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H. P. LOVECRAFT: THE MAZE AND THE MINOTAUR

VOLUME I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by
John Lawson McInnis III
B.A., Southern Methodist University, 1963
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1965
May, 1975

In loving memory of Dr. Esmond Linworth Marilla--
scholar, teacher, friend.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to show the use of the Grecian myth of Theseus and the Minotaur in the writings of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, twentieth century American writer of fantasy and science fiction tales. The introduction retells the myth and develops it as an image of man's attempt to confront chaotic energies, both in his mind and in the cosmos, for only as man faces these chaotic energies can he find himself and rise up the neoplatonic ladder of spiritual evolution. The Minotaur is a symbol of the chaos behind visible appearances, and the maze is the path that leads to that chaos. For Lovecraft, Minotaural chaos is both within the mind of the individual artist and throughout the physical universe.

Lovecraft's fear of an omnipresent Minotaur comes from a blend of two sources: his childhood reading and his early experience. He read the myth in three literary sources, all of which he discovered before he was nine years old: Thomas Bulfinch's Age of Fable, Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tanglewood Tales, and Sir Samuel Garth's edition of Ovid's Metamorphoses. The myth's potency in Lovecraft's mind was intensified by childhood experiences that left the indelible impression that life is a struggle to cling to a precarious island of order amid universal chaos.

The theme of the early stories, beginning with "The Tomb," written in 1917, and ending with "He," written in 1925, is the discovery of the Minotaur in the maze of the past. The two most well-known stories from this period are "The Outsider," in which Lovecraft glimpses a monstrous reflection of himself in a mirror, and "The Rats in the Walls," in which he discovers the atavism at the base of his beloved English civilization and by extension, at the bottom of all human existence. At the climax of Lovecraft's career there is a change in his fictive point of view which begins with "The Colour Out of Space," written in 1927. From the outward gropings of his active exploration of the maze, Lovecraft reverses himself, falling back to gather his energies to muster a holding action for the final decade of his life. In "The Dunwich Horror," his most powerful narrative that was completed in 1928, he gathers the energy latent in his memories for a final defense of his island of order against the infinite chaos around him. "In the Walls of Eryx" is completed in 1935, eighteen months before Lovecraft's death, and marks the final consolidation of his failing energies. In this story the evolved perfection of Lovecraft's island of order amid universal chaos is realized. These three stories flow from his last attempt to create order amid a destructive and alien world. With the writing of "In the Walls of Eryx," Lovecraft's two-fold mission--the journey into the energy within the maze and final consolidation of order amid Minotaural chaos--is complete.

INTRODUCTION

I

The noted mythologist Joseph Campbell writes in The Hero with a Thousand Faces:

> Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation.[1]

One such avenue of inexhaustible energy is the myth of the Attican hero Theseus, modeled as it is upon that of Herakles. The man who became the national hero of Athens was the son both of Poseidon, god of the sea, and Aegeus, king of Athens. His mother was Aethra, a daughter of Pittheus, king of Troezen. Before Aegeus left for Athens, he told Aethra that when her son was able, he should lift a certain rock, take the sword and sandals Aegeus had put under it, and come to Athens.

When Theseus was sixteen years old, he lifted the rock to which Aethra led him. Taking the sword and sandals, he decided not to go to Athens by the easy sea-route, but to journey there by land and, by meeting the dangers along

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[1] Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 3.

the way, to prove his courage. On his journey he met and defeated several malefactors, including Sinis, the pine-bender, and Procrustes, who forced his guests' bodies to conform to the shape of his torturous bed.

Having arrived in Attica, Theseus was sent against the Marathonian bull by the unwitting Aegeus, who had been thus persuaded by the sorceress Medea, who was then living with the Athenian king. After Theseus' completion of this task, he survived an attempt by Medea to poison him because Aegeus recognized the sword the stranger was wearing as the one he had left under the stone. Medea fled, and Aegeus proclaimed his newly-arrived son the heir-apparent to the Athenian throne.

At this time came due the Athenian ransom of seven youths and seven maidens to be sent as a tribute to King Minos of Crete. Minos, together with Rhadamanthys and Sarpedon, was the son of Zeus and Europe, a maiden whom Zeus, in the form of a white bull, had carried off to Crete. But Zeus tired of Europe and left her in the care of Asterios, king of Crete, who raised her three children as his own. After Asterios died, Minos claimed the throne, but was kept from attaining his goal until he alleged his kingship by divine right. Promising to elicit the approval of the gods for his reign, Minos prayed that Poseidon would send from the sea a bull as a token of his approval. Minos promised that he would sacrifice this bull on the altar of Poseidon as a thank-offering. Poseidon sent the bull from the waters,

but it was so magnificent that Minos sacrificed another in its place.

Because of the broken pledge, Poseidon put into the mind of Minos' wife Pasiphae an unnatural love for the bull from the sea. Unable to constrain herself, Pasiphae secretly commissioned Minos' Athenian architect Dedalus to make for her a hollow wooden cow, covered with skin. The queen hid inside and her desire was consummated. Later Pasiphae's transgression became known to all when she bore a monstrous half-man, half-bull--the Minotaur.

To hide the shame of his queen, Minos commissioned Dedalus to construct the labyrinth, a structure of complex passages, in which to conceal the Minotaur. Later Minos' son Androgeos was killed by a Marathonian bull which he had sought to subdue. Because this misfortune occurred near Athens, Minos blamed the Athenians and exacted the tribute every seven years of seven youths and maidens as food for the carniverous Minotaur.

Theseus placed himself in the group of fourteen, telling Aegeus that he would kill the Minotaur and end the human slaughter. Aegeus stipulated that should Theseus succeed, he should raise white sails on the returning ship, in place of the customary black ones. When the ship reached Crete, Minos came to the harbor. Recognizing Theseus, Minos demanded that the Athenian prove himself a son of Poseidon by retrieving a gold ring that he thenceforth threw into the sea. Theseus dived into the sea, where some dolphins led

him to the palace of the Nereids. There Amphitrite, a sea goddess, gave Theseus her gold crown and the ring he sought.

When Theseus stepped ashore, Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, fell in love with him at first sight. Obtaining Theseus' pledge that he would take her with him, Ariadne gave the hero a clue of thread with which he could find his way out of the labyrinth after slaying the Minotaur.

After Theseus entered the maze and discovered the Minotaur, a long battle ensued. After the Minotaur's death, the victorious hero retraced his steps with the aid of Ariadne's thread and emerged from the maze. He took Ariadne with him as he had promised but later abandoned her on the island of Naxos. Perhaps as a consequence of this wrongful deed, Theseus neglected to exchange the white sails for the black ones, so that as he neared the harbor at Athens old King Aegeus, who was watching for Theseus' return, saw the black sails and in despair threw himself into the sea and was drowned. Theseus, having finished his labors and entered into his maturity, was therefore crowned king of Athens.

In The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Joseph Campbell interprets the myth of Theseus as a "rite of passage," a phenomenon common in primitive societies:

> The so-called rites of passage, which occupy such a prominent place in the life of a primitive society (ceremonials of birth, naming, puberty, marriage, burial, etc.) are distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of severance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind. Then follows an interval of more or less extended retirement, during which are enacted

> rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new estate, so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn.[2]

The myth of Theseus with its numerous ordeals that climax in the labyrinth of the Minotaur, may be interpreted as such "rites of passage," which, as Campbell points out, are "enacted rituals designed to introduce the life-adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new estate."

These "initiations" are so vital to man's nature that they seem outward projections of life-giving mental functions. Campbell writes:

> Apparently, there is something in these initiatory images so necessary to the psyche that if they are not supplied from without, through myth and ritual, they will have to be announced again through dream from within--lest our energies should remain locked in a banal, long-outmoded toy-room, at the bottom of the sea.[3]

Campbell describes the beginning of this process of self-discovery as follows:

> The first step, detachment or withdrawal, consists in a radical transfer of emphasis from the external to the internal world, macro- to microcosm, a retreat from the desperations of the waste land to the peace of the everlasting realm that is within. . . . In a word: the first work of the hero is to retreat from the world scene of secondary effects to those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case (i.e., give battle to the nursery demons of his local culture) and break through to the undistorted, direct experience and assimilation of what C. G. Jung has called "the archetypal images."[4]

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[2] Ibid., p. 10. [3] Ibid., p. 12.

[4] Ibid., p. 17.

The myth of Theseus is a journey to the internal world of "causal zones of the psyche," with the trials along the way as preparations for the inward journey through the labyrinth toward confrontation of "the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos."

J. E. Cirlot writes of the labyrinth in his Dictionary of Symbols:

> Some [labyrinths] are believed to have been conceived with the purpose of luring devils into them so that they might never escape. It is to be supposed, therefore, that for the Primitive, the maze had a certain fascination comparable with the abyss, the whirlpool and other phenomena.[5]

The whirlpool and abyss are images of the "exhaustless energies of the cosmos" that are the hero's goal. Cirlot suggests this connection of the maze with the cosmos as he writes:

> Waldemar Fenn suggests that some circular or elliptical labyrinths in prehistoric engravings . . . should be interpreted as diagrams of heaven, that is, as images of the apparent motions of the astral bodies. This notion is not opposed to the previous one: it is independent of it and, up to a point, complementary, because the terrestrial maze, as a structure or pattern, is capable of reproducing the celestial, and because both allude to the same basic idea--the loss of the spirit in the process of creation--that is, the 'fall' in the neoplatonic sense--and the consequent need to seek out the way through the 'Centre,' back to the spirit. There is an illustration in De Groene Leeuw, by Goosse van Wreeswyk (Amsterdam, 1672), which depicts the sanctuary of the alchemists' lapis, encircled by the orbits of the planets, as walls, suggesting in this way a cosmic labyrinth.[6]

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[5] J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1962), pp. 165-66.

[6] Ibid., pp. 166-67.

The journey of the hero is a perpetual search for this "Centre," which for Theseus took the form of the Minotaur in the labyrinth. Only by meeting such a conjunction of cosmic energy that threatens to annihilate his integrity can the hero give up his old nature to assume the new nature bestowed by rebirth. That the Minotaur is such a cosmic element is unmistakable, as Cirlot writes:

> Every myth and legend which alludes to tributes, monsters or victorious heroes illustrates at once a cosmic situation (embracing the Gnostic ideas of the evil demiurge and of redemption), a social implication (for example, of a state oppressed by a tyrant, or a plague, or by some other hostile force) and a psychological significance pertaining either to the collective or the individual (implying the predominance of the monster in man, and the tribute and sacrifice of his finer side: his ideas, sentiments and emotions).[7]

Cirlot clearly defines the hero's battle with the energies of the cosmos:

> The minotaur [sic] all but represents the last degree in the scale of relations between the spiritual and the animal sides in man. The predominance of the spiritual is symbolized by the knight; the prevalence of the monstrous is denoted by the centaur with the body of a horse or bull. The inversion of this, where the head is animal-like and the body human, implies the dominance of base forces carried to its logical extreme. The symbolism of the number seven (as in seven-headed dragons, or a period of seven years, or the sacrifice of seven youths) always denotes a relationship with the essential series (namely: the days of the week, the planetary gods, the planets, and the Vices and Cardinal Sins together with their corresponding Virtues). To vanquish a seven-headed monster is to conquer the evil influences of the planets (in consequence of the equation of the planets with the instincts and the baser forces).[8]

The hero, through confronting the Minotaur, the embodiment

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[7] Ibid., p. 200. [8] Ibid.

of "the instincts and baser forces" in man, is able to conquer his own disordering influences. The Minotaur in the labyrinth forms the point at which the hero blends his essence with chaos, so that he may amalgamate the "inexhaustible energies of the cosmos."

The goal of the amalgamation of these energies is movement back up the neoplatonic ladder of spiritual evolution. Cirlot writes concerning the thought of the anthropologist Mircea Eliade:

> Eliade notes that the essential mission of the maze was to defend the 'Centre'--that it was, in fact, an initiation into sanctity, immortality and absolute reality and, as such, equivalent to other 'trials' such as the fight with the dragon.[9]

Eliade comments on what he terms the "Center" in his book, The Myth of the Eternal Return:

> The architectonic symbolism of the Center may be formulated as follows:
> 1. The Sacred Mountain--where heaven and earth meet--is situated at the center of the world.
> 2. Every temple or palace--and, by extension, every sacred city or royal residence--is a Sacred Mountain, thus becoming a Center.
> 3. Being an axis mundi, the sacred city or temple is regarded as the meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell.
> . . . Hell, the center of the earth, and the "gate" of the sky are, then, situated on the same axis, and it is along this axis that passage from one cosmic region to another was effected.[10]

Because the hero Theseus reaches the "exhaustless cosmic energies" through his traversal of the labyrinth and battle

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[9] Ibid., p. 167.

[10] Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 12.

with the Minotaur, he attains the sanctity of the "Center" and advances to the next stage or level of being--in his case, that of kingship. By meeting the hellish Minotaur of baser forces, Theseus is himself purged through trial so as to rise up the axis mundi toward the "gate of the sky," that realm of a higher, more pure being. Eliade writes:

> The Center, then, is pre-eminently the zone of the sacred, the zone of absolute reality. Similarly, all the other symbols of absolute reality (trees of life and immortality, Fountain of Youth, etc.) are also situated at a center. The road leading to the center is a "difficult road" . . . and this is verified at every level of reality: difficult convolutions of a temple . . . ; pilgrimage to sacred places . . . ; danger-ridden voyages of the heroic expeditions in search of the Golden Fleece, the Golden Apples, the Herb of Life; wanderings in labyrinths; difficulties of the seeker for the road to the self, to the "center" of his being, and so on. The road is arduous, fraught with perils, because it is, in fact, a rite of the passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to the divinity. Attaining the center is equivalent to a consecration, an initiation; yesterday's profane and illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring, and effective.[11]

By travelling the "difficult road" to the "center," Theseus prepared himself for the final step in spiritual evolution that allowed him to become a philosopher king, the most worthy citizen of Plato's Republic. Campbell writes:

> The hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man--perfected, unspecific, universal man--he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore (as [Arnold] Toynbee declares and as all the mythologies of mankind indicate) is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed.[12]

Thus King Theseus, like Caesar Augustus in Ovid's

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[11] Ibid., pp. 17-18. [12] Campbell, p. 20.

Metamorphoses, rises to become the shining star, the light in the wilderness, the center of the Creation. The path to that light is described by Ovid:

> All things are changing; nothing dies. The spirit wanders, comes now here, now there, and occupies whatever frame it pleases. From beasts it passes into human bodies, and from our bodies into beasts, but never perishes. And as the pliant wax is stamped with new designs, does not remain as it was before nor keep the same form long, but is still the selfsame wax, so do I teach that the soul is ever the same, though it passes into ever-changing bodies. . . . All things are in a state of flux, and everything is brought into being with a changing nature.[13]

The power of mythic metamorphosis stated some 2,000 years ago by Ovid is reaffirmed for the modern epoch by Nathaniel Hawthorne, as he writes concerning himself in the preface to A Wonder Book:

> He [Hawthorne] does not, therefore, plead guilty to a sacrilege, in having sometimes shaped anew, as his fancy dictated, the forms that have been hallowed by an antiquity of two or three thousand years. No epoch of time can claim a copyright in these immortal fables. They seem never to have been made, and certainly, so long as man exists, they can never perish; but, by their indestructibility itself, they are legitimate subjects for every age to clothe with its own garniture of manners and sentiment, and to imbue with its own morality.[14]

Even in our modern age, then, there is no escaping the truth that myth is the only reality, for as Campbell states in The Hero of a Thousand Faces:

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[13] Publius Ovidius Naso, Metamorphoses, Vol. II, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 377.

[14] Nathaniel Hawthorne, A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales, Centenary Edition (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1972), p. 3.

> In the absence of an effective general mythology, each of us has his private, unrecognized, rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon of dream.[15]

II

Such a "pantheon of dream" was alive in the mind of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, twentieth century American writer of fantasy and science fiction tales; the purpose of this dissertation is to show the use of the Grecian myth of Theseus and the Minotaur in his writings. The Minotaur is a symbol of the chaos behind visible appearances, and the maze is the path which leads to that chaos. For Lovecraft, Minotaural chaos is both within the mind of the individual artist and throughout the physical universe.

Lovecraft's fear of an omnipresent Minotaur comes from a blend of two sources: his childhood reading and his early experience. He found the myth in three literary sources, all of which he read before he was nine years old: Thomas Bulfinch's Age of Fable, Nathaniel Hawthorne's Tanglewood Tales, and Sir Samuel Garth's edition of Ovid's Metamorphoses. The myth's position in Lovecraft's mind was strengthened by childhood experiences that left the indelible impression of life as a struggle to cling to a precarious island of order amid universal chaos.

The theme of the early stories, beginning with "The Tomb," written in 1917, and ending with "He," written in 1925, is the discovery of the Minotaur in the maze of the

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[15] Campbell, p. 4.

past, and the subsequent escape of the deranged narrator. At the climax of Lovecraft's career, there is a change in his fictive point of view. In "The Colour Out of Space," written in 1927, "The Dunwich Horror," completed in 1928, and "In the Walls of Eryx," finished in 1935, eighteen months before his death, Lovecraft is concerned with a two-fold mission: the journey into the maze and the consolidation of order amid Minotaural chaos.

Let us turn first to a consideration of the main events in Lovecraft's forty-seven years of life (from 1890 to 1937). The second chapter, "The Maze," attempts to show the role of Lovecraft's childhood development in the growth of his fiction. This chapter demonstrates that a motif in Lovecraft's stories is the Greek myth of the maze and the Minotaur, and explores the idea of the maze as it appears in Lovecraft's letters. The third chapter, "The Minotaur," reveals the nature of the Minotaur that waits within the maze, as it manifests itself in Lovecraft's letters. These three chapters form the foundation for the subsequent exploration of the maze-Minotaur myth in Lovecraft's fiction.

CHAPTER ONE

H. P. LOVECRAFT: THE LIFE

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born on August 20, 1890, in Providence, Rhode Island, to Winfield Scott Lovecraft and Sarah Susan Phillips Lovecraft. Three years after the writer's birth, Lovecraft's father, who was a paretic, climaxed a period of increasingly abnormal behavior with an incapacitating seizure. Lovecraft's father was thereby removed from any effective contact with the boy, spending the last five years of his life hospitalized in a state of total paralysis; he died in 1898. The influence exerted upon the young Lovecraft by his mother was thereby greatly increased. The nature of the elder Lovecraft's illness and death must have had a traumatic effect upon the boy's mother, for August Derleth, Lovecraft's chief biographer, says, "Sarah Phillips Lovecraft was a psychoneurotic, determined to shelter her son from the rigors and dangers of life."[1] Mrs. Lovecraft and her two sisters, Mrs. Franklin C. Clark and Mrs. Edward Gamwell, together exerted a strong and lasting influence on the young Lovecraft, and the effect of this possessive maternalism was to remain with him throughout his life.

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[1] August Derleth, H.P.L.: A Memoir (New York: Ben Abramson, 1945), pp. 9-10.

The strongest male influence on the young writer was his maternal grandfather, Whipple V. Phillips, a successful real estate broker, whose extensive library was much frequented by the young boy from his early childhood on: "When I was three or less, I listened avidly to the usual juvenile fairy lore, and Grimm's Tales were among the first things I ever read, at the age of four."[2] Partly because of his isolation, but mostly because of innate interest, Lovecraft turned to reading, and he consumed in rapid succession The Arabian Nights, Hawthorne's Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales, and Bulfinch's Age of Fable.[3] This reading was a powerful formative influence on his interests as well as a factor in his withdrawal from others and his consequent lifelong isolated mode of existence.

Lovecraft spent his childhood and adolescence near the Seekonk River at the edge of Providence. Having few friends, he invented many games which he could play alone along the riverbank and in the nearby woods and fields. Lovecraft wrote later that this acquaintance with nature "keenly touched my sense of the fantastic."[4] Lovecraft's frail physical condition and generally poor health must

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[2] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Some Notes on a Nonentity (London: Villiers Publications Ltd., 1963), p. 6.

[3] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1911-1924, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), I, 299.

[4] Lovecraft, Some Notes on a Nonentity, p. 7.

have been a factor in his appreciation of nature's more scenic aspects. His poor health and his mother's overprotectiveness made his school attendance very irregular, so that he was largely self-educated. In a letter to Alfred Galpin, a Wisconsin friend and correspondent, he writes:

> I am only about half-alive--a large part of my strength is consumed in sitting up or walking. My nervous system is a shattered wreck, and I am absolutely bored and listless save when I come upon something which peculiarly interests me. However--so many things do interest me, and interest me intensely, in science, history, philosophy, and literature.[5]

In a letter to R. H. Barlow, another correspondent and friend (who later became Lovecraft's literary executor) Lovecraft details the nature of his illness:

> . . . a very irregular heart action, kidney trouble (almost operated on for stress but diagnosed as nervous origin) at 9--aggravated by enforced violin lessons.[6]

Also mentioned in the Barlow letter are "frightful digestive trouble" and "atrocious sick headaches" which kept him "flat 3 or 4 days in a week." The indication of the psychological origin of much of his ill health is borne out by Lovecraft's statement:

> . . . Undoubtedly if anyone had known just what psychological shock or exhalation [sic] or stimulus to apply to me in youth (unfortunately there is no certain knowledge in this field that one can depend on for results) virtually all my semi-invalidism might have been sloughed off like an old snake's skin.[7]

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[5] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 67.

