are sometimes obscured when the narrators confuse the extraterrestrials with gods. His real-life fear of miscegenation is reflected in such stories as *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, where interbreeding

with aliens corrupts human bloodlines; Timothy Evans identifies the displacement of human culture through alien traditions, much more palpable in the story than if the aliens had been attempting to spread an infernally spiritual culture (124). Yet Lovecraft's religious and philosophical views have perhaps a greater effect on his mixture of alien and godlike descriptions, and throughout his stories he "play[s] upon the various 'others' of monotheism and Christianity (paganism, magic, demonology, witchcraft, and so on)" (Hanegraaff 99). The *Necronomicon*, for instance, may be seen as a parody of such religious books as the Bible or Koran, and the cultists labeling Cthulhu a high priest hearkens back to the Old Testament synagogue in which the high priest was an incredibly sacred position. In trying to detect Lovecraft's intent, it is important to determine whether his stories and their religious references are rooted in tragedy or satire, thus telling us how to respond to the horrors of the Mythos. In cataloguing genres, Northrop Frye writes that characters in tragedy "may grope about for conceptions of gods that kill us for their sport, or for a divinity that shapes our ends, but the action of tragedy will not abide our question" (208), sounding very much like Lovecraft's doomed narrators and protagonists. However, he later writes that "the tragic process must be primarily a violation of *moral law*" (210), completely absent from Lovecraft's stories. Rather, the genre of satire seems better equipped to identify the criticized target. Frye notes that "[t]wo things, then, are essential to satire; one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack" (224). According to these two definitions, the difference between tragedy and satire in Lovecraft is clear; Lovecraft's creatures and protagonists are not violating a sense of morality but satirizing it with their actions.

If Lovecraft wields satire, his works can hardly be compatible with the majority of myths, which Campbell placed squarely in either tragedy or comedy. At first glance, Campbell's tragedy

and Lovecraft's stories seem to have common themes. Campbell says of tragedy that "[t]he happy ending is justly scorned as a misrepresentation; for the world, as we know it, as we have seen it, yields but on ending: death, disintegration, dismemberment, and the crucifixion of our heart with the passing of the forms that we have loved" (*Thousand Faces* 26). Again, the difference appears when the results are made apparent, and Campbell cites the Greek idea of *katharsis* as the ultimate meaning for tragedy (26).<sup>43</sup> Lovecraft's stories do not encourage any sort of spiritual catharsis of emotion or spirituality, most notably because Lovecraft's atheism could not allow for any sort of emotional connection with a God he viewed as nonexistent, and he viewed emotions as just a product of evolution, a purely physical trait. Lovecraft would have agreed with Campbell that a realistic approach to literature should show no "make-believe about heaven, future bliss, and compensation, to alleviate the bitter majesty, but only utter darkness, the void of unfulfillment, to receive and eat back the lives that have been tossed forth from the womb only to fail" (27), but Lovecraft went a step beyond. He managed to imbue his mythology with the contemporary atheism Campbell would later use as a lens to compare worldwide myths. This atheism allowed Lovecraft to reverse the metaphors of other religions, which pointed upward to a higher power (Frye, "New Directions" 131); Lovecraft pointed downward, toward earth, and any upward indication was only to show the spiritual emptiness and hostility of space.

As an atheist, Lovecraft wrote in the vein of what Frye calls "second-phase satire," which "shows literature assuming a special function of analysis, of breaking up the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions, and all other things that impede the free movement . . . of society" (233). By linking the aliens to gods, Lovecraft's satire attacks two targets: men, who automatically confer godhood upon abstract ideas and beings of unfathomable or mysterious power, and the very

