

# Death and the Serpent

*Immortality in Science Fiction  
and Fantasy*

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# H. P. Lovecraft's Immortal Culture

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*JOHN McINNIS*

H. P. Lovecraft, the twentieth-century American writer of horror stories, cared a great deal for the preservation of his Providence, Rhode Island, environment and the elements from the historical past which he associated with his physical surroundings. He conceived of his own individual ego as the center of a nexus, or "associative ego," composed of family, social group, and racial-historical background.<sup>1</sup> He amalgamated much of what he read into this nexus of associations and "twisted all reality to conform to what [he] had been reading."<sup>2</sup> One of his main convictions was that people needed to rely on cultural standards in their clashes with time's mutability as well as with the chaos of the outer darkness around them.<sup>3</sup> Lovecraft, who was preoccupied with maintaining the cultural influences of the past, attempted to use his writing to pass on their influences to future generations.

Lovecraft was most interested in what he considered to be the two main influences behind the Anglo-Saxon culture of England—the classicism of Greece and Rome and the Teutonic heritage of northern Europe. He wanted to merge himself with these influences and free himself from the rapid, inevitable social and technological changes that were occurring around him—a process he described as "transient and the ephemeral." He wanted to halt time, to stop change. To try to do so, he created a kind of cultural immortality, which is best seen in "The Dunwich Horror." This story offers the discerning reader a clear impression of Lovecraft's literary immortalization of what he considered to be important Roman and Teutonic influences on English culture.

The story begins with a description of the decadent countryside around Dunwich, a squalid little town in northcentral Massachusetts. Wilbur Whateley is born to husbandless Lavinia Whateley on February 2, 1913. Taught by his deformed mother and her half-insane father, old Wizard Whateley, Wilbur grows mentally and physically at a prodigious rate. The baby is goatish and ugly, but walks and talks before he is a year old. Old Whateley repairs the barnlike house,

and makes a lower room into a library on whose shelves he places the family's old books for Wilbur's edification. By the time he is four, Wilbur resembles a child of ten, and his goatishness and bizarre behavior frighten the neighbors. Dogs hate and fear him, and he carries a pistol to defend himself.

Neighbors hear strange sounds coming from the upper floor of the old house, and notice that despite continual purchasing, the number of cattle owned by the Whateleys never increases beyond a few anemic specimens. In 1923 the boy and his grandfather remove the attic floor and the upper-floor partitions of their old house. Old Whateley falls into a coma on August 1, 1925, but regains consciousness before his death to tell Wilbur to find a certain mysterious "complete edition" in order to open the gates to a mysterious realm called "Yog-Sothoth" before the thing in the attic breaks out. Only those from beyond can make the thing multiply and work. The ones from beyond are certain Old Ones who controlled the earth before and now wish to return to regain that control. Later Lavinia Whateley disappears, and in 1927, the now seven-foot-tall Wilbur moves his books and effects to a shed and takes out the lower floor's partitions, leaving only a boarded-up shell.

While trying to find the book mentioned by his grandfather, Wilbur meets the librarian at Miskatonic University, Dr. Henry Armitage. As Wilbur sits in one of the library's reading rooms reading a Latin version of the book for which he is searching (the dreaded *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred), Armitage reads enough over his shoulder to discover that a pantheon of Old Ones—gods from the distant past—are trying to return to this realm to clear it of humans and use the Earth for themselves. When Wilbur tries to borrow the book, Armitage refuses. Later, when Wilbur returns to the library to break in, a watchdog kills him. Armitage arrives with two colleagues just in time to see Wilbur's semianthropomorphic, half-saurian form dissolve into a mass of tarry stickiness.