[6] Barton Levi St. Armand, "H. P. Lovecraft: The Outsider in Legend and Myth: A Biographical and Critical Study," Thesis Brown University, 1966, p. 12.

[7] Ibid., p. 13.

Partly because his contact with people was kept at a minimum, Lovecraft maintained most of his friendships through a voluminous correspondence which he carried on throughout a large portion of his life. Derleth comments on Lovecraft's semi-invalidism: "He began very early to create his own world, the world of the imagination."[8] This turning inward was fostered by Lovecraft's illness, indirectly helping further his writing career.

Lovecraft turned early to the writing of poetry, but his writing career may be fairly said to have begun with "The Beast in the Cave," a story in the gothic tradition which he wrote in 1905.[9] Much of his early writing was nonfiction, and took the form of various scientific articles, many of which were on astronomy. The young Lovecraft put out a hectographed journal called The Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy, and by age sixteen, he was contributing articles on astronomy to the Providence Tribune.[10]

In 1914, Lovecraft's writing received a major assist, for in that year he joined the United Amateur Press Association. Here he found an outlet for some of his work, as The United Amateur published "The Alchemist," which he had written in 1908. Another member of the U.A.P.A., W. Paul Cook, published "The Beast in the Cave" in his magazine, The Vagrant. The magnitude of the aid to Lovecraft rendered by

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[8] Derleth, Memoir, p. 11. [9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., p. 15.

the U.A.P.A. may be gauged by a perusal of part of a speech he made to the members of the Boston chapter of the U.A.P.A.:

> This is a case in which overstatement would be impossible, for Amateur Journalism has provided me with the very world in which I live. Of a nervous and reserved temperament, and cursed with an aspiration which far exceeds my endowments, I am a typical misfit in the larger world of endeavour, and singularly unable to derive enjoyment from ordinary miscellaneous activities. In 1914, when the friendly hand of Amateurdom was first extended to me, I was as close to the state of vegetation as any animal well can be--perhaps I might best have been compared to the lowly potato in its secluded and subterranean quiescence. With the advent of the United I obtained a renewed will to live . . . and I found a sphere in which I could feel that my efforts were not wholly futile.[11]

It was in 1917 that Lovecraft wrote his short story "Dagon" and inaugurated what was to develop into a full-time professional writing career; this was the first of the Weird Tales stories published in 1923, the year of the terror tale magazine's inception. But "Dagon" was not the first of his professionally published stories, for in 1922 Home Brew published his two stories, "Herbert West: Reanimator" and "The Lurking Fear." But Weird Tales was a pioneer in its field and proved to be Lovecraft's main market throughout the remainder of his life.

An equally important circumstance in the earlier life of the young Lovecraft had been the tragic death of Grandfather Phillips in 1904; this year marked the beginning of a continuing deterioration of the family fortunes. Be-

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[11] James Warren Thomas, "Howard Phillips Lovecraft: A Self Portrait," Thesis Brown University, 1950, p. 30.

cause he was unable to earn a steady wage in any way, Lovecraft was forced to live on the meager sum of fifteen dollars a week for the rest of his life.[12] This poverty brought him even more under the pervasive dominance of his two aunts, an unhappy situation which was yet compounded by the possessiveness of his nervous and unstable mother. Barton L. St. Armand of Brown University writes of Mrs. Lovecraft:

> From what is known of her early years, it appears that she led a genteel, sheltered existence, which ill prepared her for married life, subsequent widowhood, and the upbringing of her son.[13]

According to St. Armand, the debility of Lovecraft's mother had begun at about the time it was necessary to secure a legal guardian for the senior Lovecraft after his paretic seizure in 1893.[14] Partly because of the worsening family financial condition subsequent to the death of Grandfather Phillips, Lovecraft's mother entered a rapid decline, and in 1919 she was placed in Butler Hospital, a hospital for the mentally ill in Providence.

Mrs. Lovecraft's death there in 1921 was a blow to the young writer, although he was past thirty years old at the time. He writes: "The death of my mother on May 24 gave me an extreme nervous shock, and I find concentration and continuous endeavor quite impossible."[15] He writes to

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[12] Derleth, Memoir, p. 14. [13] St. Armand, p. 12.

[14] Ibid., p. 10.

[15] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 133.

his friend and correspondent Rheinhardt Kleiner of New York City:

> Psychologically I am conscious of a vastly increased aimlessness and inability to be interested in events; a phenomenon due partly to the fact that much of my former interest in things lay in discussing them with my mother and securing her views and approval. This bereavement de-centralises existence--my sphere no longer possesses a nucleus, since there is now no one person especially interested in what I do or whether I be alive or dead.[16]

Because Lovecraft could not hold a steady job, and because he thought his work as a creative artist not good enough, he began to offer his services as a ghost writer and revisionist:

> . . . by 1920 his letters speak casually of revision work, the re-writing of the stories and poems of others which was to form his main source of income.[17]

But the situation was more serious--serious enough to propel Lovecraft into the greatest unhappiness he would know in his later years:

> But financial matters grew increasingly serious; only twenty thousand dollars of Whipple Phillips's estate remained to support Lovecraft and his aunts for the rest of their lives--and how much Mrs. Lovecraft's illness drained off from the estate is not known. Howard knew that a "final disintegration" of the household was only a matter of time; this was no doubt one cause of the step which was to precipitate him into the deepest misery he was to know in his life--his marriage.[18]

His work as a revisionist brought Lovecraft several new friends and correspondents, among whom was Sonia

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[16] Ibid., p. 139.

[17] Thomas, "Self Portrait," p. 30.

[18] St. Armand, p. 47.

Haft Greene of Brooklyn, a divorced woman with artistic aspirations:

> Lovecraft met Mrs. Sonia H. Greene of New York at a convention of the National Amateur Press Association held at Boston in 1921. . . . This meeting resulted in a correspondence friendship which continued for many months, exclusively on paper.[19]

As the epistolary friendship progressed, Lovecraft edited stories written by Mrs. Greene. But the future Mrs. Lovecraft had other interests; she was a business woman with an executive position at a fashionable Fifth Avenue hat shop. Approximately ten years older than Lovecraft, Mrs. Greene had a grown daughter and was described as being tall, dark, gracious, and outgoing. Lovecraft's shy retiring ways attracted and challenged her:

> . . . I felt that if he could be made to feel more confident of his genius as a writer and to forget his "awful looks," as he put it, he would become less diffident and more happy. . . . I let him have his way. In nearly everything he was the "victor" and I the "vanquished." I would gainsay him nothing if I thought it would eradicate his complexes.[20]

Lovecraft's marriage to Sonia Greene in March of 1924 was motivated, at least in part, by his need to continue living under the influential sway of his now deceased mother.[21] By this means, he sought to protect himself from the outside world so as to continue the pattern of isolation

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[19] Thomas, p. 33.

[20] Sonia H. Davis, "Lovecraft as I Knew Him," in Something about Cats and Other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), pp. 236 and 239.

[21] Thomas, p. 44.

and matronly supervision generated by his childhood experiences. Other reasons for the marriage grew from Lovecraft's markedly ambivalent feelings toward the marital relationship, as St. Armand shows:

> Lovecraft's actual decision to marry was probably due to a combination of reasons. First among them was the realization that financial disaster and a change of living habits was inevitable; perhaps a whole new start would allow him to leave his life of close seclusion and penury behind--thus he did not even reveal his plans to either his aunts or closest friends. He would at last escape the syndrome of decay and decline which had characterized his life up to now; he would found a new household, assume the title of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Gent., and conduct his affairs in the atmosphere of security and love which had surrounded his idolized grandfather.[22]

Lovecraft's ambivalent feelings are confirmed by the bravado mingled with obvious trepidation in his letter of March 21, 1924, to Frank Belknap Long:

> I am glad the Big Event didn't make you faint! . . . We thought we'd give the world a knockout. . . . Then we prepared for the historick spectacle of the execution--hopping a taxi and proceeding at once to the Place de la Guillotine.
>
> . . . the Reverend George Benson Cox . . . was more than willing to perform the soldering process.[23]

A perusal of Lovecraft's letters written from 1924 to 1926 yields an ample account of his activities for the duration of his marriage:

> Each [letter from Lovecraft to his aunts in Providence] has a "diary" section, a day-by-day account of Lovecraft's miscellaneous activities. He wrote of his health, his diet, his lodgings, and his financial status. He told of escape from reality by means of tours of antiquarian exploration and trips to various museums; of job hunting, and the meetings of the

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[22] St. Armand, p. 53. [23] Thomas, pp. 37-38.

> "Kalem Club," [most of whose last names began with the letters "k," "l," or "m"] the circle of friends who met weekly, and often more frequently than that, to discuss science, philosophy, aesthetics, and literature. He told of interminable "bull sessions" lasting into the small hours in all-night cafeterias, and of protracted nocturnal walks through the deserted streets of the city.[24]

The "job hunting" alluded to took its due place among his other doings, but was doomed from the first, largely because of Lovecraft's nervous temperament and inability to mingle with the people of New York, many of whom were the foreigners whom he detested. Mrs. Lovecraft's salary remained their only income, and finally even this support was cut off by the loss of her job and her stay in a local hospital because of a nervous breakdown.[25] This misfortune brought about the dissolution of the "new household" at 259 Parkside (the Lovecrafts' address in Brooklyn) and resulted in the financial crisis which would, ultimately, bring an end to the marriage within a period of two years.[26]

The manifold incompatibilities of the tragically mismatched couple appeared in several areas of their relationship. Lovecraft writes to J. Vernon Shea in 1931:

> Financial difficulties, plus increasing divergences in aspirations and environmental needs, brought about a divorce--though wholly without blame or bitterness on either side.[27]

They were forced to reside in Brooklyn because of Mrs. Lovecraft's work; and his mild phrase, "divergences of environ-

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[24] Ibid., p. 42. [25] St. Armand, p. 62.

[26] Thomas, p. 56. [27] Derleth, Memoir, p. 16.

mental needs," is a sardonic understatement of Lovecraft's pathological hatred of the metropolis with its slum areas and rapidly growing groups of foreign inhabitants:

> . . . increasingly throughout the letters he revealed his longing for Providence and his growing hatred of New York; its newness, its garishness, its commercial atmosphere, and what he termed its "mongrel population."[28]

Because of these circumstances, Lovecraft's condition became so alarming that his close friend Frank Belknap Long made arrangements for Lovecraft's return to New England.[29] Lovecraft lived in Providence for the remaining years of his life, except for short excursions he made to visit friends in warmer climates.

Having been released from his marriage and having arrived in what was for him an emotionally healthful environment, Lovecraft was free to explore the countryside and to compose at his leisure the stories he was to draw from many of the scenes he visited. Unfortunately, his travelling about was curtailed by an allergy, for he could not exist for long in any temperature less than thirty degrees:

> His physical characteristics were such that he was a hot-weather man. . . . In cold weather all Howard's physical processes ceased to function. And cold weather for him started at seventy degrees. . . . At seventy degrees he began to lose the use of his muscles, followed by the going out of action of his respiratory, his circulatory, and his nervous systems.[30]

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[28] Thomas, p. 42. [29] Derleth, Memoir, p. 16.

[30] W. Paul Cook, "An Appreciation of H. P. Love-

Partly because of his lessening ability to tolerate cold weather, Lovecraft remained indoors in virtual seclusion for much of the year. He slept during daylight hours and preferred working by electric light at night. During the summer months he emerged to explore his cherished Providence under cover of darkness. Barton St. Armand has indicated the nature of Lovecraft's modus operandi during the last years of his life:

> The history of H. P. Lovecraft from the time of his return to Providence in 1926 and his death there in 1937 is more the history of a developing mind than a developing man. The man lived in oblivion; the mind lived in a cosmic world of good thought, good literature, and good friendship.[31]

During these years, a small amount of recognition began to come his way. A few of his stories were reprinted in the London Evening Standard, in Christine C. Thompson's Not at Night anthologies and in Dashiell Hammett's Creeps by Night. His stories were also published by pulp magazines such as Astounding Stories and Amazing Stories, but Weird Tales published more than eighty per cent of his work.

There were other changes; in 1932, one of his aunts, Mrs. Franklin C. Clark, died after a lengthy illness. A few months later, Lovecraft and his other aunt, Mrs. Edward Gamwell, moved to what was to be Lovecraft's last address: 66 College Street, adjacent to Brown Uni-

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craft," in Beyond the Wall of Sleep, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1944), p. 432.

[31] St. Armand, p. 83.

versity.

By this time he had about one hundred regular correspondents. From time to time he would turn to the writing of a new story, but these became fewer, mainly because he became more and more dissatisfied with his work, feeling that it fell too far short of his high writing standards. Barton St. Armand comments on Lovecraft's final years:

> In spite of undoubted economic hardship, and natural personal tragedies, such as the death of his elder aunt, Mrs. Clarke [sic] in 1932 when he was away on a trip, Lovecraft's life during his last ten years was a fulfillment of all he had ever worked for, rivalling at times even that lost Elysium of childhood at 454 Angell.[32]

By the mid 1930's Lovecraft's health had begun to decline at a swifter rate. Derleth says:

> There are references among his letters of 1936 to little disabilities and annoying infirmities, but there is nothing even remotely resembling complaint.[33]

His health grew much worse in late 1936. Lovecraft must have sensed the coming end, for on February 17, 1937, he wrote concerning a renewed interest in astronomy: "Funny how early interests crop up again toward the end of one's life."[34] Later that month he was taken to the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital in Providence. He died there early on March 15, 1937, of Bright's disease and cancer of the intestine. Three days later he was buried in his Grandfather Phillips' plot in Swan Point cemetery. Lovecraft's name is on the family shaft, but no stone marks his grave.

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[32] Ibid., p. 86.

[33] Derleth, Memoir, p. 19.

[34] Ibid., p. 20.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAZE

The definite influence of childhood memories in the literary efforts of H. P. Lovecraft may be seen in his work. Lovecraft had two childhoods: the outward one, an uneventful physical reality, the inner one, a mystery of the mind, a product of fantasy and hindsight generated in part by his childhood reading. The two childhoods are related closely, because the extreme unhappiness and misery which surrounded the young Lovecraft encouraged him to rely almost wholly on fantasy and games of the imagination for personal enjoyment. In a letter to Edwin Baird, the first editor of Weird Tales, Lovecraft gives an impression of the sharp contrast between the two modes of existence:

> Events? Nothing ever happens! That is why, perhaps, my fancy goes off to explore strange and terrible worlds.[1]

August Derleth, a noted science fiction writer in his own right, says in his biographical study of Lovecraft, H.P.L.: A Memoir:

> H. P. Lovecraft was one of those not unusual men who, for a variety of reasons, elect to live in a world of imagination, rather than face the reality of con-

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[1] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1911-1924, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 298.

temporary life in all its aspects.[2]

Some statements by Lovecraft in his short autobiographical sketch, "Some Notes on a Nonentity" bear directly upon the causes of his accentuated inner life:

> This absorption was doubly strong because of the ill health which rendered school attendance rare and irregular. One effect of it was to make me feel subtly out of place in the modern period, and consequently to think of time as a mystical, portentous thing in which all sorts of unexpected wonders might be discovered.[3]

When Lovecraft looks back to his childhood, it is invariably the one of his dreams that he remembers, as Derleth points out:

> The boy, to whom the favored reality was a world compounded in his own imagination, became the man who, having brought his world into being and into focus, looked back down the years and saw, as the greatest and most delightful reality, his childhood.[4]

Lovecraft seconds Derleth's assertion:

> It so happens that I am unable to take pleasure of interest in anything but a mental re-creation of other & better days. . . . So in order to avoid the madness which leads to violence & suicide I must cling to the shreds of old days & old ways which are left to me. Therefore no one need expect me to discard the ponderous furniture & paintings & clocks & books which help to keep 454 always in my dreams.[5]

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[2] August Derleth, H.P.L.: A Memoir (New York: Ben Abramson, 1945), p. 21.

[3] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Some Notes on a Nonentity (London: Villiers Publications Ltd., 1963), p. 7.

[4] Derleth, Memoir, p. 25.

[5] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1925-1929, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1968), p. 21.

It is not the externally factual world of his childhood that Lovecraft remembers so wistfully, but rather that world compounded of dreams and fancies:

> What I am, is a hater of actuality--an enemy to time and space, law and necessity. I crave a world of gorgeous and gigantic mystery, splendour and terror, in which regions no limitations save that of the untrammeled imagination [sic]. Physical life and experience, with the narrowings of artistic vision they create in the majority, are the objects of my most profound contempt.[6]

And in a letter to Maurice Moe, a Wisconsin friend and correspondent, Lovecraft states that to him (Lovecraft) "Imagination is the great refuge."[7]

The comments of a neighbor may give some idea of the actuality which the child Lovecraft so plainly detested. Clara Hess, who lived near the Lovecrafts during Lovecraft's childhood and adolescence, writes in the Providence Journal of September 19, 1948:

> I knew Howard's mother better than I knew Howard who, even as a young boy was strange and rather a recluse, who kept by himself and hid from other children because, as his mother said, he could not bear to have people look upon his awful face. She would talk of his looks (it seemed to be an obsession with her) which would not have attracted any particular attention if he had been normal as were the other children in the community. They, because of the strangeness of his personality, kept aloof and had little to say to him.[8]

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[6] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 67.

[7] Ibid., p. 185.

[8] Clara L. Hess, n.t., Providence Journal (Sept. 19, 1948), rpt. in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 247.

Another reason for this unconventional behavior stemming from his marked turn toward his world of imagination appears in Lovecraft's comments concerning games he played with his boyhood acquaintances:

> Amongst my few playmates I was very unpopular, since I would insist on playing out events in history, or acting according to consistent plots. Thus repelled by humans, I sought refuge and companionship in books, and here was I doubly blessed. The library was stocked with the best volumes.[9]

Already in Lovecraft's childhood is his imagination in full flower; this fact is intensified by his choice not to exert the effort to interact with his peers. Lovecraft writes:

> People get on one's nerves when they harbour different kinds of memories & live by different kinds of standards & cherish different kinds of goals & ideals. . . . if one cannot find a niche in congenial society, one can at best be alone, & that is enough for me. . . .[10]

He compares his aloneness to that of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and sees people around him as mere parts of scenes:

> To all intents & purposes I am more naturally isolated from mankind than Nathaniel Hawthorne himself, who dwelt alone in the midst of crowds, & whom Salem knew only after he died. Therefore, it may be taken as axiomatic that the people of a place matter absolutely nothing to me except as components of the general landscape & scenery. . . . My life lies not among people but among scenes--my local affections are not personal, but topographical & architectural. No one in Providence--family aside--has any especial bond of interest with me, but for that matter no one in Cambridge or anywhere else has, either. The question is that of which roofs & chimneys & doorways & trees & street vistas I love the best. . . . I am always an outsider--to all scenes & all people--but outsiders have their sentimental preferences in

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[9] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 7.

[10] James Warren Thomas, "Howard Phillips Lovecraft: A Self Portrait," Thesis Brown University, 1950, p. 116.

visual environment.[11]

Lovecraft feels that his own imagination is far richer and more exciting than any relationship with other people could ever be.

Another, somewhat detrimental, factor in the growth of his imagination is Lovecraft's relationship with his mother. Clara Hess comments further concerning Mrs. Lovecraft in the Providence Journal:

> I can remember that Mrs. Lovecraft spoke to me about weird and fantastic creatures that rushed out from behind buildings and from corners at dark, and that she shivered and looked about apprehensively as she told her story.[12]

Lovecraft was not the only member of the household who had an appreciable fantasy life, because he was following his mother's example. Derleth writes concerning the Lovecraft mother-son relationship:

> It is likewise evident, though he carefully avoided mentioning the subject in his letters later, that he was cognizant of his mother's mental state, as the precocious child he was became the equally precocious adolescent.[13]

It is in this atmosphere, permeated as it is by mental illness, that the acute mind of the young Lovecraft functions.

There is, however, a more healthful side to Lovecraft's state of mind. A motive for his mental turn inward may be found in a letter to Reinhardt Kleiner, one of his

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[11] Ibid., p. 127. [12] Hess, p. 249.