notion of benevolent or moralistic gods. In mocking the first of these, humanity, Lovecraft lampoons the idea of human achievement and our special place in the universe, the latter exemplified by the Christian religion.<sup>44</sup> The protagonists of the story are not merely tragic because they are oppressed by gods; they are insignificant because the gods are merely chaotic aliens who show no interest or love to mankind. This runs counter to Judeo-Christianity which believes that the trinity – God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit – are totally committed to the redemption of mankind, the reconciliation of humans to God, and the defeat of the archenemy Satan and his horde in order to reclaim a new world for believers. In tracking the evolution of mankind, the narrator of *At the Mountains of Madness* discovers ancient ruins with pictographs describing how “[b]othersome forms, of course, were mechanically exterminated. It interested us to see in some of the very last and most decadent sculptures a shambling primitive mammal, used sometimes for food and sometimes as an amusing buffoon by the land dwellers, whose vaguely simian and human foreshadowings were unmistakable” (774). This conclusion of mankind’s evolution as an accident “is probably one of the most fiercely cynical and misanthropic utterances ever made: the degradation of humanity can go no further” (Joshi, *Decline* 140). Depriving mankind of any spiritual relationship with a higher power is a satirical attack on anthropocentrism that can only follow if the aliens are not gods, lacking the desire or ability to share any sort of transcendent relationship with humans.

After his attempts to discredit anthropocentrism, Lovecraft next attacked what he saw as a presupposition that higher powers must necessarily demonstrate some sort of moral transcendence. He ensured that the actions of the aliens do not reflect any sort of morality or ethics. As Shreffler astutely argues, “Finally, and this is perhaps the most insidious dimension of Lovecraft’s work, we come to understand that if we are looking for a moral, we might just as

well forget it. There is none” (22). The aliens, because of their nature as material beings, cannot supply a dichotomy of good and evil or even an ancient Greek sense of justice, law, and order, such as the kind found in Greek tragedy. Disavowing a higher spiritual order, Lovecraft’s monsters go about their business mostly ignoring mankind and punishing them severely when their paths infrequently intersect. If the aliens are gods, Lovecraft could have been making a statement about the cruelty of some religious deities, or perhaps the notion of deism, but his denial of any spiritual level whatsoever makes his attack much broader and more powerful. According to Joshi, he goes a step farther in bringing the aliens down to a human level, giving them such human vices as revenge and hate (*Decline* 87). A moral hierarchy is clearly out of the question, as both man and gods exist on the same single level of ethical decadence.

There can be little doubt that Lovecraft’s pantheon consists not of gods, but of physical monsters from the far reaches of space, and his reasons for leaning toward science fiction and fantasy are clearly out of a desire to criticize man’s spiritual desires and creations. In Joshi’s words,

So now the stories about the “gods” as found in the *Necronomicon* have been reduced to “myths”! The gods are merely space aliens. This appears to have been Lovecraft’s conception right from the beginning . . . Cthulhu and his “spawn” are merely extraterrestrials who come from some infinitely far galaxy to the earth, where they are unwittingly trapped in the underwater city of R’lyeh beneath the Pacific. Cthulhu and R’lyeh rise in that story, but not because the “stars are right” or because of any actions taken by his human cult, but merely by accident – an earthquake – and they sink back under the waves by a similar accident.

(*Unbelievers* 152)

Benign intervention, then, cannot happen when divinity is totally absent from Lovecraft's universe. As a replacement for holy divinity, the aliens in the Mythos cannot act as virtuous or unjust gods because they lack the necessary morality for interacting with humans or even each other on an ethical level. Critical parts of the hero's journey are therefore undone as the spiritual aspect drains from the stories, replaced by a material and hostile force from outer space.

Lovecraft took assumptions from religion throughout history, from Christianity to the ancient Greeks, and removed the sublime and spiritual elements, stripping them down to their material elements to prove a point about how horrific it would be if powerful beings truly existed; for an atheist like Lovecraft, such beings would be devoid of godhood, possessing instead the chaotic and amoral tendencies he believed were at the core of human nature. Created as the backbone of his satire against religion, the aliens stand for everything Lovecraft hated about anthropocentrism, religious deities, and morals. In spite of the ambiguous and occasionally contradictory nature of the aliens in the Cthulhu Mythos itself, the textual analysis combines with Lovecraft's own philosophical views to present a pantheon of extraterrestrials who have much more in common with the humans they tread underfoot.