A few days later the horror breaks out of the old Whateley house and begins its reign of terror. The path of its movement is so wide that it looks as if a house has been moved across the ground. Meanwhile, Wilbur's coded diary is found and turned over to Armitage. He decodes the book and reads it, finding within its pages a plan for the elimination of the human race. Then Armitage, with colleagues Rice and Morgan, develops a plan that he hopes will defeat the monster. Arriving at Dunwich, they learn of several crushed houses and other destruction wrought by the horror, and picking up its trail, they track it back to Sentinel Hill, the site of the story's climax and conclusion.

A farmer to whom Armitage has given a small telescope describes the horror atop Sentinel Hill (naturally invisible, the horror is made visible for a split second by a powder sprayed at it by Armitage, who, with Rice and Morgan, ascend the hill and approach it). The thing is like a hen's egg, bigger than anything, with dozens of legs, and with great eyes all over. A huge face reminiscent of Wilbur Whateley's covers the top. As the three men atop the hill wave their arms frantically at the horror in some incantation, it calls upon its father, Yog-Sothoth,

for help. Suddenly a great stroke of lightning comes from the darkened sky, and the horror vanishes. Armitage comes down the hill to tell the frightened citizenry that the horror was Wilbur's twin brother (but with more of the "outsideness" in it) and that it has gone forever.

The diligent reader's appreciation of "The Dunwich Horror" is enhanced by a deeper understanding of Lovecraft's preoccupation with the Roman and Teutonic influences on English culture. Lovecraft traced the two culture streams of the Roman and Teutonic heritages into the past, where, for him, the Teutonic strand faded out around 450 A.D. At that point in his backward flight through time, Roman civilization possessed the same "atmosphere of centrality & [sic] quality of a fundamental seat of vision" later possessed by his favorite cities, London and Providence.<sup>5</sup> The Roman Empire became "the central incident in human history" in Lovecraft's mind, and helped to form his national interests and literary preferences in classical and modern times alike.<sup>6</sup> Rome seemed to have a life of its own in his unconscious, for he had dreams of a Rome to which he returned vicariously many times. In these dreams he was a Roman native "of the old hawk-nosed, broad-templed Italic stock" and had the position of a "minor civil or military official."<sup>7</sup>

Lovecraft's identification with Rome appears in his drawing of Wilbur Whateley and Dr. Henry Armitage. Wilbur's goatishness may indicate that he is a literary representative of Lovecraft's Roman dream persona, because the Roman race was composed not only of Nordic but also of Semitic racial stock, a stock which was aberrant from Lovecraft's point of view.<sup>8</sup> Lovecraft disliked Jews, especially the darker ones, who obviously did not have an Aryan, pale, blond, physical appearance. And his rationalistic, empirical state of mind could not tolerate the revelation-based, supernaturalistic state of mind so central to Hebraism.

Lovecraft felt that the exotic, Oriental culture stream of the Hebrew tradition was an invader and destroyer of Western civilization. But his feeling of kinship with the partially Nordic Roman race meliorated his dislike of that race's Semitic component, and Lovecraft's identification with the physically repulsive but scholarly "Roman" protagonist is its result. He felt that both he and a number of people around him resembled Romans, even though the Roman "race" was extinct and his appearance—tall, pale, and characteristically Nordic-English—was the complete reversal of the classical, Roman, physical features. That is, the juxtaposition of two protagonists in the story comes from Lovecraft's identification with both the Roman and the Teutonic cultures. The physically repugnant Wilbur Whateley was a disguised ancient Roman, and Henry Armitage represented the modern-day, Nordic-English Lovecraft.<sup>9</sup>