[13] August Derleth, "Addenda to 'H.P.L.: A Memoir,'" in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 251.

epistolary friends. In this letter, Lovecraft glances back at his childhood from an adult vantage point:

> [Upon the death of my grandfather W. V. Phillips in 1904] . . . mother and I were forced to vacate the beautiful estate at 454 Angell Street. . . . My home had been my ideal of Paradise and my source of inspiration--but it was to be profaned and altered by other hands. Life from that day has held for me but one ambition--to regain the old place and re-establish its glory--a thing I fear I can never accomplish. For twelve years I have felt like an exile.[14]

The poignancy and everlastingness of this banishment's effect upon Lovecraft may be seen in the following epistolary excerpts:

> The one time that I seriously thought of suicide was in 1904, when my grandfather died in the midst of business tangles (he was president of a land and irrigation corporation exploiting the Snake River, and the total destruction of the dam on which everything depended had caused a frightful situation) and left us all relatively poor. . . . I felt that I had lost my entire adjustment to the cosmos--for what was H.P.L. without the remembered rooms and hallways and hangings and paintings . . . and yard and walks and cherry trees and fountain and ivy grown arch and stable and garden and all the rest? How could an old man of 14 (and I surely felt that way!) readjust his existence to a skimpy flat and new household programme and inferior outdoor setting in which almost nothing familiar remained?[15]

In a letter to Edwin Baird, Lovecraft speaks in no uncertain terms of the effect this early trauma has had on his later philosophical outlook:

> By my seventeenth [year] . . . I had formed in all essential particulars my present pessimistic cosmic

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[14] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 40.

[15] Barton Levi St. Armand, "H. P. Lovecraft: The Outsider in Legend and Myth: A Biographical and Critical Study," Thesis Brown University, 1966, pp. 28-29.

> views. The futility of all existence began to impress and oppress me; and my references to human progress, formerly hopeful, began to decline in enthusiasm. Always partial to antiquity, I allowed myself to originate a sort of one-man cult of retrospective suspiration.[16]

This letter reflects the lost, happier side of the Lovecraft family situation; and his "cult of retrospective suspiration" is the doorway to that other world Lovecraft longs for all his life.

At 454 Angell Street was the Phillips estate with its extensive library and spacious grounds. Here, until 1904, Grandfather Phillips provided the emotional stability which the young Lovecraft both wanted and needed. In this environment he could nurture his imagination on such books and games as suited his inclination:

> When I was very small, my kingdom was the lot next my birthplace, 454 Angell St. Here were trees, shrubs, and grasses, and here when I was between four and five the coachman built me an immense summer house all mine own--a somewhat crude yet vastly pleasing affair, with a staircase leading to a flat roof from which in later years I surveyed the skies with my telescope.[17]

Within this serene but small island of safety, Lovecraft was protected from the outside world, with its mundane troubles and woes:

> The poor were simply curious animals about whom one spoke insincerely, and to whom one gave money, food, and clothing . . . like the "heathen" about whom the church people were always talking. Money as a definite conception was wholly absent from my horizon.[18]

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[16] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 302.

[17] Ibid., p. 104.

[18] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft:

The end of Lovecraft's placid existence separates him forever from his happy childhood. His letter continues:

> Rather was I a simple, unplaced entity, like the carefree figures moving through Hellenick myths.[19]

Lovecraft's mention of Greek myths suggests that he may see this early time in his life as the mythic Golden Age--never to be regained, but always to be remembered.

The happiness that Lovecraft found in his early life is one reason that portions of most of his stories can be traced to his childhood (whether real or imagined). Lovecraft vicariously crosses the otherwise unbridgeable gap between himself and his paradisal dreamland by writing his stories:

> . . . Nothing in the world is of value save one's early dreams & perspectives. . . . As for me--I have retired conclusively from the present age. In a cosmos of aimless chaos & upon a planet of futility & decay, nothing but fancy is of any importance. Time & space are the sheerest incidentals. . . .[20]

Lovecraft writes to Clark Ashton Smith, a friend and fellow writer living in California:

> The source of these images [that Lovecraft glimpses in his mind], as tested by repeated analysis & associative tracing, is always a composite of places I have visited, pictures I have seen, & things I have read--extending back in my experience to my very first memories at the age 1 3/4, & having about 3/4 of its extent in that period of life antedating my 18th year, when I left the birthplace to which I was so utterly attached. The more recent an experience is--be it objective, pictorial, or

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Selected Letters 1929-1931, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1971), p. 367.

[19] Ibid. [20] Thomas, p. 94.

> verbal--the more sharply vivid it has to be in order to gain a place in this subconscious reservoir of vision material.[21]

The power of these early memories and Lovecraft's strong wish to return to the dreamland composed of his past appear in a letter from Lovecraft to William Conover, Jr., another epistolary friend:

> My dreams usually go back very far in time, and it takes a long while for any new experience or scene or acquaintance to get worked into them. At least 3/4ths of them are laid at my birthplace, where I haven't lived since 1904, and involve those who were living in those days.[22]

The ultimate source of most of Lovecraft's mental imagery is a time very early in his life. Lovecraft believed that experiences which happened to him at later times lost their power to affect him exactly in relation to their lateness. Lovecraft's artistic vision relies for imagistic material upon his remembered (and even half-remembered) experiences from his early past. The continuation of the letter is Lovecraft's notation of the metamorphosis of memory into the fantastic and dreamlike imagery that appears in his fiction:

> But the real scenes of my dreams frequently merge into unknown and fantastic realms, and involve landscapes and architectural vistas which could scarcely be on this planet.[23]

Lovecraft's view of his own experience throughout his later life seems shaped and tempered by his memories of the primal

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[21] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 197.

[22] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Dreams and Fancies (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1962), p. vii.

[23] Ibid.

experiences of his childhood, for Lovecraft writes:

> . . . my own personal mess of subjective emotions has nothing whatever to do with my intellectual opinions. I have freely declared myself at all times (like everybody else in his respective way) a mere product of my background, & do not consider the values of that background as at all applicable to outsiders. The only way for the individual to achieve any contentment or harmonic relationship to a pattern is to adhere to the background naturally his, & that is what I am doing.[24]

Lovecraft's main goal is to find for himself an acceptable pattern of order. This pattern has a close affinity with his childhood island of safety--"the background naturally his."

Lovecraft's art seems to flow directly from the memory-panorama inherent in this realm of order:

> The commonest form of my imaginative aspiration--that is, the commonest definable form--is a motion backward in time, or a discovery that time is merely an illusion and that the past is simply a lost mode of vision which I have a chance of recovering.[25]

He tries to eliminate time, the substance of the gulf which separates him from his beloved childhood, the source of his constantly recurring and sustaining fantasies:

> I can shed the years uncannily by getting into some of my favorite childhood haunts here. In spots where nothing has changed, there is little to remind me that the date is not still 1900 or 1901, and that I am not still a boy of 10 or 11. Images and ideas and perspectives of that period flood up from subconsciousness with amazing vigour and volume, and do much to prove the relativity and subjectivity of time. Sometimes I feel that if I went home to my birthplace and up the steps, I would still find my mother and grandfather alive, and my old room and things

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[24] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 314.

[25] Ibid., p. 243.

in accustomed 1900 order.[26]

The fact that Lovecraft looks to his early life suggests that major motifs come from his remembered early experiences. And his theory of art centers around the idea that images must flow from the unconscious: ". . . the essence of artistic accomplishment lies in the subconscious."[27] In a letter to James F. Morton, curator of the Paterson, New Jersey museum and a close friend, Lovecraft re-emphasizes the value of his origins for his art:

> No one thinks or feels or appreciates or lives a mental-emotional-imaginative life at all, except in terms of the artificial reference-points supply'd him by the enveloping body of race-tradition and heritage into which he is born. We form an emotionally realisable picture of the external world, and an emotionally endurable set of illusions as to values and direction in existence, solely and exclusively through the arbitrary concepts and folkways bequeathed to us through our traditional culture-stream.[28]

Lovecraft's past contains the order he searches for:

> Without this stream around us we are absolutely adrift in a meaningless and irrelevant chaos which has not the least capacity to give us any satisfaction apart from the trifling animal ones. . . . We are merely wretched nuclei of agony and bewilderment in the midst of alien and directionless emptiness.[29]

The order Lovecraft gleans from the contemplation

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[26] August Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," in The Shuttered Room and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 156.

[27] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 112.

[28] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 207.

[29] Ibid.

of fleeting vistas from the past forms a necessary shield against a fuller awareness of the awesome, incomprehensible universe, a universe which for Lovecraft is a projection and symbolic remembrance of that first dissolution in 1904 of his serene but vulnerable world. Lovecraft suggests that the games and other activities of his childhood have a later symbolization in his fiction:

> The inner mind can rearrange, select, combine, dissociate and recombine, re-proportion, re-stress, and so on, till the "subjective" idea loses all resemblance to its unconscious sources; but it cannot create anything wholly new because the human mind is a blank apart from what sensory intake gives it. . . . Fantastic forms, if present, will tend to follow natural laws.[30]

Reaching back into time to the order of his remembered childhood, Lovecraft finds an antidote for the terror which is for him inherent in the vast universe. Lovecraft reaches back to an ordered Golden Age, made of his memories that generate the mysterious world of his tales:

> My theory of aesthetics is a compound one. To me beauty as we know it, consists of two elements; one absolute and objective, and based on rhythm and symmetry: and one relative and subjective, based on traditional associations with the hereditary culture-stream of the beholder. The second element is probably strongest with me, since my notions of enjoyment are invariably bound up with strange recallings of the past.[31]

Lovecraft's stories flow from his subjective memories, based as they are on "traditional associations with the hereditary culture-stream." In a letter to Bernard Dwyer,

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[30] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 273.

[31] Ibid., p. 229.

Lovecraft writes that discipline and control affect the final product, but at bottom the artist's finished stories have their basis in the fantasies of the past from the subconscious:

> What I really set out to say was simply this--that to me the only sensible way to compose seems to be to master one's technical medium thoroughly beforehand--before one thinks about the expressive part at all--and then to forget all about the rules, using the polished instrument as freely and unconsciously as a child lisps its pristine rattle. If this method can't be worked, then one isn't an artist by Nature, for . . . the essence of aesthetic accomplishment lies in the subconscious.[32]

Lovecraft feels that the work of the artist must stand upon inner promptings from the unconscious, a reservoir of memories and experiences.

Continuing in his letter to Dwyer, Lovecraft develops further the necessary primacy of unconscious impulse in the mind of the artist:

> You may wonder how I reconcile this precept with my statement that I correct a MS. repeatedly. Well--for one thing, the revision is about as unconscious as the first writing; being largely an automatic response to something in my head which rebels at something my hand has recorded.[33]

For Lovecraft even acts of re-organization and revision are ultimately directed by the emotion-laden ideas from the unconscious.

The energy latent in his childhood memories appears to flow out of his unconscious and into Lovecraft's fiction largely by way of the Grecian influence, which is substan-

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[32] Ibid., p. 112. [33] Ibid.

tial in his early reading. George Wetzel, a Lovecraft enthusiast and collector of Lovecraftiana, writes:

> It is possible also that Grecian mythic ideas played a formative part in . . . [Lovecraft's fiction], the more obvious reason for thinking so being the appearance in early poetry and fiction by Lovecraft of Greek and quasi-Greek concepts, places, and beings. . . . Lovecraft, when he sought for fancy and illusion to replace his disillusionment with religion and ugly mechanistic reality, found it amidst his memories of childhood tales and dreams. And what were these childhood tales and dreams but his intoxication with Graeco-Roman paganism, his building of altars to Greek gods and his belief that he had once spied fauns and satyrs dancing in an oak grove, which his several autobiographical sketches prominently stress?[34]

The various games enjoyed by the youthful Lovecraft and the rituals he practiced, together with the books he read, all combine into a significant influence on his writing career. An autobiographical quotation from Lovecraft seconds Wetzel's assertion:

> When I was six years old, I encountered the mythology of Greece and Rome through various popular juvenile media, and was profoundly influenced by it. . . . The imaginative stimulus was immense, and for a time I actually thought I glimpsed fauns and dryads in certain venerable groves. I used to build altars and offer sacrifices to Pan, Apollo, and Minerva.[35]

The strong factor in the Grecian influences on Lovecraft is the literature about Greek mythology and culture, the "various popular juvenile media," that Lovecraft read as a child. Lovecraft discusses these books in sev-

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[34] George T. Wetzel, "Notes on the Cthulhu Mythos," in The Shuttered Room and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 279.

[35] Lovecraft, Nonentity, p. 8.

eral of his letters. In a letter to Maurice Moe, he describes the beginnings of his reading:

> Grimm's Fairy Tales were my delight until at the age of seven I chanced upon Hawthorne's Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales. Then and there began an undying passion for classical mythology, which was soon increased by Bulfinch's Age of Fable. All the world became ancient Greece to me; I looked for Naiades in the fountain on the lawn, and forebore to break the shrubbery for fear of harming the Dryades. . . . I sang of the exploits of Gods and Heroes [in poetry].[36]

After beginning his reading with Grimm's Fairy Tales, Lovecraft entered the world of Greek mythology. He read Nathaniel Hawthorne's versions of some of the more popular Greek myths in A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales. Tanglewood Tales contains such myths as those of the dragon's teeth, the golden fleece, and the Minotaur. The last of these tales, the story of Theseus' destruction of the monster in King Minos' maze, occupies a central position in this study of Lovecraft's fiction.

In Hawthorne's account of the myth, there is vivid detail for the entertainment of children, for whose amusement and instruction the book is written. Lovecraft, at the time a child of seven or eight, would certainly have been exposed to the Minotaur myth as related in Hawthorne's work. In addition to reading Hawthorne's account, the young Lovecraft must have encountered the story in another version: Thomas Bulfinch's Age of Fable. Lovecraft's delight in this book is seen in a quotation from his letter

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[36] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 7.

of February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird:

> As soon as possible [in Lovecraft's seventh year] I procured an illustrated edition of Bulfinch's Age of Fable and gave all my time to the reading of the text, in which the true spirit of Hellenism is delightfully preserved, and to the contemplation of the pictures--splendid designs and half-tones of the standard classical statues and paintings of classical subjects. Before long, I was fairly familiar with the principal Grecian myths, and had become a constant visitor at the classical art museums of Providence and Boston.[37]

Lovecraft not only has read the story of the myth, but has developed sufficient interest to seek out actively the visual representations of the mythical personages themselves.

A third early encountered source of the Minotaur myth is given by Lovecraft in a letter dated December 14, 1914:

> Naturally the quotations in Bulfinch led me to a perusal of the classics in translation, and in particular of that marvelous literary mosaic known as Garth's Ovid. . . .[38] I now sought everything within my reach that pertained to the age of the classic translators.[39]

In reading Sir Samuel Garth's edition of the Metamorphoses, Lovecraft most certainly would have come upon Ovid's description of Theseus' slaying of the Minotaur in Book VIII.

These are three sources, any one of which could have given Lovecraft the myth of the Minotaur in its laby-

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[37] Ibid., pp. 299-300.

[38] Lovecraft refers here to a famous edition of Ovid's Metamorphoses, published in 1717 by Sir Samuel Garth, physician and poet. The title page of this edition reads in part: "Ovid's Metamorphoses translated by Dryden, Addison, Garth, Mainwaring, Rowe, Pope, Gay, Eusden, Croxall, and other eminent hands."

[39] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 7.

rinth. It is clear that all three of these sources became known to Lovecraft when he was six to eight years old--an impressionable age. The lasting influence of the Minotaur myth and accumulated knowledge of the lore of the Cretan bull is indicated by the following excerpt from Lovecraft's letter of January 30, 1931, to Robert E. Howard, a friend and fellow science fiction writer:

> It would be interesting to see whether bull fighting could trace any subterranean folk-connexion with ancient Crete. Owing to the fact that the very existence of the Cretan civilisation was forgotten in classical times, the link must be very slender; yet it would be too much to claim that the particular cult of the bull did not linger on somehow along the North African littoral. . . . That the Apis bull of Egypt had some Cretan connexion seems highly probable--and from this link a prolongation might well exist. Come to think of it, there's another possible link, too--for bull-fighting seems to have had a vogue in Thessaly, in northern Greece, quite independently of the Roman arena. . . . Certainly, the cult of the bull was tremendously grounded in the very ancient world, so that the later ancient world had much to remember.[40]

The gathering of information of the Mediterranean bull cult had begun at a relatively early stage of Lovecraft's life, for in a letter to J. Vernon Shea, Lovecraft implies that he had already learned in 1904 of Sir Arthur Evans' archaeological expedition of that year at the site of the ancient civilization of Crete. The letter reads in part:

> . . . for the first time I heard of the lost Minoan culture which Sir Arthur Evans was even then busily digging up in Crete.[41]

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[40] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 282.

[41] St. Armand, pp. 31-32.

A comparison of Lovecraft's early reading (from age six through eight) and his knowledge of the Evans expedition with the quotation from his letter to Howard which he wrote at the age of forty-one yield firm grounds for the conclusion that there has been a gradual growth of the bull cult idea in Lovecraft's mind throughout the greater portion of his intellectual life. The strength and depth of this influence may be correctly gauged when one notes that non-Christian Greek thought has gone far in erasing the effects of the orthodox Christianity which the boy's mother tried so hard to instill in him. Lovecraft writes:

> . . . I was early placed in the Baptist sunday school. There, however, I soon became exasperated by the literal Puritanical doctrines, and constantly shocked my preceptors by expressing scepticism of much that was taught me. . . . I read much in the Bible from sheer interest. The more I read in the Scriptures, the more foreign they seemed to me. I was infinitely fonder on the Graeco-Roman mythology, and when I was eight astounded the family by declaring myself a Roman pagan. . . . I had really adopted a sort of Pantheism, with the Roman gods as personified attributes of deity. My present opinions [in 1915, when Lovecraft was twenty-five] waver betwixt Pantheism and rationalism. I am a sort of agnostic, neither affirming or denying anything.[42]

These Lovecraft letters yield the probability that the cult of the Cretan bull with its myth of the Minotaur occupies a substantial portion of Lovecraft's mental energies from the time of his early contact with the myth. This myth is therefore a critical ingredient in Lovecraft's artistic creations.

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[42] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 10-11.

There are two parts of the Minotaur myth as it appears in the fiction of Lovecraft: the labyrinth, or search, and the Minotaur itself, the terrifying unknown that awaits discovery at the end of the maze. For Lovecraft this search takes the form of the exploratory investigation of his strange worlds of fantasy. According to August Derleth, Lovecraft fashions these imaginary worlds to fit his own specifications:

> His was an alert, imaginative mind, which quickly sought compensations for the things he could not do. He began early to construct his own world; he drew from life what he wanted and rejected all else. Since the country of his mind was strange and beautiful, the strange and beautiful appealed to him. The lore of the stars, the aspects of Providence at sunset, the haunting wonder of old things held to his imagination.[43]

Lovecraft creates this inner world to compensate for deficiencies and unpleasing aspects of his physical environment as well as to add to his own positive enjoyment. In a letter to Maurice Moe, Lovecraft writes:

> The only legitimate artistic motive is to please oneself--to utter things because they have to be uttered, or because it is by uttering them that one may be most comfortable. Imagination is the great refuge.[44]

He indicates that these fantasies necessarily flow from his own inner or unconscious mind almost of their own volition. The motive behind this phenomenon is strong, for the imagination does two things for Lovecraft: it protects him from

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[43] Derleth, Memoir, p. 22.

[44] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 185.

external drudgeries, and it gives him pure enjoyment as nothing else can. This inner world with its never-ending pleasures is a very real and vivid experience for Lovecraft:

> "For H. P. Lovecraft," wrote Donald Wandrei not long ago, "There was no such thing as 'sleep' in the ordinary meaning or usage of the word; he passed directly from the waking world into an equally vivid and detailed dream-world, complete with conversations, odors, colors, and the feel of objects and the taste of viands, but always with fantastic settings and adventures toward impelling dooms that were seldom chaotic or jumbled, but often developed step by step like well-constructed narratives."[45]

In the inner world of his mind, Lovecraft constructs an order which he does not find in the external world. This dream-cosmos takes the form of, as Wandrei puts it, a "well-constructed narrative;" thus the dream-fantasies lend themselves to a certain linear development.