## Conclusion

As an atheist and staunch materialist, it is little wonder that Lovecraft chose to subvert the mythic cycles that he correctly perceived to contain close ties with religion, where the stories of gods and heroes direct attention to otherworldly powers (Spence 88). Unlike the Christian world, where God provides and embodies a sense of goodness and justice, Lovecraft saw his world as devoid of God's love and neutral at best; at worst, the aliens are openly hostile to those beings inferior to them and show them no heavenly mercy. While Christians need not view individuals and mankind as heroic in the mythological sense, they should understand the importance God places on each man and woman, as neither overly powerful heroes nor mere animals, but as part of God's creation – not as great as God Himself, but not as low as the rest of what God has created. People do not need to undertake epic journeys or slay monsters to earn their right to heaven and eternal life in God's presence. Lovecraft denied Campbell's "supreme boon," or eternal life. Campbell writes that the supreme boon in Christian belief is simply a matter of eternal life, a rather common theme among mythology, but he misunderstood the main point of biblical salvation (*Thousand Faces* 176). Salvation is not simply a practical way to attain eternal life for its own sake. Rather, it elevates mankind into a closer relationship with God, both in spirituality, with our heavenly bodies and spirits, and proximity, with our nearness to God in heaven.

Lovecraft, of course, denied the possibility that a God could love His creation, and his resulting creations failed to even achieve godhood. As aliens, the monsters in the Cthulhu Mythos pale in comparison with a moral, omniscient, omnipotent God. These aliens can offer Christians a view of what an indifferent God might be and do, sowing chaos in an uncaring fashion. Atheists, in denying God and therefore a spiritual source for morality, cannot expect

more than a universe of neutral or hostile forces, and Christians can take solace in the fact that our God is different from Cthulhu and the rest of Lovecraft's monsters, both in terms of His just and moral nature, and in His benevolent actions. Azathoth, Lovecraft's most powerful and godlike alien, does not send Cthulhu to earth to redeem mankind from sin, for Cthulhu's sole purpose is self-serving. In contrast, God sent Jesus not to establish a kingdom on earth, but to lay the groundwork for a heavenly kingdom that will eternally bless those who seek redemption in Christ.

With knowledge of Christianity due to his Baptist childhood and correspondence with Christian friends, Lovecraft mocked Christianity's beliefs in the Mythos, making his godlike creatures anything but gods and giving them horrifying characteristics, the opposite of the Christian God's positive traits. This is what Frye calls the "mythos of winter," which entails irony and satire (*Anatomy* 223). In contrast, even though Frye groups Christianity in with other myths and literature he does not take to be true, he considers the Bible to ultimately follow the pattern of a comedy, which ends happily despite any preceding tragedy.<sup>45</sup> He notes that "[t]he action of comedy, like the action of the Christian Bible, moves from law to liberty," which flies in the face of the lawless world of the Cthulhu Mythos where chaos and gods of chaos reign supreme (181). These two different cycles, comedy and tragedy or satire, help highlight the differences between Lovecraft's Mythos and the Christian belief in a much more optimistic life and afterlife. Christians believe that God's goodness will win in the end, in the manner of a literary comedy, concluding in a happy and heavenly residence for all who believe. In Frye's terms, however, Lovecraft's Mythos world is forever plunged in the winter of irony and satire. And, like C. S. Lewis's land of Narnia under the White Witch's rule, the Mythos is always winter and never Christmas, a bleak and hopeless world for everyone involved.

Christians should study Lovecraft's works for more than just a contrast with biblical ideas of mankind's relation with his Creator. In recent years, Lovecraft's character as an author, his most famous creation Cthulhu, and the entire Cthulhu Mythos have exploded in popularity, and Christians ought not to remain ignorant about the literary and philosophical ideas reflected in the Mythos. In addition, the Mythos provides a vast field of academic study, much of it untouched, especially by Christians. A deeper study of Christian themes in the Mythos might shed further light on what specific elements of Christianity Lovecraft intended to parody and whether he was successful in satirizing the Christian religion. Lovecraft read so much mythology during his life, especially during his childhood, that studies will inevitably discover additional mythic themes. Christian study might also counter the atheistic views of certain critics, especially S. T. Joshi, who side with Lovecraft's atheism and attempt to view his work through an openly anti-Christian lens. Christians should not be afraid to study Lovecraft's works because he was an atheist; in fact, his religion and views on Christianity offer perhaps the biggest reason for Christians to take a careful look at the Mythos and discover what it has to contribute to a religious outlook on literature.