Additional Roman proclivities appear in the story's early portion. The character of Old Wizard Whateley, Wilbur's grandfather, suggests Lovecraft's own grandfather, Whipple Van Buren Phillips, who had visited London and Rome during his European travels (and who had often told the young Lovecraft horror stories of his own contrivance).<sup>10</sup> Grandfather Phillips had introduced his grandson to the bygone world of the Roman Empire when the boy was six years old and

later bequeathed him his entire library of books.<sup>11</sup> Many of these old books were about Rome, and this collection appears in the story as Wilbur's decaying library of witch lore. Lovecraft's reading about Rome was prodigious, and as a youth he continually searched local libraries for books about the Romans. Wilbur's desperate search for the *Necronomicon*, the famous key to the return of the "Old Ones," has its parallel in Lovecraft's youthful seeking. He wanted to bring the Roman culture forward,<sup>12</sup> and his wished-for return of the old Roman gods parallels the return of the "Old Ones" in the *Necronomicon*, a book that is the central element of the "Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth."<sup>13</sup> As a child, Lovecraft declared himself a Roman pagan,<sup>14</sup> building altars to honor the gods of the Graeco-Roman world, and this belief seems to have left him with a lifelong desire to resurrect Roman culture in its entirety.<sup>15</sup> For Lovecraft, the difference between modern American thought and ancient Roman thought was a difference in how they conceived the relationship between religion and ethics. He felt that the ancient Romans arrived at their ethical standards rationally, basing them upon their experience in a material universe controlled by natural laws. By contrast, modern Americans based their ethics on dogmatic laws revealed by an authoritarian, supernatural religion. He saw Christianity as a Semitically-based mythology with a slave psychology requiring obedience to external authority. It kept people from improving their condition by understanding nature's laws. In Lovecraft's thinking, the rise of the Roman Empire, with its gods and culture, in America would have eliminated the restrictions placed on our thinking by what he considered to be irrational Christianity: "Had [Christianity] been cast overboard long ago, the western world would have had all the earlier start toward a rational system of administration based on the actual needs of actual people."<sup>16</sup> The rebirth of the Roman Empire with its cultural patterns would have returned rationality to a Western world immersed in a quagmire of political, social, and economic confusion. In 1926 he wrote concerning Mussolini's plans for rebuilding Rome that he wished the Italian dictator would restore completely all the structures of ancient Rome, so that the image of Roman grandeur would rise "to mock the modern world."<sup>17</sup>

Such a "mocking" of the modern world with the grandeur of ancient Rome may suggest the return to earthly power of the "Old Ones" of the Yog-Sothoth Cycle, and may be the goal of Wilbur Whateley's actions as a "minor civil or military official" of the Roman Empire.<sup>18</sup> With gold coins he buys cattle to feed the expanding horror, which operates metaphorically like a circumvallum, or circular rampart used for offensive and defensive warfare by the soldiers of Rome. Lovecraft wrote that when his dreams returned him to Roman times, he often became an officer of the empire, such as a centurion or legatus, and felt "the great vallum of the castra Romana" (rampart of the Roman military camp) close beside himself.<sup>19</sup> Such dreams suggest Wilbur's role of colleague to the vallumlike horror, which is Lovecraft's symbolic *castra Romana* of soldiers.

Whateley, like a Roman soldier, and the horror, like fellow *vallum* legionnaires, make ready to crush the decadent modern world in preparation for the

return of the old Roman gods. But there can be no success in such an impossible endeavor, and the realization of such imminent failure causes Lovecraft to switch identity perspectives midway through the story. After Whateley and Armitage meet and converse in the Miskatonic University Library and Armitage refuses to turn over the *Necronomicon*, Wilbur dissolves into a pool of slime. Thus the focus of the story must change from Whateley, Lovecraft's ancient Roman persona, to Armitage, his Anglo-Saxon persona. The change from Whateley's perspective to that of Armitage is one "out of which an occultist would make a case of metempsychosis." The spiritual transmigration from the world of ancient Rome to Armitage's world of the eighteenth century, is effected, and the focus of the story switches from Wilbur's goal of conquest to Armitage's goal of retrenchment and preservation.<sup>20</sup>

An additional Roman influence appears in the spectacular, vertical withdrawal of the Roman *vallum*, that is, the horror, into the heavens. This passage may have been suggested by the well-known Chapter 16 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Just as Julius Caesar ascends into heaven and is transformed into a star, so the Roman *vallum* rises into the sky by way of the lightning bolt, leaving Armitage alone below to confront the rabble.