Although, according to August Derleth, Lovecraft could not often translate these dreams directly into fiction, there is a very close relationship between his dreams and his stories. Lovecraft's letter of May 18, 1936, to Henry Kuttner, author of many science fiction stories, reads in part:

> Dreams are generally too vague & incoherent for literary exploitation, but once in a while something almost ready-made comes along. I am a very vivid dreamer, and have frequently made use of dreams in stories. The Statement of Randolph Carter [an early Lovecraft story] is virtually a literal transcript of a nightmare I experienced

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[45] Lovecraft, Dreams and Fancies, p. vii.

in December 1919.[46]

This mental proximity of dream and finished story shows that much of the material for Lovecraft's fiction flows from his unconscious mind, that area of his psyche in which emotion predominates. The subordination of the conscious intellect in favor of Lovecraft's emotive energies may be an act of conscious volition, as can be seen in the following extract from Lovecraft's letter of May 20, 1926, to Frank Belknap Long:

> What liking I have for logick and analysis is purely an aesthetic one--a wish to arrange and classify things in patterns whose configurations shall possess, in the realm of ideas, that decorative beauty of form possesst by tangible objects of art and nature in the realm of matter.[47]

For Lovecraft the intellect may be the servant of the feelings and intuitive insight, as ideal beauty, not logical or material fact, is his constant goal:

> Art deals with beauty rather than fact, and must have the liberty to select and arrange according to the traditional pattern which generations of belief and reverence have marked with the seal of empirical loveliness.[48]

In this letter to August Derleth, Lovecraft appears to accept art and beauty of form because he wishes to fulfill inward, emotive pleasures. He is here espousing the deliberate curtailment of the intellect in favor of aesthetic,

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[46] Ibid., p. ix.

[47] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 52.

[48] August Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," in The Shuttered Room and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 143.

primarily emotional, satisfactions:

> Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but the creation of a given sensation.[49]

And Lovecraft believes that to probe arbitrarily beyond the tenuous realities of the aesthetic order is to invite disaster:

> Beyond or behind this seeming beauty lies only chaos and weariness, so that art must preserve illusions and artificialities rather than try to sweep them away.[50]

Lovecraft here broadly hints that for himself art, like the realm of the imagination, is a great refuge; he implies that it is the duty of art to preserve illusion so that the dry reality of the external environment will not come too close. In a letter to his disciple Elizabeth Toldridge, Lovecraft translates this implication into a mandate:

> If we can happily do it, we might just as well believe in Santa-Claus, God, a green-cheese moon, fairies, witches, good and evil, unicorns, ghosts, immortality, the Arabian Nights, a flat earth, etc., etc., as learn the real facts about the universe and its streams and patterns of eternal and alternatingly evolving and devolving energy. Truth becomes important only when it is necessary to establish our emotional satisfaction.[51]

However, as his statement about the universe and its energy shows, his scientific curiosity is always lurking in the

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[49] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," in Dagon and other Macabre Tales, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p.350.

[50] Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," p. 143.

[51] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 23.

background, ever ready to sweep aside the tenuous veil of illusion in a search for scientifically verifiable truth:

> And yet certain elements--notably scientific curiosity and a sense of world drama--held me back [from suicide in 1904]. Much in the universe baffled me, yet I knew I could pry the answer out of books if I lived and studied longer. . . . I had not resented my lack of solution as long as I expected to know someday--but now that the idea of never knowing presented itself, the circumstance of frustrated curiosity became galling to me.[52]

The nature of the emotional satisfaction Lovecraft desires directs attention to his memories of childhood, which help protect him from the emotional ravages of the physical world and bring him feelings of artistic satisfaction and enjoyment. For Lovecraft, intellect and emotion are wedded in a constant quest for both scientific truth and the truth of the fantastic, vistaed landscape. The intellect is the instrument of the emotions for Lovecraft; for this reason his search for scientific fact is really a fantastic voyage--a movement away from prosaic reality into the maze of his mind. Lovecraft tries to delineate in his fiction this combined search for scientific truth and childhood memory:

> I have often thought of attempting . . . the delineation of that vague dream-life of wonder and beauty which one mentally reconstructs around the isolated high spots of aesthetic experience after their actual realistic setting and prosaic interludes have receded far into the past. Such a record would not be confined to childhood alone, although it would include a good deal of childhood.[53]

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[52] St. Armand, pp. 30-31.

[53] Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," p. 152.

Thus Lovecraft reaches into the memories of his childhood to evoke his artistic vision.

His letter continues:

> In my hands, it would probably be more remote from reality, and more coloured with a fantastic background not truly mnemonic at all, but rather of the nature of sheer imagination.[54]

Lovecraft seeks his lost past in the wellsprings of his fertile imagination:

> As for the nature of dreams--I think that there is no question but that they consist of dissociated scraps of previous impressions (some utterly forgotten and ordinarily deeply buried in the subconscious) regrouped by the undisciplined sleeping fancy into new and sometimes utterly unfamiliar forms. Their surface aspect is strange, yet every basic ingredient is something the mind has picked up at one time or another. . . . from books, pictures, experiences, etc.[55]

Lovecraft himself would be the first to say that his fiction is a summing up of his own early experiences and a reinterpretation of them. The letter continues:

> Yes--I have often had that sense of previous knowledge of things absolutely new to me, but in most cases I have been able to trace it to very early and largely forgotten impressions.[56]

The re-cognition of influential experiences from the past is central to the Lovecraft canon, because the recalling of fantasized memory sketches fascinates the inquisitive Lovecraft. The books which he read at such an early age engraved themselves in his imagination, and emerge in his fiction. Lovecraft continues:

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[54] Ibid. [55] Lovecraft, Dreams and Fancies, p. 42.

[56] Ibid., p. 43.

> For example--a certain village landscape at sunset looked familiar when first I saw it, and I eventually traced it to a picture I had seen in virtual infancy. Vague dreams of pseudo-memory--the sort involving strange cyclopean cities--usually refer back to forgotten bits of reading or pictures, more or less combined in a new way.[57]

Lovecraft's searching out the pictured village scene suggests his effort to find once again his lost childhood. He may find a prototype of this childhood in the Golden Age of his beloved Greek mythology.

There lies in Lovecraft's past a somewhat darker strand, a source of terror which counterbalances the bliss he seeks. There are several sources of this darker motif, so apparent in Lovecraft's fiction. One such is the terror tales of Grandfather Phillips:

> I never heard oral weird tales except from my grandfather--who, observing my tastes in reading, used to devise all sorts of impromptu original yarns about black woods, unfathomed caves, winged horrors . . . old witches with sinister cauldrons, and "deep, low moaning sounds. . . ." He was the only other person I knew--young or old--who cared for macabre and horrific fiction.[58]

The strand of horror winds among the images of perfection in Lovecraft's thought:

> Indeed, it is my chief delight to weave verbal images of unreality, in which I can flout, rearrange, and triumph over the impersonal cosmic pattern at will. . . . Emotionally I stand breathless at the awe and loveliness and mystery of space with its ordered suns and worlds. In that mood I endorse religion, and people the fields and streams and groves with the Grecian deities and local spirits of old--for at heart I am a pantheistic pagan.[59]

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[57] Ibid. [58] St. Armand, pp. 20-21.

[59] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 312.

Because of this emotive absorption, Lovecraft seems to guide his dreams and fancies toward the wish fulfillment he can never realize in his daily life. Apparent in the phrase "triumph over the impersonal cosmic pattern" is a hint of the darker strand which is always interwoven in Lovecraft's search--the quest that is the shape and outline of his entire life and work:

> I know that these trips and tales will never take me to the marvelous city of pre-cosmic memory, & I am probably rather glad of that knowledge, in that it secures for me an eternity of never-tarnished vision & never-sated quest through all the years of my consciousness.[60]

This search or "dream-quest" (one of his novellas is titled The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath) appears throughout Lovecraft's fiction as the enactment of the maze motif. For him, his tales are trips or journeys; they are attempts in writing to discover what Lovecraft has termed "the marvelous city of pre-cosmic memory"--a phrase which clearly reflects the idea of the Golden Age.

The universe becomes a maze-like theater of art for Lovecraft's search:

> Space and time become vitalised with literary significance when they begin to make us subtly homesick for something "out of space, out of time." . . . To find those other lives, other worlds, and other dreamlands, is the true author's task.[61]

The search or maze is in the center of the artist's purpose--for only by exploring the maze of his own mind can

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[60] Ibid., p. 126.

[61] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 143.

Lovecraft find his dreamlands which lie "out of space, out of time." He seeks to discover the dreamland of his semi-mythical childhood through his writing.

Lovecraft's fiction reflects a personal involvement commensurate with that of his dream-quest. In a letter dated February 1928, to August Derleth, he writes:

> A story ought to be lingered over--to be lived through vicariously, as it were--by the author; so that each scene is sharply limned in his own consciousness. . . .[62]

Mrs. C. M. Eddy, Jr., a close friend of Lovecraft, gives a firsthand account of an incident which illustrates Lovecraft's assertions:

> He [Lovecraft] started to read this creepy yarn ["The Rats in the Walls"] to us at midnight--and continued, placing special emphasis on certain words as he read, his facial expressions changing as he became so absorbed in what he was reading aloud that it seemed he was actually living the story, making it come alive. The conclusion of the story left us literally gasping![63]

Lovecraft becomes so emotionally involved in reading his story that the act of re-reading develops into a mental journey or search. Further evidence for Lovecraft's strong emotional involvement with the search or maze motif with its trajectory toward the unknown is given by his letter of February 2, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> I used to write detective stories very often, the works of A. Conan Doyle being my model as far as plot

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[62] Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," p. 149.

[63] Mrs. Clifford M. Eddy, "Howard Phillips Lovecraft," in Rhode Island on Lovecraft, n.ed. (Providence, R.I.: June 1945), pp. 16-17.

> was concerned. But Poe was my God of Fiction. I used to love the horrible and the grotesque--much more than I do now--and can recall tales of murderers, spirits, reincarnations, metempsychoses and every shudder-producing device known to literature![64]

Lovecraft's love of the detective story augments the power of the search or maze motif in his mind and fiction.

Lovecraft encounters anticipated terror almost everywhere, because for him the sense of terror is so real as to pervade all Nature:

> Nature, too, keenly touched my sense of the fantastic. My home was not far from what was then the edge of the settled residence district, so that I was just as used to the rolling fields, stone walls, giant elms, squat farmhouses, and deep woods of rural New England as to the ancient urban scene. This brooding, primitive landscape seemed to me to hold some vast unknown significance and certain dark wooded hollows near the Seekonk River [which passes through Providence] took on an aura of strangeness not unmixed with vague horror. They figured in my dreams--especially those nightmares containing the black, winged, rubbery entities which I called "night gaunts."[65]

This obscure horror pervades the mind of the young Lovecraft and becomes an integral part of his artistic vision. The sense of terror appears throughout his stories as the omnipresent and overpowering fear of the unknown and is a pre-eminent effect of almost all of Lovecraft's fiction. This pervasive apprehension is the fear of all that might lie beyond the sharply perceived limits of his small realm of constructed order.

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[64] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 20.

[65] Lovecraft, Notes on a Nonentity, p. 8.

In an excerpt from his long essay, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," Lovecraft sheds further light on the sources of his ontological dread:

> When to this sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself. Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse.[66]

Lovecraft suggests that his own fear of the unknown comes in part from a childhood fear of the dark. He writes to Marian F. Barner, a librarian in Providence:

> No--we are not scared of the dark now, though we used to be prior to 1895 or '96. Our grandfather cured us of this tendency by daring us (when our years numbered approximately 5) to walk through certain chains of dark rooms in the fairly capacious old house at 454 Angell. Little by little our hardihood increased.[67]

Within this early childhood experience may lie some of the roots of Lovecraft's propensity for the maze, which appears here as a series of "chains of dark rooms." Here is a very real search for the unknown, especially for a five-year-old child.

Thus there are powerful fears of both the outdoor and indoor kind in the childhood of Lovecraft. He brings

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[66] Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," p. 349.

[67] Thomas, p. 15.

the two kinds together in a letter to his mother's sister, Lillian Phillips Clark:

> Landscapes like [those of New England] have a deeply ingrained character, and exude a positive type of antiquity. To enter one is almost like walking at will through time and space, or climbing bodily into some strange picture on the wall.[68]

Here the maze appears as the avenue of movement from the realistic to the fanciful. The path into antiquity comes to Lovecraft through his early reading and experience.

In a letter to Clark Ashton Smith, a sculptor and fellow science fiction writer, Lovecraft further declares his artistic indebtedness to the home of his childhood:

> What I need is simply my own fabric as a matter of cosmic symmetry. . . . The ethereal sense of identity with my own native and hereditary soil & institutions is the one essential condition of intellectual life--& even of a sense of complete existence & waking reality--which I cannot do without. Like Antaeus of old, my strength depends on repeated contact with the soil of the Mother Earth that bore me.[69]

Lovecraft's discussion of the Greek myth of the giant Antaeus shows his strong attachment for the home of his childhood. This powerful need for his "own fabric as a matter of cosmic symmetry" leads Lovecraft to search for the ordered microcosm of his fantasy-childhood.

Lovecraft's attachment to the artifacts and atmosphere of his childhood is balanced by an opposing tendency, the urge to vicariously explore the infinite depths of the awesome cosmos that contains "the hidden and fathom-

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[68] St. Armand, p. 225.

[69] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 177.

less worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars." In an undated letter to Clark Ashton Smith, Lovecraft writes:

> There are really two distinct personalities in me--the cosmic & fantastic on the one hand, & the historical, domestic and antiquarian on the other hand.[70]

These two tendencies, the love of the familiarly and personally sentimental and the striving for the objective and infinite, appear to be irreconcilably divergent. The opposing tendencies form a dichotomy in Lovecraft's mind, a dichotomy which is a necessary ingredient for his creative mental activity, as if the two polar tendencies form the opposing poles of some great magnet.

When Lovecraft speaks of one of these affinities, the other, however disguised, is never far away. Lovecraft himself may recognize this phenomenon in his thinking. He writes to Derleth:

> The idea of impersonal pageantry and time-and-space defying fantasy has always--quite literally from the very dawn of [my] consciousness--been so inextricably bound up with my inmost thought and feeling, that any searching transcript of my moods would sound highly artificial, exotic, and flavored with conventional images, no matter how faithful it might be to truth. What has haunted my dreams for nearly forty years is a strange sense of adventurous expectancy connected with landscape and architecture and sky-effects.[71]

This "strange sense of adventurous expectancy" lies near the center of his thought and unites "conventional images"

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[70] Ibid., p. 159.

[71] Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," p. 153.

and "time-and-space defying fantasy." This expectancy forms the union of the opposing poles of Lovecraft's creativity. After writing of fantasy and sky effects, Lovecraft turns to thoughts of the past and memories of his childhood. His letter to Derleth continues:

> I can still see myself as a child of 2-1/2 on the railroad bridge at Auburndale, Mass., [the town where the Lovecrafts lived for a short time until the senior Lovecraft's paretic seizure in 1893] looking across and downward at the business part of the town, and feeling the imminence of some wonder which I could neither describe nor fully conceive--and there has never been a subsequent hour of my life when kindred sensations have been absent. I wish I could get the idea on paper--the sense of marvel and liberation hiding in obscure dimensions and problematically reachable at rare instants through vistas of ancient streets, across leagues of strange hill country, or up endless flights of marble steps culminating in tiers of balustraded terraces.[72]

Lovecraft reaches into his childhood to realize the feeling of "adventurous expectancy" which synchronously comes from his mental imagining of the infinite gulfs of outer space. Both the familiarly finite and the unknown infinite serve as a stage on which Lovecraft can bring forth life-giving fantasies, for either frame of reference serves as the avenue that leads to "the sense of marvel and liberation hiding in obscure dimensions." These awesome dimensions are reached through the maze--here seen as "vistas of ancient streets."

The closeness of these two modes of fancy, the finite and the infinite, is pointed out by Lovecraft in his

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[72] Ibid.

letter of January 17, 1936, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> The greater number of my dreams & visions are fantastic syntheses, etherealizations, & rearrangements of the landscape and architectural impressions which impinge on me during waking hours, & during these waking hours there is no pleasure which can compare with the experience of seeing strange old towns & houses & scenic vistas. These things are, & always have been, the most potent stimuli my imagination can possibly encounter; hence they usually form the points of departure for my excursions into the outside cosmic gulfs. . . . My chief use of the visible world is simply to provide a springboard for leaps into abysses & dimensions forever beyond visibility.[73]

The fusion of cosmic fantasy and childhood memory into "fantastic syntheses, etherealizations, & rearrangements" appears in Lovecraft's use of old buildings and towns and scenic vistas for what he terms a "springboard" to launch his mind into the infinities of outer space.

These old buildings and scenic vistas are doubtless closely connected with Lovecraft's remembered childhood scenes, because these childhood scenes and memories--especially the early ones--strongly stimulate Lovecraft's imagination. Lovecraft uses his finite childhood memories as a doorway or avenue into the originative wellspring of his unconscious. His choice of bookplate design is evidence for this contention:

> The fine colonial doorway is like my bookplate come to life, though of a slightly later period (circa 1800) with side lights and fan carving instead of a fanlight.[74]

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[73] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, pp. 111-12.

[74] St. Armand, p. 104.

Lovecraft's doorway to his wonderland of books opens into the maze of his mind and is the gateway to both the personal past and the cosmic void. The trip into the maze takes the form of fearful fantasies of the infinite depths that form the backdrop for the enactments of mental forces in Lovecraft's fiction.

Lovecraft is acutely conscious of time as a continuum in his mind which stretches back so far as to include his ancestors.[75] Lovecraft seems to believe that these ancestors influence his life to a great extent; he may see himself as closely united with the members of the human race who have gone before him. Lovecraft's strong preoccupation with this idea is seen in his letter to Woodburn Harris, a fellow epistolarian:

> There is hardly a man living who hasn't two distinct pictures of his own ego--the individual picture, comprising his single personal self, & the panoramic picture, comprising his ancestry and posterity either physical or cultural, in which his personal self figures as one of a continuous series of manifestations, all of which possess a poignantly-felt relationship.[76]

This strong predilection for even the distant past foreshadows another major formative influence. An additional factor in Lovecraft's mental development is the concept of evolution as formulated by Charles Darwin. This concept strongly influences Lovecraft's thinking and appears repeatedly in his fiction. In his letter of February 27,

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[75] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 83.

[76] Ibid.

1931, to Frank Belknap Long, Lovecraft speaks of the "black abyss" as if it were both the depths of limitless outer space and a mental concept of the depths where first began the process of evolution:

> The process of delving into the black abyss is to me the keenest form of fascination, & it is my conviction that this process demands the exercise of those parts of the human organism which represent the latest & most complex degree of evolution.[77]

With his sharply vivid imagination Lovecraft looks beyond the limits of the known world and back down the corridors of time and evolution into the wellspring of life. This temporal avenue is the maze, the path to that which is most mysterious and monstrous in Lovecraft's many-leveled imagination:

> Surely the strange excresences of the human fancy are as real--in the sense of real phaenomena--as the commonplace passions, thoughts, and instincts of everyday life. There is a giddy exhilaration in looking beyond the known world into unfathomable deeps, and a haunting thrill in thoughts of the cryptically horrible.[78]

The twin elements of space and time join to form the maze through which Lovecraft can pass beyond the known world into the unique world of his mental energies. To realize or conceive what he terms "the cryptically horrible," Lovecraft arrives at a point sufficiently distant from the distracting world of commonplace thoughts. The motif of the maze, whether in spatial or temporal mode, is

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[77] Ibid., p. 299.

[78] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 116.

the avenue which leads Lovecraft to the central wonder within his imagination. August Derleth writes in the addenda to his memoir of Lovecraft:

> To a young man who had been sharply aware of much unhappiness and more than the usual share of spiritual and physical suicide, the mystery of the unknown would have an uncommonly strong appeal. For the unknown must have appealed to him as but another face of that intimate world of his own, with a personal relationship to that world of twilight Providence, as remote, as charming--and yes, terrible, too--as unchanging, so that the flight forward in the unknown paralleled the flight backward into memory, where the passage of time glossed over and palliated the less happy experiences of those years when his sensitivity to the disturbingly contradictory impressions of his mother's love and apparent abhorrence helped to mold and shape his direction in the world of American letters.[79]

Here again is the mergence of two modes of thought in Lovecraft's mind: the venturing out to the unknown is coupled with the exploration of the past. The Antaeus myth records Lovecraft's degree of movement away from a central point in his mind (the old home at 454 Angell Street) toward the terrible void that surrounds the point of safety within his past.

There is a hint in Lovecraft's Notes on a Nonentity of what he is searching for within the memories of his early life:

> The interests which have led me to fantastic fiction were very early in appearing, for as far back as I can clearly remember I was charmed by strange stories [the tales told him by Grandfather Phillips] and ideas, and by ancient scenes and objects. Nothing has ever seemed to fascinate me so much as the thought of some curious interruption in the prosaic

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[79] Derleth, "Addenda," p. 252.

> laws of nature, or some monstrous intrusions on our familiar world by unknown things, from the limitless outside.[80]

These terrible intrusions foreshadow that other portion of the great generative myth shaping Lovecraft's fiction: the Minotaur, which waits at the end of the maze to be discovered by the keen-minded searcher.