Lovecraft, unlike Cthulhu, is not hidden from view or buried beneath waves of obscurity and whispered rumors. His popularity has only risen, and the Internet and popular culture have taken hold of the more palatable aspects of the Mythos (the aliens, in particular) and spread them to a point of near-saturation. There are Cthulhu t-shirts, plush toys, board games, video games, coffee mugs, and a whole host of other products bearing the name or visage of Lovecraft's creation. The Cthulhu Mythos has grown beyond the literary additions contributed in the decades following Lovecraft's death, additions mostly submitted by Lovecraft's closest friends. Now, the Cthulhu Mythos is widespread and permeating nearly every facet of the media, having grown far

beyond its original place in literature. In fact, the animated comedy show *South Park*, known for its cultural timeliness and keen awareness of pop culture, included Cthulhu as a character in three episodes of its 2010 season. Perhaps Cthulhu's appearance on *South Park* is the best indicator that Lovecraft's popularity has overflowed from the niche corners of the Internet and literature to the popular culture and mainstream entertainment media, although Lovecraft's presence in the academic world has not waned as a result. A conference this year in London featuring Lovecraft's fiction as one of the topics is not an isolated case of academia noticing the Cthulhu Mythos and its topics of literary interest. In all likelihood, the Mythos will retain its popularity, yet it runs the risk of becoming overwhelmed by pop entertainment and losing its literary merit among the sea of casual references. Future study of the Mythos and the rest of Lovecraft's work, not just in relation to mythology but also to the whole of academia, should be pursued to expand and illuminate the mysteries of Lovecraft's bleak yet engaging world.

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## Notes

1. The term “Cthulhu Mythos” was coined by one of Lovecraft’s younger friends and fellow writer of weird fiction, August Derleth, after Lovecraft’s death.
2. The term “myth” refers to Campbell’s use and view of mythology, generally as a story with a religious background in which heroes and supernatural beings appear. The capitalized term “Mythos” in this study refers to the Cthulhu Mythos. Frye defines “mythos” as the “narrative of a work of literature” (*Anatomy* 366).
3. Day suggests that fairy tales are easily identified because even children are aware of their impossibility. He provided the tale of Hansel and Gretel as an example (18).
4. In India, there are numerous myths about the creation of the world found in such texts as the *Purusha Sakta* and *Rig-Veda* (Spence 159). Ragnarök, in Norse mythology, details the destruction of the gods and the immolation of the earth (Campbell, *Thousand Faces* 376-7).
5. “The Call of Cthulhu” and “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” both begin with statements of the human experience.
6. Comparative mythology is simply the comparison of myths from different cultures, rather than focusing on a single group of myths from one culture (e.g., Greek mythology).
7. S. T. Joshi suggests that Lovecraft rejected certain ideas from Freud while begrudgingly accepting some of the famous psychologist’s claims (*A Life* 308-9). However, Jung’s emphasis on immaterial ideas, such as the collective unconscious, were incompatible with Lovecraft’s views.
8. Campbell borrowed the word “monomyth” from James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*.
9. Campbell directly quotes from Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

10. “Jesus saith unto him I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14.6).

11. A definition of the hero in both Campbell’s works and Lovecraft’s will follow in Chapter 1. Briefly, “hero” will be defined as either a character with heroic qualities or a character who performs heroic feats, absent in Lovecraft’s stories. “Protagonist” refers to the main characters in Lovecraft stories when separate from the narrators. A “savior” is simply a person who carries out some sort of redemptive act, especially spiritual or moral redemption.

12. Campbell offers numerous myths to support the hero’s journey, including Prometheus and Jason from Western mythology (*Thousand Faces* 30), and Jesus, Mohammed, and Buddha from Eastern mythology (38).

13. Andrew Gordon points out the presence of the monomyth in the *Star Wars* films (314), among other popular films. The hero (Luke Skywalker) goes through a stage of departure when he leaves his home planet of Tatooine, is initiated to be a Jedi (by two elderly mentors, Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda), battles the evil forces (Darth Vader) to rescue the princess (Princess Leia), and finally returns (crossing the threshold of the Death Star to escape). For an extremely helpful chart on the exact corresponding elements, see *Sparks*.