To support his version of culture after the fall of the Roman Empire, Lovecraft turned in his imagination to the world of the Teutonic peoples of northern Europe, who, he felt, were the only "social and political adults" left after the demise of the Romans.<sup>21</sup> But these Nordics seem to form another side of Lovecraft's English cultural thinking. Though the Roman cultural background gave modern English culture its "intellectual and emotional surfaces" ("as a Roman, [Lovecraft was] a philosophic sceptic")<sup>22</sup>, the Teutonic gave to England its "deep blood influences" and was "the logical successor of the Roman in power."<sup>23</sup> Lovecraft's political, social, and aesthetic thinking concerning these two cultural influences can be divided into a dichotomy of intellect and emotion. He perceived the Romans as conveying the Greek philosophical ideal of rational empiricism to England, and he thought of the Teutonic peoples as the "purging, cleansing, regenerating force" that could protect that classical heritage from what he considered to be pernicious, modern influences.<sup>24</sup> These two cultural influences, one static, the other dynamic, form a foundation for Lovecraft's rationalistic but severely patriotic conception of English culture. Compounded as it was of Roman and Teutonic influences, Lovecraft's "undiluted Englishry" was polarized between reality and dream, between mortality and immortality.<sup>25</sup> Although the Roman Empire no longer existed as a viable political entity, it remained alive as a dream-world in Lovecraft's imagination and emerged in "The Dunwich Horror." Lovecraft used authorship to formulate and preserve "certain fugitive images which [he wanted] formulated and preserved."<sup>26</sup> Such fugitive images would, in this case, have largely made up his conception of the Roman Empire. Lovecraft wanted to see a Nordic empire, based upon the idea of the Roman original and maintained as a viable political force. This wish to renew the Roman Empire (albeit in Teutonic terms) as a political power was the "mortal" idea

that balanced the idea of immortality in his story. Indeed, the island of Britain with its worldwide empire was the renewal of the Roman ideal of world order in physical terms: "Teutonic blood snatched Britain from the Celt and made England the greatest force in all of civilization."<sup>27</sup> Lovecraft bowed before the Teutonic gods "of war and dominion . . . as before no others" and saw in Fritz Lang's 1923 silent film *Siegfried* "the very inmost soul of the immortal & [sic] unconquerable blond Nordic, embodied in the shining warrior of light, great Siegfried, slayer of monsters & [sic] enslaver of kings."<sup>28</sup> Lovecraft was not here concerning himself with the latter part of the Siegfried myth in which the blond hero of light is outwitted and killed by the forces of darkness and guile.

In the pages of the "Dunwich Horror," Lovecraft fought to its inevitable conclusion just such a losing battle—a battle against modernity and technological progress. Modernism, to him, was a barbarism of "quantity, machinery, speed, commerce, industry, wealth, & [sic] luxurious ostentation," a plague which should be eliminated from the earth.<sup>29</sup> In the story the elimination of these effects was to be carried out by the horror, which metaphorically, was now a phalanx of Teutonic warrior heroes created to crush the decadent members of contemporary society whom Lovecraft despised. In this scenario the lightning bolt at the end of the story becomes Bifrost, the rainbow bridge of the Norse gods over which Lovecraft's heroes cross to Valhalla. Lovecraft understood that all Valhalla rituals would end with the Day of Ragnarok, the Twilight of the Gods.<sup>30</sup> But he elected to face whatever pain and suffering might come his way "with a calm visage and knowledge that Thor and Odin will themselves perish one day"—an attitude that is apparent in old Dr. Armitage's journey back down the mountain to face the rabble.<sup>31</sup>

The concept of immortality of the intellect is closely associated with physical mortality in Lovecraft's thinking: "There is room in life and literature for both types—the sensitive dreamer and the man of action."<sup>32</sup> His concept of civilization required proportions of each, because Roman rationalism and political order went together in Lovecraft's mind with the Teutonic urge to protect and preserve this order.