The maze or path of investigation leads Lovecraft into his uniquely imaginative world. He seeks the unknown forces from the limitless outside by simultaneously looking outward toward the infinite universe and inward to the living depths of his mind. Both these fascinating areas freely merge in Lovecraft's fiction as the black abyss he is eager to explore. By coinciding the intellect of outward observation and the emotion of imagination, Lovecraft paints with the living brush of his fancy on the canvas of his inner sky:

> . . . the sky, with its tale of eternities past and to come, and its gorgeous panoply of whirling universes, has always held me enthralled. And in truth, is this not the natural attitude of an analytical mind? . . . But what is the cosmos? What is the secret of time, space, and the things that lie beyond time and space? What sinister forces hurl through the black incurious aether these titanic globes of living flame, and the insect-peopled worlds that hover about them? . . . The veil hangs tantalisingly--what lies on the other side?[81]

From his childhood to his adulthood, Lovecraft is utterly entranced by "the black incurious aether" and all the in-

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[80] Lovecraft, Notes on a Nonentity, p. 6.

[81] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 107.

sight-provoking mystery which it holds. For Lovecraft the stars form the "living flame," a counterpart for the raw energy from the wellspring of his unconscious.

The conterminous relationship in Lovecraft's mind of the outer cosmos and the inner psyche is suggested by an entry he makes in his Commonplace Book, a work containing story ideas for possible future reference:

> Hideous world superimposed on visible world. Gate through. Power guides narrator to ancient and forbidden book with directions for access.[82]

Here is the living dichotomy between conscious and unconscious thought in Lovecraft's mind. His "hideous world" is the unconscious mind with its fantasies to be explored, and the visible world is the springboard for the conscious psyche that launches Lovecraft into both outer space and inner mind. He writes:

> It is man's relation to the cosmos--to the unknown--which alone arouses in me the spark of creative imagination. . . . Pleasure to me is wonder--the unexplored, the unexpected, the thing that is hidden and the changeless thing that lurks behind superficial mutability. To trace the remote in the immediate; the eternal in the ephemeral; the past in the present; the infinite in the finite; these are to me the springs of delight and beauty.[83]

Lovecraft's fusion of these opposites--which may all be subsumed under one head: the conscious mind and the unconscious mind--gives him his springboard into the realm of

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[82] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, The Notes & Commonplace Book Employed by the Late H. P. Lovecraft, ed. Robert H. Barlow (Lakeport, Calif.: Futile Press, 1938), p. 109.

[83] St. Armand, pp. 163-64.

wonder. Lovecraft's unconscious mind is the black abyss, the exploration of which requires "the latest and most complex degree of evolution,"[84] i.e., a strong and curious intellect with the power to explore the abyssal depths.

In his essay "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection," Lovecraft continues the elucidation of the intellect-emotion dichotomy of conscious and unconscious mental processes:

> Most decided and obvious of all the eternal conflicts of human thought is that between the reason and the imagination; between the real and the material, and the ideal or spiritual. . . . Only the impartial, objective, dispassionate observer can form a just verdict of the dispute.[85]

There is a constant dispute, an almost magnetic polarity inherent in Lovecraft's creative mentation; this dispute is the basic, vitalizing mergence of the conscious intellect and unconscious emotive force. Lovecraft visualizes one of the factors in this vital conjoinment, the factor of the pure intellect, as the highest imaginable form of evolution. Correspondingly, he sees the emotion-laden, energy-bearing configurations as far down on the evolutionary scale. This idea is supported in the further development of the essay:

> Man, slowly coming into existence as an efflorescence of some simian stock, originally knew nothing beyond the concrete and immediate. Formerly guided by reflex action or instinct, his evolving brain was an absolute blank regarding everything beyond these

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[84] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 299.

[85] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection in The Shuttered Room and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 85.

> simple matters of defense, shelter, and food-procuring whose exigencies had brought it into being. As this primal brain developed along the path of the original, impelling force, its intrinsic strength and activity outstripped the material which it had to feed upon.[86]

Lovecraft conceives evolution as the developmental path of primal force. He investigates this path of evolution as he passes through the maze into that "hideous world"[87] to explore the depths of the black abyss. Acting out the detective role he loved as a child, Lovecraft uses his highly evolved conscious intellect to follow the thread of irresistible force back into the dark world of the unconscious, the primal mind that may still remember man's earliest beginnings because it has not evolved from unconscious vitalism to conscious intellect. Lovecraft chooses the words of Arthur Machen as an inscription at the head of his story, "The Horror at Red Hook:"

> There are sacraments of evil as well as of good about us, and we live and move in my belief in an unknown world, a place where there are caves and shadows and dwellers in twilight. It is possible that man may sometimes return on the track of evolution, and it is my belief that an awful lore is not yet dead.[88]

Apparent in these words is Lovecraft's wish to follow the path of evolution into the black abyss.

As his essay "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection"--which centers on the evolution of man's mind--con-

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[86] Ibid., p. 86.

[87] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 109.

[88] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 240.

tinues, Lovecraft's discussion of sun worship hints of the "sky-effects" he writes of as being closely connected with the "strange sense of adventurous expectancy"[89] which always haunts his dreams:

> Leaders give favors when people praise them and give them presents. Therefore the sun should be praised and propitiated with presents. And so were born the imaginative conceptions of deity, worship, and sacrifice. A new and wholly illusory system of thought had arisen--the spiritual.[90]

When Lovecraft speaks of the realm of the spiritual as being illusory, he is revealing an emotional tie to the non-material realm of the imagination. His comment to Elizabeth Toldridge that man should believe in a "green cheese moon"[91] (as well as in other products of the imagination which he lists) implies his use of the imagination to preserve his mental equilibrium in a hostile environment:

> To be clear of irritant and hostile social fabrics is the thing--for otherwise, faced by a life of exile in hateful chaos, a bullet through the brain is the only solution.[92]

By constructing his own fictional world, Lovecraft combats his fear and hatred of the societal world he is forced to live in:

> If I can only keep my nerves in a kind of detached state--independent of time, space or environment--I think I shall soon be enjoying a period of renewed literary productivity. I must slough off for a

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[89] Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," p. 153.

[90] Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism," p. 86.

[91] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 23.

[92] Thomas, p. 116.

> space the real & practical world, & isolate myself behind the opera-glasses of glamour & fantasy, so that I may see again that unreal world of wonder, which, being seen, at once animates my pen & stamps itself on paper![93]

Lovecraft's escape into the world of his mind is concomitant with his belief in evolution, because his mind is an active dichotomy between logic and analysis as opposed to emotion and imagination. Lovecraft uses his conscious power of analysis to achieve a "decorative beauty of form"[94] by applying the raw emotion of energy's paintbrush in the realm of the artist's imagination. Lovecraft writes:

> My nervous poise & aesthetic articulateness are to be attained only by telling the world to go to the deuce, and proceeding to set down the transformations which a naturally fantastic imagination makes in the visual images set before it.[95]

Lovecraft feels that "to find those . . . other worlds, and other dreamlands, is the true author's task;"[96] he completes his visionary credo by soundly condemning the idea that an earthly utopia may ever exist at all:

> All human life is weary, incomplete, unsatisfying, and sardonically purposeless. It always has been and always will be, so that he who looks for a paradise is merely the dupe of myths or of his own imagination.[97]

Lovecraft is bound by myth and by the action of his fancy

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[93] Ibid., p. 83.

[94] Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," p. 143.

[95] Thomas, p. 83.

[96] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, pp. 142-43.

[97] St. Armand, p. 34.

to the path of evolution, because he needs logic and analysis to "arrange and classify things in patterns"[98] and his emotionally viable imagination as a source of these patterns:

> The present writer feels that one basic instinct plus its derivative emotion ought to be added to the list [containing other emotions and instincts]; namely, an instinct for symmetry in the abstract, based upon habituation to the ceaseless rhythm and regularities (astronomical and otherwise) of the terrestrial environment, which supplies many aesthetic feelings traceable neither to creativeness nor to any conceivable complex emotion or emotions.[99]

Lovecraft is by virtue of his "instinct of symmetry" almost always somewhere in transit within the continuity of evolution. In order to analyze the nature of his own mental phenomena, Lovecraft allows the forces of his unconscious to act independently upon his intellect. These forces propel him into the realm of the free imagination. His hatred of the stifling rules of the prosaic world appears in the continuation of his essay, "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection:"

> Observing that his welfare depended on conformity to that fixed course of atomic, molecular, and mass interaction which we now call the laws of nature, primitive man devised the notion of divine government, with the qualities of spiritual right and wrong. Right and wrong indeed existed as actualities in the shape of conformity and nonconformity to nature; but our first thinking ancestors could conceive of no law save personal will, so deemed themselves the slaves of some celestial tyrant or tyrants of human shape and unlimited authority.[100]

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[98] Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," p. 143.

[99] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Some Causes of Self Immolation," in Marginalia, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1944), p. 188.

[100] Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism," p. 87.

This self-willed celestial ruler that men are slave to suggests the idea that Lovecraft conceptualizes the infinite universe as always lying behind and beyond the tenuous illusion of beauty which Lovecraft seeks. The celestial despot may be a projection of the mental forces ever seething beneath consciousness in Lovecraft's mind, for August Derleth believes that the voyage outward into space directly parallels the voyage backward into Lovecraft's memories.[101] Almost everywhere in his mind Lovecraft looks, he finds the monstrous forces of his emotion waiting to leap upon and devour him:

> Emotion, working hand in hand with imagination, created such illusions as that of immortality, which is undoubtedly a compound of man's notions of "another world" as gained in dreams, and of the increasing horror of the idea of utter death as appreciated by a brain now able to comprehend as never before the fact that every man must sooner or later lose his accustomed pleasures. . . . He finds false analogies like the vernal resurgence of plant life, and the beautiful world of dreams, and succeeds in persuading his half-formed intellect that his existence in the real world is but part of a larger existence; that he will either be reborn on earth, or transplanted to some remote and eternal dream-world.[102]

Lovecraft's letter of February 4, 1934, to J. Vernon Shea, shows Lovecraft's intellect combatting the emotive devourment and dissolution which await him; this letter concerns his thoughts of suicide during the time following the death of his grandfather in 1904:

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[101] Derleth, "Addenda," p. 252.

[102] Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism," pp. 87-88.

> How easy it would be to wade out among the rushes and lie face down in the warm water till oblivion came. . . . Then the long peaceful night of nonexistence . . . what I had enjoyed from the mythical start of eternity till the 20th of August, 1890 [the date of his birth]. More and more I looked at the river on drowsy, sun-golden summer afternoons. I liked to think of the beauty of sun and blue river and green shore and distant white steeple as enfolding me at the last--it would be as if the element of mystical cosmic beauty were dissolving me.[103]

The terrible truth of the inevitable death of Lovecraft's wonder-world (prefigured as it was by his forced exile of 1904 from his beloved home) sharpens the already active dichotomy between conscious intellect and unconscious emotional energy. The Lovecraft essay "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection" reveals a veritable battle between his intellect and emotion:

> The advance of the intellect without previous scientific knowledge to guide it had the effect of strengthening emotion and imagination without a corresponding strengthening of ratiocinative processes, and the immense residue of unchanged brute instinct fell in with the scheme.[104]

This brute instinct, the essence of the monstrous entity of force bodied forth within the maze of Lovecraft's mind, is the mythic Minotaur of which he had read as a child. In another essay, Lovecraft writes:

> We must recognize the essential underlying savagery in the animal called man. . . . We must recognize that man's nature will remain the same so long as he remains man; that civilisation is but a slight coverlet beneath which the dominant beast sleeps lightly and ever ready to awaken. To preserve civilisation, we must deal scientifically with the

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[103] St. Armand, p. 30.

[104] Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism," p. 88.

> brute element, using only genuine biological principles.[105]

One of these authentic biological principles is undoubtedly Darwin's concept of evolutionary development, for to "deal scientifically with the brute element" is the central duty of "the latest and most complex degree of evolution."[106] Lovecraft's belief in the bivalent operation of man's mind is suggested in a continuation of his essay "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection:"

> Desire and fancy dwarfed fact and observation altogether; and we find all thought based not on truth, but on what man wishes to be the truth.[107]

The essay reflects Lovecraft's own state of mind, at least in outline:

> Lacking the power to conceive of a mighty interaction of cosmical forces without a man-like will and a man-like purpose, humanity forms its persistent conviction that all creation has some definite object; that everything tends upward toward some vast unknown purpose or perfection. Thus arise all manner of extravagant hopes which in time fasten themselves on mankind and enslave his intellect beyond easy redemption.[108]

Cosmic forces may be seen by Lovecraft as outward projections of his brute instinctual energies that lie at the base of the "path of the original impelling force"[109] of

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[105] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "At the Root," in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), pp. 153-54.

[106] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 299.

[107] Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism," p. 88.

[108] Ibid. [109] Ibid., p. 86.

evolution. Lovecraft the evolutionist feels that "everything [including, of course, himself] tends upward toward some vast unknown purpose or perfection."

But Lovecraft foresees a limitation to this upward tendency, and a limit to the power of man to face chaotic emotional forces:

> Man's respect for the imponderables varies according to his mental constitution and environment. Through certain modes of thought and training, it can be elevated tremendously, yet there is always a limit. The man or nation of high culture may acknowledge to great lengths the restraints imposed by convention and honour, but beyond a certain point primitive will or desire cannot be curbed. Denied anything ardently desired, the individual or state will argue or parley just so long--then, if the impelling motive be sufficiently great, will cast aside every rule and break down every acquired inhibition, plunging vicariously after the object wished; all the more fantastically savage because of previous repression. The sole ultimate factor in human decisions is physical force.[110]

For Lovecraft, man's position on the evolutionary path is determined by his ability to maintain a precarious self-control as he looks back down the line of developmental force and into the black abyss of primal nescience. Lovecraft writes in his essay, "Some Causes of Self Immolation:"

> Of such sets [of relative standards of social development,] the least flimsy and empirical is that determined by organic evolution and aesthetic-intellectual development, which attributes may be said to measure the distance of an individual from the primal protoplasmic jelly. What balance of these motives, then, may we expect to find in the most preferred type of homo sapiens?[111]

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[110] Lovecraft, "At the Root," p. 154.

[111] Lovecraft, "Some Causes of Self Immolation," p. 196.

These Lovecraft essays, especially "Idealism and Materialism," synthesize Lovecraft's basic conflict as it appears in his fiction--the conflict of being destined to traverse perpetually the maze-like continuum, the cyclic path that lies between intellect and instinctual force. Lovecraft strives upward toward intellectual perfection to rise above the lower depths of "primal protoplasmic jelly." He makes use of his emotional drive toward intellectual perfection to create a world in imaginative fiction.

The concept of evolution is a key to understanding the art of Lovecraft. He writes further in his essay "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection:"

> Idealising must now be made to conform to the actual facts which have been unearthed, and to the quickened sense of beauty which has grown up. At this stage the great civilisations are forming, and each fashions one or more highly technical and artistic schemes of philosophy or theology. At first the advances tend to confirm the idealistic notion. Beauty breeds wonder and imagination, whilst partial comprehension of the magnitude and operation of Nature breeds awe. . . . Each thing on earth becomes merely the type of some imaginary better thing, or ideal, which is supposed to exist either in another world or in the future of this world. Out of the pleasantest phases of all objects and experiences imagination finds it easy to build illusory corresponding objects and experiences which are <u>all pleasant</u>.[112]

Lovecraft sees the portrayal of art and beauty as a product of evolution. Lovecraft believes that man's tendency to fabricate mentally such totally pleasant situations is a natural attempt to stave off the terrible reality of the

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[112] Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism," pp. 88-89.

chaotic forces which surround and permeate him:

> In general we may say that in an evolved and cultivated man, the intellect, imagination, and beauty sense are developed prodigiously beyond their respective proportions in the primitive type. Accordingly we may expect to find the powers of discrimination, association, symbolisation, and creativeness very strong.[113]

Thus the creative and artistic faculties of the mind are products of a high evolutionary plane and may be used to examine and explore less evolved and less "celestially oriented" sections of the mind. It is at this medial stage of developmental evolution that Lovecraft believes he has arrived.

Apparent in Lovecraft's essay is the strong influence of Greek thought, especially Platonism, with its upward mutation toward ideal forms:

> Whilst all mankind is more or less involved in this wholesale dreaming, particular nations develop particularly notable idealistic and aesthetic capacity. Here Greece, foremost of cultural centres, easily leads the rest. With a primitive mythology of unexcelled loveliness, she has likewise the foremost of later idealistic philosophies, that of Plato. It is this Platonic system, sometimes operating through the clumsy covering of an alien Hebraic theology, that forms the animating force in idealism today.[114]

Lovecraft is seeking to follow the upward path to Platonic perfection as he creates his fictional world. In a letter of November 26, 1932, to E. Hoffman Price, Lovecraft writes:

> When a writer succeeds in translating [the] nebulous . . .

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[113] Lovecraft, "Some Causes of Self Immolation," pp. 196-97.

[114] Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism," p. 89.

> into symbols which in some way satisfy the imagination--symbols which adroitly suggest actual glimpses into forbidden dimensions, actual happenings following the myth-patterns of human fancy, actual voyages of thought or body into the nameless depths of tantalising space, and actual evasions, frustrations, or violations of the commonly accepted laws of the cosmos--then he is a true artist in every sense of the word. He has produced genuine literature by accomplishing a sincere emotional catharsis.[115]

Lovecraft is "following the myth-patterns of human fancy" as he seeks to gain "actual glimpses into forbidden dimensions," motivated by the Grecian evolutionary influence with its impelling line of idealising force leading upward to ideal forms. The opposite direction of this maze leads downward into the unconscious, the turbulent uncontrolled energy which is merged with the intellect and evolved upward into recognizable forms. This basal energy is the terrible Minotaur that Lovecraft meets in the maze of his fiction, for only through meeting the Minotaur can "primal protoplasmic jelly"[116] be evolved upward into the form of fiction.

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[115] St. Armand, p. 204.

[116] Lovecraft, "Some Causes of Self Immolation," p. 196.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MINOTAUR

Lovecraft comes closer to the center of the maze in his essay "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection," as he classifies the idealists of the twentieth century into two groups, theological and rationalistic. The theological idealists, he says, are "frankly primitive"[1] and use crude arguments to make their points. The rationalistic idealists, on the other hand, have adopted an outwardly scientific attitude, but yet, as Lovecraft says, "are overwhelmingly influenced by the illusions of human perfectibility and a better world."[2] Lovecraft comments further on the rationalistic idealists, introducing again the idea of evolutionary metamorphosis:

> In clinging to these hoary fancies [thoughts of human perfectibility], they generally seize upon the rather recently discovered and indubitably proven law of evolution to sustain them, forgetting the infinite slowness of the process, and overlooking the fact that when evolution shall have really affected our descendants to any appreciable degree, they will no longer belong to the human race, mentally or physically--any more than we belong to the simian race.[3]

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[1] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection," in The Shuttered Room and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 89.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

This idea of evolutionary movement along the path of impelling force gives Lovecraft's fiction much of its eerie power. Lovecraft shows his respect for and fear of the forces at the lower end of the evolutionary continuum, as he writes:

> The human reason is weak in comparison to instinct and evolution, and up to the present, these latter forces, in the guise of theology, have proved the only effective restraint from the disorders of utter license and animalism.[4]

Lovecraft views religion as the mere sublimation or theologization of the instinctual forces of the human mind, but a necessary governing principle for the drives of ordinary man:

> It remains fairly clear that some form of religion is at least highly desirable among the uneducated. Without it, they are despondent and turbulent, miserable with unsatisfied and unsatisfiable aspirations which may yet lead the vivilized world to chaos and destruction.[5]

Lovecraft recognizes the mental forces which appear in externalized form in his fiction:

> No one exceeds me in reverence for the quaint and sonorous rituals of antique devotion--the organised symbolisation of our lives and the formulated expression of our emotions.[6]

In a letter to Bernard Dwyer, Lovecraft shows that he is aware of the presence within his mind of these highly charged emotional drives:

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[4] Ibid., p. 90. [5] Ibid.

[6] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1925-1929, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1968), p. 119.

> With me the hardest emotion to bring under the control of reason was hatred--as expressed in beserk [sic] rages and general pugnacity. I had some fairly rough fights from which I would not retreat but from which I almost always got the worst except when I managed to frighten my foe through a dramatically murderous expression and voice.[7]

This berserk, blind energy that Lovecraft feels within himself is the dynamism within man that requires "formulated expression"[8] and "organised symbolisation."[9] By giving these frightening emotions egress through his fiction, Lovecraft is able to accomplish a catharsis:

> The only legitimate artistic motive is to please oneself--to utter things because they have to be uttered, or because it is by uttering them that one may be most comfortable.[10]

Barton St. Armand's statement that Lovecraft's letters are "dialogues" can be expanded to include Lovecraft's fiction:

> Many of his [Lovecraft's] interminable conversations with his correspondents were really extended dialogues with himself, born of his need to unburden himself somehow of the encyclopaedic store of knowledge which was catalogued so neatly in his well-ordered brain.[11]

These "extended dialogues with himself" appear to help Lovecraft relieve the tension of the emotional forces

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[7] Barton Levi St. Armand, "H. P. Lovecraft: The Outsider in Legend and Myth: A Biographical and Critical Study," Thesis Brown University 1966, p. 67.