14. While these similarities can occasionally be difficult to map, at least two are very clear. The first is a goat-like beast named Shub-Niggurath whose descriptions quite obviously recall the Greek god Pan. The other, an aquatic monster called Dagon, bears a close resemblance to the Philistine deity of the same name. Joshi admits that there is valid skepticism in equating Dagon with the Philistine god and decides that “we are left to draw our own conclusions” in regards to the correlation (*A Life* 158).

15. Campbell describes the hero's helper as masculine, as it is in the case of Erich Zann (*Thousand Faces* 72).

16. Concerning human centered fiction, Tierney says that “[p]robably all fiction up to the middle of the nineteenth century falls into this category” (193), which would include myths and mythic stories.

17. Campbell's idea of the virgin birth is not simply limited to a literal account as found in the Bible. Instead, he includes any sort of matriarchal creation myth or beliefs that link the earth with a matriarchal figure (i.e., Mother Earth) by equating the earth as the virgin and the human race as what is birthed. He also injects motherhood where it is not implied, going so far as to claim that when God “moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1.2), the mother figure “is a personification of the primal element named” in that verse (*Thousand Faces* 297). Since there is no explicitly female figure in the biblical Trinity, many Christians would disagree with Campbell's assessment.

18. Joshi tracks Lovecraft's thoughts on the matter of civilization via the latter's letters to friends. In particular, his correspondence with Robert E. Howard (creator of Conan the Barbarian) demonstrates that Lovecraft elevated humanity over barbarity due to our understanding of the universe (*Decline* 43).

19. Judges 13-16.

20. Some of these characters may already be predisposed toward the supernatural and the madness it brings in the Mythos. The main character of “From Beyond” and “Pickman's Model” insanely attempt to control what they cannot understand, but many of the narrators and main characters are simple scientists who do not deal with metaphysical or otherworldly matters – the geologists in *At the Mountains of Madness* and the professor in *The Shadow out of Time* are two

such examples. The narrator in *The Shadow out of Time* even says, “At no time had I the least interest in either occultism or abnormal psychology” (949) until after his forcible possession.

21. Dostoevsky’s character of Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) is an oft-cited antihero acting as the protagonist. His only real virtue is his intelligence.

22. The titular character in “Herbert West – Reanimator” can be considered an antihero. However, as this story morphed into a parody, it can hardly be taken seriously as an important part of the Mythos.

23. Robert E. Howard, one of Lovecraft’s friends, is famous for the aptly named Conan the Barbarian, a character whose name speaks volumes.

24. “The Thing on the Doorstep” is the only Mythos story with a truly prominent female character, but because she has been possessed by her father, her character can be disregarded as a female presence.

25. This is one of the flaws of the Cthulhu Mythos after Lovecraft died and other authors began writing stories in the cycle. Reused characters, including some that would fit the description of a hero, diminish the world Lovecraft created.

26. While Lovecraft is not always consistent in his use of the terms, the term “Elder Things” generally refer to the cylindrical aliens discovered by the scientists in *At the Mountains of Madness*. The “Old Ones” generally include Cthulhu and the more powerful beings, including some that do not exist in any known dimension. The Elder Things are portrayed as more scientifically minded than the Old Ones and share certain characteristics with humans, including the building of architecture and creation of historical records.

27. Speculative fiction is a broad genre that includes science fiction and fantasy. Fiction with fantastical or imaginative elements typically fall under the wide umbrella of speculative fiction.

28. By capitalizing the pronouns referring to the Great Old Ones, the cultist indicates that he views the aliens as gods. Whether the creatures are gods or aliens is discussed in Chapter Three.

29. Joshi chronicles Lovecraft's mistrust and suspicion of Einstein's theories of relativity before finally reconciling them with materialism (*Decline* 17-18).