Lovecraft preserved his imagined, orderly world by putting it into writing. He shaped ideas from his particular view of the past into a personal vision and put images suggestive of these ideas into his stories, notably "The Dunwich Horror." A proper ordering of these images yields at least the outlines of such a vision.

Most of the images composing the imaginative world of Lovecraft's artistic universe derived from his cultural heritage. He wanted to form an "emotionally enduring set of illusions as to values and direction in existence" from the "arbitrary concepts and folkways bequeathed to [him] through [his] traditional culture-stream."<sup>33</sup> He saw himself as an "aesthete devoted to harmony," a harmony of "symbolic identification with the landscape and tradition-stream" to which he belonged.<sup>34</sup> He thought of himself as patterned by his milieu, the "ideas, impressions, traditions, landscapes, and architecture through which he

must necessarily peer in order to reach the 'outside.'"<sup>35</sup> This envelope of tradition appears in the story as the horror, whose globelike bulk was the overdetermined symbolic nexus of landmarks and scenes of the Rhode Island countryside that was so much a part of Lovecraft as to be his very self: "ME, MYSELF, I, THE CONSCIOUS EGO!"<sup>36</sup> He appreciated the idea of infinity most when he could "scale it against the known terrestrial scene" of his own ego.<sup>37</sup> This is because he needed a composite of the artistic world he knew so well to help him withstand the chaos of the modern world around him. Focusing his ego into a story was Lovecraft's way of transcending time and space to "merge [himself] with the whole historic stream" and free himself from the effects of the modern world he loathed.<sup>38</sup>

The Dunwich horror was a symbolic microcosm in which Lovecraft used "dream-patterns [to form a] natural organism"<sup>39</sup> composed of Lovecraft's memories<sup>40</sup>—memories which had taken the forms of "fugitive images."<sup>41</sup> The fusion of these images from the past formed "a sort of one-man cult of retrospective suspiration"<sup>42</sup> which generates Cthulhu, a deity in the "Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth" and Yog-Sothoth's cousin (as he is identified in the story).<sup>43</sup> Transposition of the single letter "u" makes it possible to separate the name Cthulhu into its respective components: cuth, l(ovecraft) h(oward's) u(niverse). Professor Henry Sweet, the noted linguistic authority, defines the Anglo-Saxon word *cuth* as follows: "known; certain, manifest; clear; well-known, famous, familiar, intimate."<sup>44</sup> Each of these adjectives describes some aspect of Lovecraft's microcosm of the British heritage, so that the word *cuth* compresses the world of Lovecraft's cultural knowledge into one powerfully overdetermined syllable. Because Lovecraft wanted to look at nature through "a large proportion of the total eyes of mankind," he assimilated more and more of the historical past and became "more and more people all in one; til at length [he had] the sensation of a sort of identification with [his] whole civilisation."<sup>45</sup> The Dunwich horror, the many-eyed *circumvallum* rampart of Roman and Teutonic heroes, is the image and emblem of English civilization which Lovecraft wanted restored to the earth's surface, with a consequent eradication of most aspects of "decadent modernism." Mortal man, here seen in the ideal of military conquest, is joined to the idea of an immortal culture in Lovecraft's universe of *cuth*.