[8] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 119.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1911-1924, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 185.

[11] St. Armand, p. 85.

boiling within him. Because Lovecraft is trapped on the continuum of mental evolution, these dialogues take the shape of interactions between his conscious and unconscious. This impression is strengthened by the idea that Lovecraft sees no line of demarcation between man and other entities lower on the evolutionary scale:

> No line betwixt 'human' and 'non human' organisms is possible, for all animate Nature is one--with differences only in degree; never in kind.[12]

There is in Lovecraft's mind no barrier to separate him from the depths of the evolutionary spiral. Regarding his contemplation of suicide in 1904, he writes to J. Vernon Shea:

> Could it be possible that a poor man without servants or a large house and grounds might get a greater satisfaction from remaining alive and studying and writing than from slipping back to primal nescience and molecular dispersal? . . . One couldn't miss a chance like that! Let suicide wait![13]

Contained within the same letter is the following comment:

> So in the end I decided to postpone my exit till the following summer. I would do a little curiosity satisfying at first; filling certain gaps of scientific and historical knowledge, and attaining a greater sense of completeness before merging with the infinite blackness.[14]

In the exercise of his dialogue of dichotomy, the cycle of existence, Lovecraft discovers the primal myth-monster of pure energy, the power of "molecular dispersal."

Lovecraft's curiosity regarding the primal depths of evolved human nature is reflected in his preoccupation

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[12] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 258.

[13] St. Armand, p. 32. [14] Ibid., p. 31.

with the sources of human life, a preoccupation which shows itself in his letter dated July 17, 1921, to Frank Belknap Long:

> When we analyse personality we can trace every quality to the atoms and electrons of the body. Certainly these electrons were never thus assembled till the body in question took form, and equally certainly they will never be thus assembled again. When a man dies, his body turns to liquids and gases whose molecules soon enter into an infinitude of new combinations--there is nothing left.[15]

Emerging in Lovecraft's thought is the idea that man has evolved from some quantum of pure energy or force which was in the beginning chaotic and uncontrolled. In another letter to Long, Lovecraft writes:

> It seems to me that the question 'what is life' is as fully answered as any other; since life is pretty clearly a well-defined form of energy like light or electricity. The processes of vital organisation are physical and chemical, depending on the motions and reactions of molecules, atoms, and electrons. . . .[16]

Indeed, according to Lovecraft, the entire universe has come into being from pure, unshaped energy:

> It seems very certain that the actual "mother stuff" (or protyl, as Haeckel used to call the hypothetical basic substance) will prove to be something wholly alien to our ideas of substance, & clearly allied to what we recognize as energy. Before its nature can be grasped, our whole notions of entity will have to undergo a revision & clarification.[17]

Partly because of his belief that life as man knows

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[15] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 141.

[16] Ibid., pp. 158-59.

[17] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1929-1931, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1971), p. 86.

it has arisen from pure formless energy, Lovecraft juxtaposes in his mind primal life energy and cosmic energy of the universe. These two energies are to him of like nature and confusion:

> In art there is no use in heeding the chaos of the universe, for so complete is this chaos, that no piece writ in words could even so much as hint at it. I can conceive of no true image of the pattern of life and cosmic force, unless it be a jumble of mean dots arranged in directionless spirals. And so far are real dots and actual curves from depicting the utter formlessness and emptiness of life and force, that they stand confest as artificial as Mr. Pope's couplets.[18]

The chaos of the universe and the chaos of primal life are objects of equal trepidation, and Lovecraft confronts those terrors as he traverses the maze of Grecian myth. Barton St. Armand writes:

> A myth is, after all, only symbolic truth, and Lovecraft's real genius as an artist is . . . as a creator of myths. This means not only his pseudo-mythology [the Cthulhu Mythos], of course, but the whole concept behind his tales, the same concept which lies beyind [sic] any type of folklore or folk tale--the idea that it is not the world <u>within</u> man which is to be feared, but the world <u>outside</u> of him. What we have to reckon with in primal myth and legend is never our own subconscious, but the tangible projection of that subconscious outside the mind--a Hydra or a Grendel or a Minataur [sic]. The adversary is not man, but what man has to deal with, not the inside but the outside, which is always ready to push him over the brink of chaos into insanity or death.[19]

The Minotaur which St. Armand mentions appears in Lovecraft's fiction as an invasion of the known world by unknown enti-

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[18] Lovecraft, <u>Selected Letters 1911-1924</u>, p. 261.

[19] St. Armand, p. 264.

ties from outside the known universe. Lovecraft says in his essay, "Supernatural Horror in Literature:"

> The one test of the really weird is simply this--whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim.[20]

This uncontrolled, inevitable force, whether it be the essential quantic substance of the cosmos or the primal energy at the base of the evolutionary path, is what terrifies Lovecraft. This unchecked energy that lies both within himself and the universe at large is the essence of the knowledge gleaned by Lovecraft's characters. Lovecraft seeks to meet and modify through his art this force that appears to him in the guise of terrifying creatures of the unknown.

Lovecraft's awe of the forces inherent in the world around him appears in a letter to August Derleth, dated March 1933:

> An unconscious aesthetic sense protects against a violation of a certain unity in the historic stream--and this whether or not the old code has any merely rational value. . . . It is a fact that we cannot gain any really satisfying illusion of values and ends in life except through the engulfing effect of encountering this same illusion throughout the pages of ancestral history.[21]

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[20] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," in Dagon and other Macabre Tales, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 350.

[21] August Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," in The Shuttered Room and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 168.

Lovecraft avoids the total terror of "merging with the infinite blackness"[22] by remaining within the limits of his aesthetic order, within the "directionless spirals"[23] made by "mean dots"[24] as he seeks his "really satisfying illusion." Artificial as they may be, these aesthetic phenomena alone prevent Lovecraft's precipitous descent into the realm of formlessness.

The image of the artificial spiral of dots that Lovecraft describes is not without deeper significance, for these dots form the maze inherent in his fiction. In a letter dated December 11, 1934, to his friends Alfred Galpin and Maurice Moe, Lovecraft writes:

> My remembrance of dreams is often affected by a sort of sense of unity--I can recall only things which have a connected sequence, hence my narratives stop as soon as the main subject is exhausted.[25]

Lovecraft's stories develop along a line of "connected sequence" to an arrival at the end of the line of force.

The power of the evolution-maze in Lovecraft's thought appears in the following letter to August Derleth, dated May 1927:

> In history, the only important things are sequences and influences--not the numerical date of a happening, but its relation to other happenings and forces

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[22] St. Armand, p. 31.

[23] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 261.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Dreams and Fancies (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1962), pp. 49-50.

and to the civilisation or civilisations involved.[26]

But the maze motif is deeper within the psyche than Lovecraft's epistolary comments may reveal, for some of Lovecraft's dreams contain Maze-like images:

> Did I tell you in my last letter about my dreams . . . of the ancient house in the marsh, with the staircase that had no end, . . . [and] of the streetcar that went by night over a route that had been dismantled for six years, and that lost five hours in climbing College Hill, finally plunging off the earth into a star-strewn abyss and ending up in the sand-heaped streets of a ruined city which had been under the sea?[27]

Lovecraft's need for historical sequentiality seems to rest upon a more basic need for inward mental sequentiality as recounted in the above examples of his dreams. This internal consecution forms Lovecraft's protection against the formless forces at the outer rim of the universe. In his essay "Suggestions for a Reading Guide," Lovecraft reveals the pervasiveness in his thinking of the idea of connectedness:

> In the end one likes to have a connected and workable idea of things--to see the universe whole, and to feel keenly the continuity, drama, and differing moods of human history.[28]

The need to see ordered continuity in human history helps bring about the primacy of the maze in the mind of Lovecraft.

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[26] Derleth, "Lovecraft as Mentor," p. 146.

[27] Lovecraft, Dreams and Fancies, pp. 10-11.

[28] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Suggestions for a Reading Guide," in The Dark Brotherhood and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 32.

The story of the labyrinthine search for a mythical monster is the agency of coherence that helps Lovecraft to live in a lawless world.

Lovecraft's vital need to bring order out of chaos is apparent in his remarks in a letter of May 13, 1921, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> To me, the element of conflict is essential--I must always have something to hate and fight, and will never quit the field of controversy and satire. Speculation is also indispensable, for my mind is distractingly curious and sensitive as to the unknown phenomena and abysses of space that press upon it from the world and aether beyond. Anything savouring of quiet and tameness is maddeningly abhorrent to me--not in actual life, for that I wish as placid as possible; but in thought, which is my more vivid life.[29]

Here are the search and the horror which is its goal, the twin elements of Lovecraft's myth. These components appear here as "speculation," or the search for "unknown phenomena" and "conflict," the contact with the monstrous adversary. These ever present elements are the counterpoised factors in Lovecraft's mind, as is suggested by the fact that he wants the external world to be "as placid as possible," so as not to disturb the precarious balance of this internal opposition. The internal contention between emotion and intellect is the means of unleashing Lovecraft's elemental energies that swirl up from the black abyss of his unconscious. Lovecraft writes:

> I recognize the power of the primal--which amongst the illiterate, semi-literate, and a few of the lit-

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[29] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 131.

> erate, is a force capable of much good if skilfully wielded.[30]

Lovecraft molds the energy-images which flow up from the depths of his mind into his weird fiction.

Lovecraft's wish to bring order out of the energies around him is displayed in his attitude toward a motion picture entitled "Siegfried," which he attended in New York City with a friend:

> . . . a stupendous spectacle in which the scattered myths of the Nibelung ring from the early Volsung Saga to the Wagnerian tetralogy are fused into one concise & coherent whole, & shown to the accompaniment of a mighty orchestral composite of Wagnerian musick. . . . As for the film--it was an ecstasy & a delight to be remembered forever! It was the very inmost soul of the immortal & unconquerable blond Nordic, embodied in the shining warrior of light, great Siegfried, slayer of monsters and enslaver of Kings. . . .[31]

In the drama of the mythic hero Siegfried, Lovecraft sees a panoramic enactment of his wish. He watches Siegfried, "slayer of monsters," confront and for a time vanquish all the monstrous foes which lurk in the mind of man. For Lovecraft the sword of Siegfried is a coalescence of primal energies around a central point, "a force capable of much good if skilfully wielded."[32] Lovecraft sees "Siegfried" as an act of creation.

Lovecraft writes in a letter to Wilfrid Blanch

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[30] Ibid., p. 65.

[31] James Warren Thomas, "Howard Phillips Lovecraft: A Self Portrait," Thesis Brown University 1950, p. 88.

[32] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 65.

Talman, another epistolary friend:

> As to what is meant by "weird"--and of course weirdness is by no means confined to horror--I should say that the real criterion is a strong impression of the suspension of natural laws or the presence of unseen worlds or forces close at hand.[33]

The suspension of natural laws corresponds to the breaking through to consciousness of basal energies, the "mother-stuff"[34] not yet integrated into the realm of rationality. The act of artistic creation is the molding of the energy from the unconscious into a form recognizable as entity. Because the primal force gives Lovecraft the power to write fiction, and because this power flows from his unconscious, the so-called "cosmic forces" Lovecraft writes of are projections and objectifications of the author's own subliminal emotional energies. Lovecraft writes in his letter of May 8, 1922, to Frank Belknap Long:

> I like to view the universe as an isolated cosmic intelligence outside time and space--to sympathise not only with man, but with forces opposed to man, or forces which have nothing to do with man, and do not realise that he exists.[35]

Lovecraft sees his own mind as "an isolated cosmic intelligence." Inner mind and outer universe are coincided and the universe, the world "outside time and space," becomes the stage upon which his mental dramas are enacted. Lovecraft's panoramic vision, the facing of chaos by the conscious mind,

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[33] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 69.

[34] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 86.

[35] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 172.

is enacted by Siegfried, the hero of the film.

Lovecraft ventures into the maze in order to find the "isolated cosmic intelligence," the force which opposes him. This awesome adversary is the Minotaur, the mythic entity which forms one pole of the bipolar "element of conflict"[36] in Lovecraft's creativity. His engrossment in this search is implied by a quotation from his essay "Notes on Interplanetary Fiction:"

> The emphasis, too, must be kept right--hovering always on the wonder of the central abnormality itself. It must be remembered that any violation of what we know as natural law is in itself a far more tremendous thing than any other event or feeling which could possibly affect a human being. . . . The characters, though they must be natural, should be subordinated to the central marvel around which they are grouped. The true "hero" of a marvel tale is not any human being, but simply a set of phenomena.[37]

This search dominates Lovecraft's characters, as Fritz Leiber, Jr., a noted science fiction writer, relates:

> These individuals [Lovecraft's major characters] are in all other ways very realistically minded indeed, but having glimpsed the forbidden knowledge, they are generally more susceptible to cosmic terror than ordinary people. Sober and staid realists, they yet know that they live on the brink of a horrid and ravening abyss unsuspected by ordinary folk.[38]

The "set of phenomena" forms the adversarial "cosmic intel-

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Some Notes on Interplanetary Fiction," in Marginalia, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1944), p. 141.

[38] Fritz Leiber, Jr., "A Literary Copernicus," in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 300.

ligence."[39] Lovecraft's characters who have "glimpsed the forbidden knowledge" follow the maze to the "central abnormality" and meet the Minotaur.

The Minotaur, the "central abnormality" in Lovecraft's fiction, appears in many forms. This energy phenomenon appears in Lovecraft's essay "The Materialist Today:"

> Now, altho the sum of energy in the universe is (speaking without reference to very recent discoveries in intra-atomic physics and chemistry) virtually indestructible, we see very clearly that it is most eminently subject to transformations from one form to another. Mechanical energy becomes electricity under the appropriate conditions, and, under other conditions, that electricity becomes light and heat. Nothing is lost, but all is changed.[40]

Here, stated by Lovecraft as the law of the conservation of energy, is an explanation for the Minotaur's appearance in Lovecraft's fiction. The law of the conservation of energy is a restatement in scientific terms of the protean appearance of the Minotaur. This monster, the basal energy that has a life of its own in Lovecraft's mind, emerges from primal force into intellectual energy in Lovecraft's fiction.

The idea that the Minotaur manifests itself in Lovecraft's fiction as a bodying forth of primal energy appears in Lovecraft's essay:

> Now, I regard the vital principle as just such a form of energy--and mind is only one of the many complex manifestations of that principle. It [the

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "The Materialist Today," in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 157.

> mind] is a product and attribute of certain forms and processes of matter; and when that matter is disintegrated, it ceases to exist--just as molecular heat ceases to exist upon the dispersal or disintegration of the material molecules which make it possible. Nothing is lost, any more than when electrical energy is transformed into luminous energy; but a complete metamorphosis occurs, and the identity of mind and life becomes effaced as the units of energy pass away in other forms--mostly radiant heat and other waves in the ether. Mind is no more immortal than a candle flame. The flame is just as immortal if we wish to take a poetic view and reflect that the units of energy therein are never lost to the universe, but merely dissipated and incorporated into other forms and phaenomena.[41]

Because Lovecraft thinks of the universe as being analogous to the mind or cosmic intelligence, basic units of cosmic energy appear in his mind as quantities of mental energy, the Minotaur. The ending of a Lovecraft story does not bring about the loss of incipient energy; rather, these energies are "merely dissipated and incorporated into other forms and phaenomena"--other Lovecraft stories. This analogy arises from Lovecraft's vision of life itself--"the vital principle"--as a form of energy. Most stories in the Lovecraft canon are attempts to find, confront, and assimilate the energies from his unconscious, here seen as "the isolated cosmic intelligence."[42] Each of Lovecraft's stories is a segment of the maze of literary sequentiality and enacts the mythic ritual that arises from his reading of Theseus' search for and destruction of the Minotaur.

The idea of evolution is connected in Lovecraft's

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 172.

mind with the Minotaur myth. Lovecraft says in the continuation of his essay, "The Materialist Today:"

> It seems, in the light of recent discoveries, that all matter is in a state of balance betwixt formation and disintegration, evolution and devolution--and that the infinite cosmos is like a vast patch of summer sky, out of which little cirrus clouds gather here and there, presently to be dissolved into blankness again. The universes we know correspond to the little cirrus clouds of that summer sky, being merely transient aggregations of electrons condensed from that field of ungrouped electrons which we call space, and soon to be dissolved into that space again. This process of formation and destruction is the fundamental attribute of all entity--it is infinite Nature, and it always has been, and always will be.[43]

Here is a statement of Lovecraft's cyclical mental movement up and down the path of irresistible metamorphic force. The lower end of this path lies in the realm of formless energy out of which originates the vital principle and the entire evolutionary upward surge of life, as Barton St. Armand points out:

> His [Lovecraft's] appeal, and his concern, is with the primal roots of human responsiveness--fear, disgust, wonder, awe--the same responses produced by the oldest myths and folklores--by the aura of the fantastic and the fearful which we find in ancient epics like Beowulf and even the more refined Odyssey.[44]

For Lovecraft, the entire spectrum of organic life is controlled by the power of the inevitable line of life-force. This cycle, a series of vicarious movements up and down the evolutionary scale, will continue as long as there is energy

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[43] Lovecraft, "The Materialist Today," p. 158.

[44] St. Armand, p. 263.

in the mind of the artist to set the mechanism in motion, because Lovecraft declares:

> Nothing matters--all that happens happens through the automatic and inflexible interacting of the electrons, atoms, and molecules of infinity according to patterns which are co-existent with basic entity itself.[45]

The close conjunction of myth and scientific thought in the mind of Lovecraft appears in the following quotation from his letter of October 8, 1921, to Frank Belknap Long:

> Whenever we investigate the vague claims of those vitalists, Bergsonians, and "Creative Evolutionists" who speak of the non-materiality, universality, and continuity of life, we find their conceptions basically and essentially mythological and poetical. They have, and can have, no clear idea of what they really mean; but devise their images from allegory and obsolete metaphysics.[46]

Lovecraft reflects his unconscious use of myth in his comment on the Bergsonians; he mirrors his own symbolic thinking in his belief that their conceptions are "basically and essentially mythological and poetical." The world of Grecian myth is a refuge from the chaos that Lovecraft observes on every side. He acknowledges his need of this mythic basis for his work in his letter of April 21, 1927, to Donald Wandrei:

> It is because I am a complete sceptic & cynic, recognising no such qualities as good or evil, beauty or ugliness, in the ultimate structure of the universe, that I insist on the artificial and traditional values of each particular cultural stream--proximate values that grew out of the special instincts, associations, environment & experiences of the race in

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 159.

> question, & which are the sole available criteria for the members of that race & culture, though of course having no validity outside it. These backgrounds of tradition against which to scale the objects & events of experience are all that lends such objects and events the illusion of meaning, value, or dramatic interest in an ultimately purposeless cosmos--hence I preach & practice an extreme conservatism in art forms, society, & politics, as the only means of averting the ennui, despair, & confusion of a guideless and standardless struggle with unveiled chaos.[47]

Lovecraft insists on such artificiality in his fiction, as he protects himself with his art from "unveiled chaos" by writing fiction in order to feel "more comfortable."[48] The meaning derived from a story's mythic content or other cultural value is the only real or ultimate meaning that Lovecraft is likely to accept for his stories, because he insists on adhering to "the artificial and traditional values of each particular cultural stream." Lovecraft is steeped in the Grecian cultural experience (a fact seen in his essay, "Suggestions for a Reading Guide,") and he prizes the Hellenic cultural heritage above others. It is therefore the Grecian myth of the maze and the Minotaur that lends "such objects and events as Lovecraft's stories the illusion of meaning, value, or dramatic interest in an ultimately purposeless cosmos."

Lovecraft finds the meaning and purpose he seeks through the confrontation and delineation of basic natural force. Barton St. Armand writes:

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[47] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 125.

[48] Ibid., p. 185.

> He [Lovecraft] is the rational man whose keen faculty of observation penetrates beneath the surface of ordinary events to see the primal and dangerous corruption hidden there; a fatalist and a behaviorist, "He was conscious, as one who united imagination with scientific knowledge, that modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances."[49]

Lovecraft writes to Clark Ashton Smith in a letter dated November 20, 1931:

> My perspective is too inherently cosmic and analytical to make me feel the importance of what the tri-dimensional world regards as changes in the relative setting of dust-grains as negligible as terrestrial men. The only things I can conceive as worthy protagonists of cosmic drama are basic natural forces and laws, and what spells interest for me is simply the convincing illusion of the thwarting, suspension, or disturbance of such forces and laws. To me a climax is simply an effective demonstration of a temporary defeat of the cosmic order.[50]

In this letter, the fundamental Lovecraftian conflict is dilated to almost infinite dimensions. Here are echoes of "Siegfried," in which Lovecraft sees his hero, rational man, face the ultimate Minotaur--the entire irrational cosmos.