30. Joshi writes, "[b]y 1923, however, – or even earlier . . . – the fortress began to suffer attack from the very source of its strength: science" (*Decline* 17) in reference to Einstein's theories demolishing beliefs Lovecraft had held. Lovecraft struggled with Einstein at first, but Joshi notes "that Lovecraft fairly quickly snapped out of his naïve views about Einstein and, by no later than 1929, actually welcomed him as another means to bolster a modified materialism that still outlawed teleology, monotheism, spirituality, and other tenets he rightly believed to be outmoded in light of nineteenth century science" (*A Life* 320).

31. The Deep Ones are a race of aquatic creatures who likely originally came from outer space. They worship Cthulhu, Dagon, and Hydra, three much more powerful entities. As the narrator of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* describes them, "I think their predominant colour was a greyish-green, though they had white bellies. They were mostly shiny and slippery, but the ridges of their backs were scaly. Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed. At the sides of their necks were palpitating gills, and their long paws were webbed. They hopped irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four. I was somehow glad that they had no more than four limbs.

Their croaking, baying voices, clearly articulate speech, held all the dark shades of expression which their staring faces lacked” (853).

32. Although Lovecraft sometimes switches the names around, the Elder Things are generally portrayed as mortal aliens who helped create life on earth. They also created and enslaved the monsters called shoggoths and were at war with the Old Ones before being frozen in Antarctica. They figure most prominently in *At the Mountains of Madness*. The Old Ones are another variety of extraterrestrials including Cthulhu and creatures that are even more powerful. Subspecies of the Old Ones populate several stories and are far more prominent than the Elder Things. Cthulhu itself physically appears in “The Call of Cthulhu.” The Deep Ones can be considered a subspecies of the Old Ones, and serve Dagon (itself an ancient Deep One) who in turn serves Cthulhu.

33. “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family” and *The Shadow over Innsmouth* are both examples of revelatory horrors.

34. Egyptian mythology in particular tells stories of dismemberment, resurrection, and reincarnation not physically possible with man’s bodily form (*Thousand Faces* 92-93).

35. Campbell gives the example of Christ’s indwelling of Christian believers (*Thousand Faces* 39).

36. “The Thing on the Doorstep” features several such instances of mental possession and swapped identities.

37. Campbell lists “the miraculous energy of the thunderbolts of Zeus, Yahweh, and the Supreme Buddha, the fertility of the rain of the Viracocha, [and] the virtue announced by the bell rung in the Mass at the consecration” (*Thousand Faces* 182) as more recent examples of immortality and the ideas relating to it.

38. The idea of immortality is in Lovecraft as well. The Great Race in *The Shadow Out of Time* possesses the minds of beings in different time periods to avoid or delay their destruction. Ephraim Waite seeks also immortality via mental possession in “The Thing on the Doorstep.”

39. The biblical Last Judgment and the Norse Ragnarök are two examples of world-ending scenarios.

40. Schreffler lists at least four other beings superior to Cthulhu and possessing immortality: Azathoth, Yog-Sothoth, Shub-Niggurath, and Nyarlathotep (157).

41. In “The Call of Cthulhu,” Cthulhu’s head is destroyed when rammed by a ship. He reforms almost immediately afterward. Lovecraft describes how “the scattered plasticity of that nameless sky-spawn was nebulously *recombining* in its hateful original form” (378).

42. In “The Call of Cthulhu,” one of the cultists explains that although Cthulhu’s superiors “no longer lived, They would never really die. They all lay in stone houses in Their great city of R’lyeh, preserved by the spells of might Cthulhu for a glorious resurrection when the stars and the earth might once more be ready for Them” (367). Even the scientists in *At the Mountains of Madness* label certain alien buildings as “temples” (779).

43. Campbell employs the term *katharsis* as “a term which referred in the Greek religious vocabulary to a spiritual transformation brought about by participation in a rite. The mind, ‘cleansed’ of attachments to merely secular aims, desires, and fears, is released to spiritual rapture” (*Inner Reaches* 103).

44. The Judeo-Christian idea of anthropocentrism stems from Genesis 1:26, which links man and God in physical appearance and gives mankind dominion over animals. Before man’s creation, only God had any sort of dominion over anything.

45. Frye does detect moments of all four major cycles: comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony/satire, but the Bible as a whole follows the pattern of a comedy, culminating in the book of Revelation and the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19: 6-9.