Most important to Lovecraft in his own thinking was the idea of harmony and integrity within the individual. His civilized world participated in an evolutionary process which sought "to emancipate man from animal caprice" and all the weaknesses and lack of discipline which characterize the lower levels of the evolutionary spiral.<sup>46</sup> Lovecraft's world seems to have been constantly evolving toward a state of harmony, "a little Arcadia in [his] fancy."<sup>47</sup> This evolved state of harmony was an English world "with the fire of the Elizabethans, the correct taste of the Georgians, and the refinement and pure ideals of the Victorian"—the *cuth* ideal in all its many manifestations.<sup>48</sup>

Lovecraft's world of culture developed its essential form and substance during the time of his prodigious childhood reading, which was concerned mainly with

the work of the eighteenth-century English translators of the classics: "All the Queen Anne authors combined to form [his] literary diet."<sup>49</sup> He strove to delete all contemporary English words from his vocabulary, adopting an old Walker's *Dictionary* of 1804 as his linguistic authority.<sup>50</sup> In matters of language and literature, "rightness" became most important; eighteenth-century absolute correctness became the cornerstone of his literary universe, in which books "became [his] complete world—at once [his] servants & [sic] [his] masters."<sup>51</sup> The bequest of old books which appears in "The Dunwich Horror" as Wilbur's library was the foundation of Lovecraft's universe of *cuth*.

Lovecraft wrote that when he was seven years old he read a great deal of Hindu, Teutonic, and Egyptian mythology, and tried to believe in each of them "to see which might contain the greatest amount of truth."<sup>52</sup> These three mythologies are combined in the name of "The Dunwich Horror" deity, Yog-Sothoth. The name is derived from *yoga*, Sanscrit for union; *soth*, Anglo-Saxon for truth; and Thoth, the god of wisdom and learning who was a scribe to the gods in the Egyptian pantheon. Thoth's name means the union of knowledge in the written word. These three languages, and by implication their systems of knowledge, became parts of Lovecraft's world of the intellect. A kind of alchemical process combines these three cultures into an English milieu of *cuth* in Lovecraft's mind: "it is only *as collocated* parts of our own English stream that contributions of the earlier or alien streams have any meaning for us."<sup>53</sup> The world of *cuth* was discipline and power, intellect and emotion; it juxtaposed Roman and Teutonic influences. Lovecraft was interested in the combination of knowledge (immortality) with power (mortality) to the extent that he wished that the Nordic Aryans had remained in their Indo-European homeland and not turned to the decadent West to "merge their fortunes with the restless, fever'd machine-driven European chasers after mutable nothingness."<sup>54</sup> He meant for his world of *cuth*—classical knowledge wedded to Nordic strength—to be a permanent empire founded on Earth:

Had we [Nordics] stuck to Asia, we might have founded a permanent world-empire of unrivalled splendor and "irresistible" strength—as mighty and puissant as Rome, and as stable and enduring as antique Aegyptus or deathless Sinae.<sup>55</sup>

Thus Lovecraft solved the problem of the empire's mutability by forming his own imaginative empire-universe to preserve through "The Dunwich Horror," the literary heritage of the bygone worlds of the Romans, Teutons, and English of past centuries.

## NOTES

1. Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1929–1931*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House Publishers, 1971), pp. 83–184.

2. Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1932–1934*, ed. James Turner (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House Publishers, 1974), p. 150.
3. Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1935–1937*, ed. James Turner (Sauk City Wis.: Arkham House Publishers, 1976), p. 354.
4. Lovecraft, *Letters 1929–1931*, p. 220.
5. Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters, 1925–1929*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wis.: Arkham House Publishers, 1968), p. 200.
6. Lovecraft, *Letters 1934–1937*, p. 266.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
8. Lovecraft, *Letters 1932–1934*, pp. 333–34.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
11. Howard Phillips Lovecraft, *H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1911–1924*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City Wis.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 33.
12. Lovecraft, *Letters 1932–1934*, pp. 335–36.
13. See note 43 below.
14. Lovecraft, *Letters 1917–1924*, p. 10.
15. Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection," in *The Shuttered Room and Other Places*, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City Wis.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 95.
16. Lovecraft, *Letters 1932–1934*, p. 121.
17. Howard Phillips Lovecraft, letter to Lillian Clark, January 11, 1926, Howard Phillips Lovecraft Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, R. I.
18. Lovecraft, *Letters 1934–1937*, p. 181.
19. Lovecraft, *Letters 1925–1929*, p. 189.
20. Lovecraft, *Letters 1932–1934*, p. 332.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
22. Lovecraft, *Letters 1929–1931*, p. 394.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
24. Lovecraft, *Letters 1911–1924*, p. 290.
25. Lovecraft, *Letters 1929–1931*, p. 279.
26. Lovecraft, *Letters 1925–1929*, p. 111.
27. Lovecraft, *Letters 1929–1931*, p. 54.
28. Howard Phillips Lovecraft, letter to Lillian Clark, September 12, 1925. Howard Phillips Lovecraft Papers, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, R. I.
29. Lovecraft, *Letters 1929–1931*, p. 58.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
32. Lovecraft, *Letters 1932–1934*, p. 123.
33. Lovecraft, *Letters 1929–1931*, p. 207.
34. Lovecraft, *Letters 1925–1929*, p. 288.
35. Lovecraft, *Letters 1929–1931*, p. 221.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 220.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
41. Lovecraft, *Letters 1925–1929*, p. 111.
42. Lovecraft, *Letters 1911–1924*, p. 302.
43. Critics of the Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth are concerned with its nature and what Lovecraft stories it may relate to (August Derleth, S. T. Joshi, Dirk W. Mosig, and George T. Wetzel); with the nature and sources of the “books” invented and used in connection with the Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth (Lin Carter, T.G.L. Cockcroft, Edward Lauterbach, and William S. Home); or with the disentangling of Lovecraft’s “myth cycle” from the additions, misinterpretations, and “Christianization” it suffered at the hands of August Derleth (S. T. Joshi, Dirk W. Mosig, Robert M. Price, and Richard L. Tierney). The approaches these critics make to the Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth are on a literal level. At worst the myth cycle is considered to be mere forces of evil (or good and evil) waiting to destroy humanity (Derleth); at best the myth cycle is considered to be embodiments of the forces in an indifferent universe that lie beyond human understanding (Mosig). Mosig’s approach actually considers the Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth as a possible product of Lovecraft’s unconscious mind. The breaking up of Derleth’s conventionalized “Cthulhu Mythos” with its dogma of specifically selected tales by Mosig, Tierney, and others opens the door to the idea that each tale connected to the Yog-Sothoth Cycle of Myth contains its own singularly dramatic “god situation,” and that each “god” is itself an outgrowth of that fictive situation alone (although it may be named and even “used” in other tales, possibly for atmosphere’s sake). As the roots of each Lovecraft mythic element are found out, the falsehoods that hide Lovecraft’s intentions will be dispelled. Mosig writes in his article “H. P. Lovecraft: Myth-Maker” (quoted in *H. P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism*, edited by S. T. Joshi and published by the Ohio University Press in 1980, p. 107): “Lovecraft did not envision the various mythopoeic conceptions that were going to become integral parts of his *oeuvre* at the start of his writing career. Instead, the various elements involved in his pseudomythology gradually evolved and constantly changed during his lifetime.” Such a piecemeal evolution of Lovecraft’s gods suggests that they are (at least in part) effusions and products of his unconscious mind. Considered in that light, these “deities” may yield yet more insight concerning Lovecraft’s aesthetic—an aesthetic that blends the emotional passion of wish-fulfillment with the intellectual discipline inherent in the most rigid philosophical methods.
44. Henry Sweet, *The Student’s Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), p. 38.
45. Lovecraft, *Letters 1925–1929*, p. 300.
46. Lovecraft, *Letters 1929–1931*, p. 321.
47. Lovecraft, *Letters 1911–1924*, p. 27.
48. Lovecraft, *Letters 1925–1929*, p. 123.
49. Lovecraft, *Letters 1911–1924*, pp. 7–8.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
53. Lovecraft, *Letters 1929–1931*, p. 51.
54. Lovecraft, *Letters 1932–1934*, pp. 35–36.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 36.