This conflict is a drama of forces in the theater of Lovecraft's mind, as he writes in his letter of November 20, 1931, to Clark Ashton Smith, here continued:

> I use human puppets as symbols, but my interest is not with them. It is the situation of defeat itself [of the cosmic forces]--and the sensation of liberation therein implicit--which provides me with the thrill and catharsis of aesthetic endeavour.[51]

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[49] St. Armand, p. 211.

[50] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 436.

[51] Ibid.

The phrase "thrill and catharsis of aesthetic endeavour" is reminiscent of Lovecraft's dictum that the artist writes to feel comfortable. Robert H. Barlow, Lovecraft's literary executor, writes:

> Representing evil entities as composite monsters, he [Lovecraft] said one day, was a little childish. Yet he had to admit that they must be more fully described than mere formless shadows. "It must be handled very carefully."[52]

Lovecraft projects his vibrant mental conflict outward into the cosmic order. But no matter how many purely astronomical terms Lovecraft may use, he is reflecting fundamental cleavage within his psyche of the intellect and emotion, a cleavage that appears as the Minotaur myth; Barton St. Armand writes:

> Lovecraft tries to restore a sense of man's essentially precarious (and ultimately tragic) position in the cosmos by setting up a polarity, albeit a synthetic one, between human importance and the power of a wilful pantheon of deities, not unlike the Greek gods, who gaze down and occasionally intervene in the events of the Iliad or the Odyssey.[53]

Monstrous forces appear in each of several Lovecraft narratives as various members of a pantheon of gods who wait on the outer limits of existence to invade and conquer the human world. These gods, collectively known as the Cthulhu Mythos, are embodiments of the emotive energies which Lovecraft finds within himself. Fritz Leiber comments:

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[52] Robert H. Barlow, "The Barlow Journal," in Some Notes on H. P. Lovecraft, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. xxx.

[53] St. Armand, pp. 265-66.

> . . . [The members of the Cthulhu Mythos] are presented as powerful and terrible, yet also--strange paradox!--"blind, voiceless, tenebrous, mindless. . . ." Of the [Cthulhu Mythos], Azathoth is the supreme deity, occupying the topmost throne in the Cthulhu hierarchy. There is never any question of his being merely an alien entity from some distant planet or dimension, like Cthulhu or Yog-Sothoth [other members of the mythos]. He is unquestionably "god," and also the greatest god. Yet when we ask what sort of god, we discover that he is the blind, idiot god ". . . the mindless daemon sultan . . . ," "the monstrous nuclear chaos. . . ."[54]

These complexes of mental energy, centering in the ultimate horror of Azathoth, "'the monstrous nuclear chaos,'" are manifestations of the maelstromic energy, the Minotaur of ancient Grecian mythology.

August Derleth quotes Lovecraft and comments on the artist's mythos:

> "All my stories, unconnected as they may be, are based on the fundamental lore or legend that the world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practising black magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live on outside ever ready to take possession of this earth again," he wrote. Given this frame, given Lovecraft's free-ranging imagination and his ability to bring his imagination vividly into being on paper, and the myth pattern began to assume a dramatic reality.[55]

Derleth connects Lovecraft's mythos with the dreamworld in Lovecraft's mind:

> It [the Cthulhu Mythos] was a dream-world in more senses than one, for in part it was actually the creation of Lovecraft's dreams; the "night-gaunts" of his childhood nightmares were assimilated into the structure of the Cthulhu Mythos; sometimes he dreamed complete or virtually complete tales, and these he set down soon

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[54] Leiber, p. 295.

[55] August Derleth, H.P.L.: A Memoir (New York: Ben Abramson, 1945), pp. 69-70.

> after, often preceding their fictional presentation by straightforward accounts of his dream incorporated in letters to his friends.[56]

Lovecraft searches out the terrible forces in his mind by dreaming them forth and putting these forces and phenomena into his fiction as they manifest themselves. Barton St. Armand outlines the process:

> . . . [Lovecraft's] major premise will remain "the soul of the beast is omnipresent and triumphant," and his tales . . . [are for the most part] the conjuring up of a nightmare vision through accidental or premeditated means; the final climactic revelation; and the smooth ebbing back into a precarious but thankfully ignorant reality.[57]

In a letter of April 16, 1936, to Henry Kuttner, Lovecraft writes:

> I believe that--because of the foundation of most weird concepts in dream phenomena--the best weird tales are those in which the narrator or central figure remains (as in actual dreams) largely passive, & witnesses or experiences a stream of bizarre events which--as the case may be--flows past him, just touches him, or engulfs him utterly.[58]

Lovecraft meets the Minotaur of energy, "'the soul of the beast . . . omnipresent and triumphant,'" as a "stream of bizarre events" that flows toward him in his dreams.

The stream of energy surges upward along the evolutionary path from its chaotic beginnings and Lovecraft meets it in the black abyss as he draws near the wellspring of his energy. Lovecraft retraces his path into the Great Unconscious, called "chaos" by the Greeks, to accomplish his

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[56] Ibid., p. 76. [57] St. Armand, p. 220.

[58] Lovecraft, Dreams and Fancies, p. ix.

goal of assimilation through confrontation. One physical manifestation of the Great Unconscious is the sea, with amphibiousness as the point of egress. Lovecraft enters in his Commonplace Book the idea of retracing man's evolutionary steps:

> Individual, by some strange process, retraces the path of evolution and becomes amphibious.[59]

This downward path leads Lovecraft into the black abyss of man's beginnings:

> That Lovecraft had an innate talent for acting is readily apparent both from the melodramatic structure of many of his tales and the testimony of his closest acquaintances. . . . Lovecraft was also a life-long master and connoisseur of dialect; his wife remembers, for example, his perfect recitation of the part of Brutus Jones from O'Neill's "Emperor Jones" (completely from memory).[60]

Barton St. Armand's assertion of Lovecraft's affinity for O'Neill's play is sustained by a Lovecraft letter of May 3, 1922, to Frank Belknap Long:

> Last week I went to see The Emperor Jones by Eugene O'Neill. Have you seen it? It is a thing of terror, ably presented. O'Neill strikes me as the one real dramatist of America today--starkly tragic, and with a touch of the Poe-esque.[61]

Brutus Jones' dramatic trip into the dark jungle of the primal human mind illustrates Lovecraft's vicarious exploration of the lower depths.

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[59] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, The Notes and Commonplace Book Employed by the late H. P. Lovecraft, ed. Robert Barlow (Lakeport, Calif.: Futile Press, 1938), p. 30.

[60] St. Armand, p. 6.

[61] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 173.

By voyaging into the depths of his mind, Lovecraft reaches and assimilates the force he needs to rise up the metamorphic path toward the realm of intellectual order. Lovecraft composes his narratives, jointures of intellect and emotion, by making the cyclic journey up and down the evolutionary spiral. The maze is a vehicle for the emergence of raw energy into conscious articulation. By his oscillatory movement up and down the spiral from one realm to the other, Lovecraft joins intellect to emotion in the creative act. By compounding these two elements, Lovecraft produces an order that he believes the external world cannot offer.

The lower end of this spectrum extends into the energy where Lovecraft seeks his artistic sustenance. Lovecraft writes in a letter dated February 20, 1929, to Frank Belknap Long:

> Wandering energy always has a detectable form . . . if it doesn't take the form of waves or electron-streams it becomes matter itself.[62]

This plasmic stage in the excrescence of energy into forms of matter intrigues Lovecraft most. This stage ranks with the amphibious stage noted in the Commonplace entry. The Minotaur myth is the essential rhythm of Lovecraft's confrontation, absorption, and retreat from his energies as he discovers energy's perceptible form rising from the depths as Minotaur.

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[62] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, pp. 266-67.

A Lovecraft dream illustrates the search. The first part of the dream is in the words of his friend Robert H. Barlow:

> H.P.L. told me of a dream in which he was one of a band of medieval soldiers (although he says that for him the Middle Ages are a perfect blank devoid of interest), crawling over housetops in search of a monster-thing concealed somewhere, one that was not only menacing the lives of the villagers, "but their very souls as well." The searchers were led by a man on a black horse who encouraged them actively and spurred them on. Finally locating the Thing where it was hidden behind a chimney, the men advanced, obtaining footholds in broken tiles and thatched roofs. It looked at them with hate, for they bore Egyptian staves and weapons--it was afraid of their weapons, but not of the men. When it was cornered, he saw for the first time that it had wings like those of a flying squirrel.[63]

The climax of the narrative is in Lovecraft's words:

> Then suddenly It soared up out of our reach on those evil bat wings which we had thought merely rudimentary and unusable--and darted dizzyingly toward the ground, or rather, toward our leader as he sat on his horse. The officer gave one great cry--but the Thing was on him. As It touched, It began to coalesce hideously with its victim, so that within a moment there bestrode that great black horse a nameless hybrid in the robe and cap of our leader, but with the accursed owl-like black face of that malign spawn of the pit. It put spurs to Its horse and began galloping away.[64]

The dream-search comes from a desire for coalescence. Lovecraft's stories are products of intellectualized energy and are as powerful as the raw energy that flows into them from the "malign spawn of the pit" with which the horseman merges.

Lovecraft's need to search for the energy is illus-

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[63] Barlow, "The Barlow Journal," p. xxv.

[64] Lovecraft, Dreams and Fancies, p. 36.

trated by a dream he recounts in a letter of November 24, 1927, to Donald Wandrei:

> One scene is especially stamped upon my recollection--that of a dark, foetid, reed-choaked marsh under a gray autumn sky, with a rugged cliff of lichen-crusted stone rising to the north. Impell'd by some obscure quest, I ascended a rift or cleft in this beetling precipice, noting as I did so the black mouths of many fearsome burrows extending from both walls into the depths of the stony plateau. At several points the passage was roof'd over by the choaking of the upper parts of the narrow fissure; these places being exceeding dark, & forbidding the perception of such burrows as may have existed there. In one such dark space I felt conscious of a singular acession of fright, as if some subtile & bodiless emanation from the abyss were engulphing my spirit; but the blackness was too great for me to perceive the source of my alarm.[65]

"Impell'd by some obscure quest," Lovecraft advances through the maze of "fearsome burrows" toward the primal annihilatory energy, the Minotaur, as Lovecraft feels "as if some subtile & bodiless emanation from the abyss were engulphing my spirit." The stream-like evolutionary process is inevitable. Free will is swept aside as Lovecraft declares in a letter dated July 17, 1921, to Frank Belknap Long:

> As to free will--like the Epicureans, whose school I followed, I used to believe in it. Now, however, I am forced to admit that there is no room for it. It is fundamentally opposed to all those laws of causality which every phenomenon of Nature confirms and verifies. Man cannot "supplement and change the forces of Nature" because he himself is but a force of Nature.[66]

Lovecraft sees man himself as one more force in the impelling line of propulsive evolution. In Lovecraft's preor-

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[65] Ibid., p. 26.

[66] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 142.

dained descent into the unconscious, he discovers the nightmare of man's precarious existence, as Barton St. Armand points out:

> All of Lovecraft's heroes are predestined; their fates are immutably decreed by their own exotic temperaments and scientific curiosity, while all are figures of the rational mind seized by the irrational nightmare of man's insecure and essentially emphereal [sic] place in a universe which is at best glimpsed through a glass darkly.[67]

The process of investigation unfolds in an entry from Lovecraft's Commonplace Book:

> The dreams of one man actually create a strange half-mad world of quasi-material substance in another dimension. Another man, also a dreamer, blunders into this world in a dream. What he finds. Intelligence of demizens. Their dependence on the first dreamer. What happens at his death.[68]

This entry is a trip by Lovecraft into the "other dimension" of his unconscious. The autogenic anomalies which appear in his stories are embodiments of Lovecraft's unconscious energies. The appearance of the other man in the dream fantasy forshadows the image the Minotaur assumes. This clue is unravelled in Lovecraft's discussion of an early tale:

> One long-destroyed tale was of twin brothers--one murders the other, but conceals the body, and tries to live the life of both--appearing in one place as himself, and elsewhere as his victim. (Resemblance had been remarkable.) He meets sudden death (lightning) when posing as the dead man--is identified by a scar, and the secret finally revealed by his diary. This, I think, antedates my 11th year.[69]

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[67] St. Armand, pp. 211-12.

[68] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 100.

[69] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 20.

This youthful literary effort is the early enactment of Lovecraft's conflict, the assimilation of a basically well-ordered but weaker intellectual self by an inner, daemonic monster-self, an embodiment of repressed feelings and forces rising to meet and overwhelm him.

Later in his life Lovecraft writes in a letter to Clark Ashton Smith:

> Only last night I had another dream--of going back to 598 Angell Street [where the family lived after they left Lovecraft's beloved birthplace, 454 Angell] after infinite years.
> The neighborhood was deserted and grass-grown, and the houses were half-falling to pieces. The key on my ring fitted the mouldering door of 598, and I stepped in amidst the dust of centuries. Everything was as it was around 1910--pictures, furniture, books, etc., all in a state of extreme decay. Even objects which have been with me constantly in all later homes were there in their old positions, sharing in the general dissolution and dust-burial. I felt an extreme terror--and when footsteps sounded draggingly from the direction of my room I turned and fled in panic. I would not admit to myself what it was I feared to confront . . . but my fear also had the effect of making me shut my eyes as I raced past the mouldy, nitre-encrusted mirror in the hall. Out into the street I ran. . . . At the last moment my great fear seemed to be of passing my birthplace and early home--the beloved 454 Angell Street--toward which I was headed.[70]

The search leads coterminously "backward in time,"[71] down the evolutionary path toward ultimate dissolution and back toward the indelible memories of Lovecraft's childhood. But from 598 Angell Street, a home of his youth, Lovecraft cannot--at least in this dream--go further back in his journey

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[70] Lovecraft, Dreams and Fancies, p. 40.

[71] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 243.

toward his beginnings at his birthplace at 454 Angell Street. A clue to this conflict is the fear that closes Lovecraft's eyes as he rushes past the old mirror away from the terror behind his door. In his dream, the passage of evolutionary time is linked to the lapse of chronological time in his life. These twin circuits of the maze guide Lovecraft toward beginnings too monstrous to face.

Lovecraft's literary quest for the horror in his existence finds its origin in the beginnings of his life. His curiosity about this early self impels him to explore all aspects of his relation to the world around him. He writes in a letter dated May 5, 1918, to Maurice Moe:

> I admit that I am very much interested in the relation I bear to the things about me--the time relation, the space relation, and the causative relation. I desire to know approximately what my life is in terms of history--human, terrestrial, solar, and cosmical . . . and above all, what may be my manner of linkage to the general system--in what way, through what agency, and to what extent, the obvious guiding forces of creation act upon me and govern my existence. And if there be any less obvious forces, I desire to know them and their relation to me as well.[72]

Lovecraft's intense curiosity about his personal history and its beginnings suggests that the goal of his quest may lie in this area; his curiosity becomes more acute:

> What am I? What is the nature of the energy about me, and how does it affect me? So far I have seen nothing which could possibly give me the notion that cosmic force is the manifestation of a mind and will like my own infinitely magnified; a potent and purposeful consciousness which deals individually and directly with the miserable demizens of a wretched

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[72] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 63.

> little flyspeck on the back door of a microscopic universe, and which singles this putrid excrescence out as the one spot whereto to send an onlie begotten Son, whose mission it is to redeem these accursed flyspeck-inhabiting lice we call human beings.[73]

Lovecraft's question "What am I?" contains the destination of his quest: he is searching for the energy within his identity. He finds some of the answer in his early childhood. Lovecraft wishes to know the nature of the energy around him even as far back as the "microscopic universe" of his early years--an environment which was composed of his family and its immediate surroundings. Lovecraft's view of the universe as purposeless and chaotic may stem from his experience within his childhood environment.

The bitter castigation of the human race in Lovecraft's letter of August 8, 1916, to the Kleicomolo (Reinhardt Kleiner and Maurice Moe) may be a clue to the behavior of Lovecraft's parents:

> Our human race is only a trivial incident in the history of creation. It is of no more importance in the annals of eternity and infinity than is the child's snow-man in the annals of the terrestrial tribes and nations. And more: may not all mankind be a mistake--an abnormal growth--a disease is [sic--probably should be read as "in"] the system of Nature--an excrescence on the body of infinite progression like a wart on the human hand? Might not the total destruction of humanity, as well as of all animate creation, be a positive boon to Nature as a whole?[74]

Lovecraft's imagery of filth and disease denotes his disappointment with his fellowmen. Such a disappointment may come from a part of Lovecraft's nature that was formed at

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[73] Ibid., pp. 63-64. [74] Ibid., p. 24.

an early time when he was at the mercy of those in his environment. The perpetrators of most of the misery and terror which helped to foment such a diatribe against mankind were Lovecraft's parents.

Lovecraft states that when he was three years old, his memories began to "crystallize definitely and connectedly for the first time."[75] This was the time that the Lovecrafts moved back to the Providence home of Grandfather Phillips, where Lovecraft, as he puts it, "spent all the best years of my childhood."[76] The years at 454 Angell Street, with Grandfather Phillips as the center of Lovecraft's "entire universe,"[77] were the years of childhood which Lovecraft remembers. But the final object of Lovecraft's search lies beyond the tantalizing veil of forgetfulness, in the first three years of life.

An entry in Lovecraft's Commonplace Book points the way into the black abyss of the forgotten past:

> Some past (or future) horror just outside memory (or prescience.)[78] The terror in the maze may lie within the world of Lovecraft's forgotten infancy. Lovecraft writes in another Commonplace Book entry:
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> Perusal of a certain hideous book or possession of a certain awful talisman places person in touch with shocking dream or memory world which brings him

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[75] Ibid., p. 33. [76] Ibid., p. 6.

[77] Ibid., p. 33.

[78] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 12.

eventual destruction.[79]

Some mind-shaking memory awaits Lovecraft in his past.

Lovecraft says of his maternal grandfather, Whipple V. Phillips, that the man formed the center of his universe. However, Lovecraft's father, Winfield Scott Lovecraft, was a major influence during Lovecraft's earliest years, because the Lovecraft family lived away from Providence until their move back there in 1893, the time of the paretic seizure which incapacitated Winfield Scott Lovecraft. Lovecraft says of this event:

> In 1893 [when Lovecraft was almost three years old] my father was seized with a complete paralytic stroke, due to insomnia and an overstrained nervous system, which took him to the hospital for the remaining five years of his life. He was never afterward conscious, and my image of him is but vague.[80]

As August Derleth says, Lovecraft is never conscious of the real nature of his father's illness. That lack of knowledge--due partially to Mrs. Lovecraft's well-meant efforts to protect her son--does not remove from Lovecraft's life the mind-scarring effects of the behavior of a parent caught in the final stage of mind-destroying paresis. A world with such a center would have a traumatizing effect upon an infant. The chances that such an erratic influence was in the young child's environment are great, since Lovecraft says that his father was not placed in a hospital until after his incapacitating seizure.

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[79] Ibid., p. 11.

[80] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 6.

David Keller, M.D., a science fiction writer and psychiatrist, in an article entitled "Shadows Over Lovecraft," suggests a terrifying familial environment for the period from Lovecraft's birth until he was almost three years old:

> Shortly after the birth of this child [Lovecraft] the father became psychotic; and when Howard was three years old, Albert A. Baker was appointed his guardian because of the father's mental incompetency.[81]

An inquiry into the symptoms of paresis seems warranted, especially with regard to the behavior patterns engendered by the disease:

> The onset is commonly insidious, and manifests itself in a change of character. Former ideals and standards of living are replaced by recklessness, neglect of appearance, gross indulgence, bad moral habits, loss of sense of obligation to family and others. There is a general dulling of comprehension, deficiency of memory, judgment and self-control. There is no insight into these factors, which are often accompanied by a special sense of well-being and ideas of great wealth and power. Sometimes a convulsive attack ushers in the disease. The patient gradually deteriorates mentally and physically and there is an increasing inability to adapt to life. Very bizarre, grandiose delusions are constantly noted. . . . In the course of time the downhill mental involvement is so profound that the patient may be said to live a purely vegetative existence, and become as helpless as a newborn babe.[82]

Such characteristics are suggested by entries in Lovecraft's Commonplace Book: "Amencephalous or brainless monster who

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[81] David H. Keller, "Shadows over Lovecraft," Fresco, 8, No. 3 (1958), p. 21.

[82] C. Stanford Read, "Insanity: General Paralysis of the Insane," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1956 ed. (Chicago: Benton 1956) XII, 389.

survives and attains prodigious size."[83] Another entry is also suggestive: "Shapeless living thing forming nucleus of ancient building."[84] These entries are shadows of the chaos which seems to have been an everyday part of Lovecraft's first three years. Lovecraft fears some terrible memory, and what more terrible memory can there be than that of a psychotic father? Daily terror forms chaos, and such daily traumata impressed upon an infant could cause the adult man to declare all mankind to be a mistake, an abnormal growth, or even a disease. Such a chaotic, destructive influence may emerge later as a mindless monster lying at the center of the ancient building containing Lovecraft's memory of his early familial experience. The nightmare chaos generated in a child's world by an insane father could form the memory that shapes Lovecraft's view of himself.

The effects of such a holocaust appear in later Lovecraft letters. For example, the craving for orderly behavior is apparent in Lovecraft's letter of February 20, 1924, to Frank Belknap Long:

> I have no respect or reverence whatsoever for any person who does not live abstemiously and purely--I can like him and tolerate him, and admit him to be a social equal . . . but in my heart I feel him to be my inferior--nearer the abysmal amoeba and the Neanderthal man--and at times cannot veil a sort of condescension and sardonic contempt for him, no matter how much my aesthetick and intellectual superior he may be. It is a very deep feeling.[85]

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[83] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 26.

[84] Ibid., p. 104.

[85] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 315.

An early remembered feeling may emerge as the genesis of the abhorrence for the non-abstemious. The terror-fraught origin of the hatred of dissolute living may be the effect of a paretic father who was beyond the control of a weak-willed and fearful mother.

Lovecraft integrates the two ideas of disorderly behavior and devolution. In Lovecraft's view, whenever anyone acts uninhibitedly, that person takes a large step downward in the direction of Neanderthal man and the primal amoeba. The twin terrors of past memory and primal devolution are conjoined in a Commonplace Book reference:

> Man tries to recapture all of his past, aided by drugs and music acting on memory. Extends process to hereditary memory--even to pre-human days. These ancestral memories figure in dreams. Plans stupendous recovery of primal past--but becomes sub-human, develops a hideous primal odor, takes to the woods, and is killed by own dog.[86]

The path of devolution leads Lovecraft to a scientifically critical vision of a chaos he can face as a truth-seeking adult. In his scientifically oriented search, Lovecraft can intellectualize--and therefore face, after a fashion--what is intolerable as literal memory.

But intolerable as the literal memories may be, Lovecraft is preoccupied with his past. The originator of the "Providence Detective Agency" is enacting the ritual of investigation of the answers which are forever just beyond his prescience and which therefore enthrall him; Lovecraft

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[86] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 12.

writes:

> All life is hollow and futile--it means nothing; and I want nothing of it but passive dream and simple childhood memory till the greater boon of oblivion comes. My taste? Simply a wistful longing for the perpetuation of those early fancies and tribal memories which moulded my imagination when I was very young.[87]

The "tribal memories" of his familial entrapment in chaos mold Lovecraft's imagination. His attempt to carve order out of that primary chaos that he has endured is implicit in his letter of March 3, 1927, to Bernard Dwyer:

> I'm a rather one-sided person whose only really burning interests are the past and the unknown or the strange, and whose aestheticism in general is more negative than positive--i.e., a hatred of ugliness rather than an active love of beauty. I see that I am fundamentally a cynic, a sceptic, and an Epicurean--a conservative and quietist without any great breadth of taste or depth of ability, and with a literary ambition confined altogether to the recording of certain images connected with bizarrerie and antiquarianism. . . . To my cynical spirit the world is an absolutely negligible and purposeless affair.[88]

Lovecraft uses his fictive talent to enact the bringing of order out of chaos. His letter to Dwyer continues:

> To me authorship is only a mechanical means of getting formulated and preserved certain fugitive images which I wish formulated and preserved.[89]

The common denominator of Lovecraft's fiction is the confrontation of the monstrousness of chaos by a limited but rational impulse toward order. But in a universe of disruption and disease, even the most courageous entity, lost

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[87] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 316.

[88] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 111.

[89] Ibid.

and alone, may itself be infected with the germs of madness. Because Lovecraft is influenced by the abnormal family life of his first three years, he feels that he himself has become a monster: "Man with unnatural face, oddity of speaking. Found to be a mask--revelation."[90] And the mirror image appears:

> Fear of mirrors--memory of a dream in which scene is altered & climax is hideous surprise at seeing oneself in the water or mirror.[91]

The primal force coalesces around the image that he fears to gaze upon--in part because of the hints of the unhappy existence behind the dark limit of forgetfulness. For Lovecraft to remember the early traumas would mean the destruction of the fantasy world built of the good memories of the ordered life at 454 Angell Street.

Lovecraft's conflict of yearning for the truth but not daring to face it is revealed in one of his earliest tales. His character discovers a monstrous creature--which may stand for Lovecraft's rejected self--in a maze-like cave in the story titled "The Beast in the Cave." In a letter he describes the beast to a friend:

> It had been a MAN, long ago lost in the cave, and mentally and physically metamorphosed by perpetual darkness, perpetual silence, and perpetual solitude.[92]

The creature which had once been a man may be Lovecraft's

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[90] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 23.

[91] Ibid., p. 102.

[92] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 21.

terrified spirit, lost in the dark cave of madness. Because he is the son of emotionally unbalanced parents, he feels that he, too, must devolve into monstrosity. His search for this monster-self takes the form of movement back down the metamorphic path toward his forgotten childhood.

Lovecraft rediscovers this nightmare by making the voyage into the darkened areas of his childhood, along the course of the maze that leads to the black abyss. In that darkness dwells the Minotaur, the primal end of the journey to terror that lies at the foot of the mental, evolutionary scale of Lovecraft's mind.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPRENTICESHIP

The search for a truth that overwhelms is the most powerful motif in Lovecraft's fiction. He writes to James F. Morton on October 19, 1929, of his need to inhabit and explore the past:

> The past is real--it is all there is. The present is only a trivial and momentary boundary-line--whilst the future, though wholly determinate, is too essentially unknown and landmarkless to possess any hold upon our sense of concrete aesthetic imagery . . . since we cannot study it as a unified whole and become accustomed to its internal variations as we can study and grow accustomed to the vary'd past. There is nothing in the future to tie one's loyalties and affections to--it can mean nothing to us, because it involves none of those mnemonic association-links upon which the illusion of meaning is based.[1]

For Lovecraft the world of the past is the only reality, because it includes remembered events that grew in his mind to become valued parts of a sacred ritual. He seeks in myth and ritual aesthetic images, "those mnemonic association-links upon which the illusion of meaning is based."

Because Lovecraft finds reality in his past, his fiction grows from his memories to form a reconstruction of his central myth: the hero's struggle with the chaos of the

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[1] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1929-1931, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1971), p. 31.

Minotaur. In his letter of May 19, 1927, to Donald Wandrei, Lovecraft writes:

> I have often wished that I had the literary power to call up visions of some vast & remote realm of entity beyond the universes of matter & energy; where vivid interplays of unknown and inconceivable influences give vast & fabulous activity to dimensional areas that are not shapes, & to nuclei of complex arrangement that are not minds.[2]

The "vast & remote realm of entity" is the labyrinth with its monstrous Minotaur, the line of demarcation where chaos merges into entity and "vivid interplays of unknown and inconceivable influences" lie in wait for the rational hero.

The touch of this limit contains a truth for Lovecraft that comes to light in a letter of November, 1918, to Alfred Galpin regarding Shakespeare's character Hamlet:

> It is really a distressing glimpse of absolute truth. But in effect it approximates mental derangement. Reason is unimpaired, but Hamlet sees no longer any occasion for its use. He perceives the objects and events about him, and their relation to each other and to himself as clearly as before, but his own estimate of their importance, and his lack of any aim or desire to pursue any ordinary course amongst them, impart to his point of view such a contemptuous, ironical singularity, that he may well be thought a madman by mistake.[3]

Lovecraft's view of Hamlet reflects his own vision of the precariousness of rational reality and the narrow world of

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[2] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1925-1929, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1968), p. 127.

[3] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1911-1924, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 77.

reasoned behavior. Ironically, Lovecraft himself could have arrived at this insight as a result of action within his family circle, for as the young idealistic Hamlet sees a monstrous reality in the abuse of family relationship, so the infant Lovecraft was touched by the tangible chaos that pervaded his family. To escape the intolerable situation that formed the nexus of his early childhood, Lovecraft moves toward ratiocination. But even as he achieves the safe pinnacle of intellection, Lovecraft looks to the turbulent forces swirling below in the nightmare realm of emotive energy. In a letter of June 4, 1921, he writes to Frank Belknap Long:

> The only real tranquility--the true Epicurean ataraxia,--comes from the assumption of the objective, external point of view whereby we stand off as spectators and watch ourselves without caring much; a triumph of mind over feeling.[4]

Childhood fear emerges as a philosophical point of view, and the myth of the rational hero's encounter with the incarnation of disorder is lived out in the mind of the man the child became. The vintage of primal chaos' touch is Lovecraft's retreat into a pervasive intellectuality, as he writes on September 14, 1919, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> It is obvious that although I have "nothing to live for," I certainly have just as much as any other of the insignificant bacteria called human beings. I have thus been content to observe the phenomena about me with something like objective interest, and to feel a certain tranquility which comes from perfect acceptance of my place as an inconsequential atom. In ceasing to care about most things, I have

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[4] Ibid., p. 135.

likewise ceased to suffer in many ways.[5]

From the safe vantage point of the purely intellectual and scientific, Lovecraft looks upon the configuration of the energy he fears to feel. He writes to Donald Wandrei on February 10, 1927:

> It is beauty--the beauty of wonder, of antiquity, of landscape, of architecture, of horror, of light & shadow, line & contour, of mystic memory & hallowed tradition--that I worship. . . . That is . . . why science with its breathless mysteries & inconceivable vistas has so often crowded mere letters from my sphere of paramount interest.[6]

The "mystic memory" of the all-consuming chaos within his childhood environment haunts him; the memory itself becomes the "hallowed tradition" Lovecraft worships throughout his life. The writing of his stories is a journey into the mystery in his memory. Each story is an enactment of Lovecraft's sacred rite of scientific discovery, the search for truth that emerges as myth enacted into ritual--a union of science and letters. In a letter of September 14, 1919, to Reinhardt Kleiner, Lovecraft hints that he would rather investigate the marked and holy ground of prior experience than to explore new and possibly confusing areas:

> Consider yourself an impersonal observer without emotions, and have as your aim in life the tranquil observation and classification of the facts about you. I am sure that I, who hardly know what an emotion is like (outside of a few bursts of honest anger once in a while!) am far less vexed than he who is constantly straining after new sensations.[7]

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[5] Ibid., p. 87.

[6] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, pp. 102-03.

[7] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 87-88.

Lovecraft would rather amalgamate the knowledge inherent in cerebral excursions into his personal past than explore "new sensations." There is the suggestion in the emphasis on the word "anger" that a central actuality in his personal mental environment was the fear that uncontrolled emotion might break out at some time during Lovecraft's "tranquil observation and classification of the facts" in his mental environment.

Lovecraft's intellectualized approach is clear in his letter of June 1, 1921, to his student Anne Renshaw:

> I have today not a single well-defined wish save to die or to learn facts.[8]

Because the past is real for him, the answers Lovecraft searches for lie in facets of memory from his past. The discovery of his buried enigma is Lovecraft's detective-like reason for being, and he searches through the maze for the answer to the riddle of his past. He writes to Maurice Moe on May 15, 1918:

> I desire to know approximately what my life is in terms of history--human, terrestrial, solar, and cosmical . . . and above all, what may be my manner of linkage to the general system--in what way, through what agency, and to what extent, the obvious guiding forces of creation act upon me and govern my existence. And if there be any less obvious forces, I desire to know them and their relation to me as well.[9]

Lovecraft sees his life and being as a series of external and internal forces. Lovecraft sees his mind as a force, and he views his stories as a projection of mental forces:

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[8] Ibid., p. 135. [9] Ibid., p. 63.

"I have often wished that I had the literary power to call up visions of some vast & remote realm. . . ."[10]

Lovecraft prepares to call forth and meet the forces within his mind by becoming his own scientific instrument through a retreat into intellectuality, an escape into objectivity confirmed in his letter of June 1, 1921, to Anne Renshaw:

> I am, I hope, now a complete machine without a disturbing and biassing volition, a machine for the reception and classification of ideas and the construction of theories. As such, I may say that the obsoleteness of religion and idealism as systems of enlightened thought is impressed upon me with redoubled force. If anything is true, it is that these beliefs are seen to be finally extinct until some cataclysm shall wipe out civilisation and inaugurate a new Dark Age of myth and ignorance.[11]

Lovecraft's fictive, analytical explorations of his past take the form of "the reception and classification of ideas and the construction of theories"--or, put in less scientific words, the reception and classification of memories and the construction of fictional narratives. Lovecraft meets the "cataclysm" which will destroy civilization in almost every story, a cataclysm reminiscent of past terrors. Dimly recalled traumas of early childhood emerge in Lovecraft's adult intellectuality as "a new Dark Age of myth and ignorance."

Lovecraft's belief that the productions of the artist are a summary of past impressions is stated in his

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[10] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 127.

[11] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 135.

letter of September 3, 1929, to his pupil Elizabeth Toldridge:

> All the poet can do is to guess, absorb other people's conclusions, and set forth his feelings in symbolic form. Naturally, he is quick to absorb impressions--the quality that makes him a poet gives him this facility--and sensitive in his reaction to them.[12]

Lovecraft does "set forth his feelings in symbolic form" in his fiction. Because his feelings are so bound up with the past, his only reality, it appears that his stories may be seen as symbolic exegeses of his memories. Lovecraft speaks of fantasy in his letter of November 16, 1926, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> But fantasy is something altogether different. Here we have an art based on the imaginative life of the human mind, frankly recognized as such; & in its way as natural & scientific--as truly related to natural (even if uncommon & delicate) psychological processes as the starkest of photographic realism.[13]

Lovecraft's fiction is a juncture of scientific search and symbolic reminiscence, "an act based on the imaginative life of the human mind, frankly recognized as such." His fiction reflects "natural (even if uncommon & delicate) psychological processes."

A letter of March 3, 1927, from Lovecraft to Bernard Dwyer confirms the presence of the idea of fiction as personal mental history:

> In my own humble and careless effusions, one sees the convergence of two separate tendencies--a liking for well-modeled expression in the traditional manner for its own sake, and a wish to get

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[12] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 23.

[13] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 90.

> on paper some of the images and impressions constantly running through my mind.[14]

Lovecraft believes his fiction reflects the past. He writes in June 1927, to Dwyer:

> [Reminiscent] individual art will not reflect its own age, but it will sometimes reflect former ages almost as well as the artists of those ages once reflected them--depending on the extent to which the artist is able to merge himself and his soul into the background of bygone life.[15]

With his fiction, Lovecraft fulfills his wish to pursue a motion backward in time and explore the personal realm and integrate himself, body and spirit, into the life of the past. The source and purpose of his fiction are sketched in his letter of January 23, 1931, to August Derleth:

> I have had thousands of impressions of unreal phenomena--false memories, &c.--and have given them the most careful study--almost invariably tracking down the real sources of the impressions, which often bear only a slight resemblance to the impressions themselves. I have likewise accomplished similar tracings of the bizarre impressions of others.[16]

Lovecraft suggests that his fictional narratives are literary attempts--however unconscious--to explore the maze of his personal past.

Some tracing of the impressions forming Lovecraft's fiction may be possible; Lovecraft's love of the truth and his detective work in tracing the sources of the "bizarre impressions of others" constitute an invitation to trace some of the impressions which perhaps grew into his narra-

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[14] Ibid., p. 107. [15] Ibid.

[16] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 281.

tives. In his letter of December 21, 1931, the metamorphosis is apparent as Lovecraft writes of the transformation of environmental impressions into fantastic monsters of the mind:

> Yes--I have frequently noticed the bestial and repulsive aspect in crowds, especially in such decadent & cosmopolitan centres as New York City. Hogarth certainly reproduced the true substance of life, and it takes but a little imagination to modify those degraded types into the out and out monsters of phantasy. . . . Swift surely had a sound basis for his account of the Yahoos--which indeed I found fascinating from childhood onward.[17]

Lovecraft's lifelong fascination with Jonathan Swift's Yahoos could spring from his veiled memories of his paretic father's lawless behavior, because the infantile exposure to such denigrating behavior is an explanation for Lovecraft's wholesale portrayal in his fiction of the "out and out monsters of phantasy." Lovecraft's words in his letter of June 18, 1930, to Maurice Moe could have been written about Lovecraft himself, especially in the light of his fear of feeling and turn toward the intellectual part of himself:

> Undoubtedly the emotional stresses of many great and little artists display traces of one-sided education, warped mentality, ill-proportioned impulses, or such things.[18]

The purpose of the analyses in this chapter and those following is to explore Lovecraft's fiction as an outgrowth of certain "emotional stresses" symbolically apparent in his fiction as the Grecian myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.

The first example of Lovecraft's adult fiction is

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[17] Ibid., p. 450. [18] Ibid., p. 155.

"The Tomb,"[19] written in 1917, as he relates:

> As for "The Tomb" . . . it was the first tale I wrote after an hiatus of 9 years--1908 to 1917.[20]

The story recounts the discovery and exploration by a melancholic young man named Jervas Dudley of a large sepulchre recessed into the slope of a hill. While he is at the tomb, Dudley's mood turns inward, toward the world of his imagination: "I have dwelt ever in realms apart from the visible world."[21]

The tomb houses the remains of Dudley's ancestors, the ancient Hyde family. Dudley discovers the door of the tomb, which is ajar but chained. He is able to open it with a key he finds through the exercise of patience, a virtue which he is reminded of as he reads of Theseus in Plutarch's Lives:

> The year after I first beheld the tomb, I stumbled upon a worm-eaten translation of Plutarch's Lives in the book-filled attic of my home. Reading the life of Theseus, I was much impressed by that passage telling of the great stone beneath which the boyish hero was to find his tokens of destiny whenever he should become old enough to lift its enormous weight. The legend had the effect of dispelling my keenest impatience to enter the vault, for it made me feel

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[19] The order of the stories considered will be chronological; the chronology followed (with one exception, "The Tomb," here noted) will be that of the list prepared by Lovecraft himself, found on pages vii and viii of Dagon and other Macabre Tales, edited by August Derleth.

[20] James Warren Thomas, "Howard Phillips Lovecraft: A Self Portrait," Thesis Brown University, 1950, p. 106.

[21] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Dagon and other Macabre Tales, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 9.

that the time was not yet ripe.[22]

Dudley visits the macabre tomb often, and is "forced to exercise care in threading the mazes of the wooded hollow."[23] Through this maze, Dudley enters the world of his mind, for he sees atop the hill containing the tomb an old mansion, an ancient edifice in all its two hundred year old glory, in which a great feast is being given. The people whom he sees there--the Hydes and their friends--are all those who lie buried in the tomb. Dudley enters wholeheartedly into the carousing of the wild revelers:

> Amidst a wild and reckless throng I was the wildest and most abandoned. Gay blasphemy poured in torrents from my lips, and in shocking sallies I heeded no law of God, man, or nature.[24]

As the pandemonium reaches its height, lightning strikes the mansion, and the old building is consumed by fire. Dudley's concern is that he may never lie in the tomb of his ancestors and gain the peace of oblivion. This frightful possibility is rectified as the final sentence declares that Jervas Dudley has a resting place reserved within the tomb.

Through the persona of Jervas Dudley, Lovecraft explores the past of his memories beyond the limits of the visible world. Lovecraft's childhood games are similar to the explorations made by Dudley in "The Tomb," as August Derleth writes:

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[22] Ibid., p. 12. [23] Ibid., p. 16.

[24] Ibid., p. 17.

> On the banks of the Seekonk as a child he acted out Greek and Roman legends; by early adolescence he was writing poetry, and by fifteen he had produced his first story, The Beast in the Cave.[25]

The reader is introduced to the myth of Theseus, which plays a central role in the Lovecraft canon. The part of the myth in which Theseus sets out on his journey is the beginning of the labyrinth. The maze itself is touched upon as Dudley threads his way through the forest toward the tomb.

This maze leads Lovecraft into the world of his mind, where he finds the party of his "ancestors." At this feast he meets the beast of chaotic disorder, the Minotaur of madness. Lightning, the final cataclysmic force that Lovecraft uncovers, drives him to find the oblivion of the grave, the peace of the eternal rest. Lovecraft's wish for oblivion as he traverses the maze of his fiction appears in a Lovecraft letter of August 19, 1921, the eve of his thirty-first birthday:

> At 9 a.m. I will be one more milepost nearer the welcome sepulchre which yawns for my gray head.[26]

From the beginning of the Lovecraft canon appears the path of the maze, a journey marked with milestones. "The Tomb" is a clear, if rudely simple, demonstration of the Lovecraft modus operandi: the journey into the maze which appears as the path through the forest and exploration of the tomb, and

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[25] August Derleth, "H. P. Lovecraft and His Work," in The Dunwich Horror and Others, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1963), p. x.

[26] Thomas, p. 18.

the meeting of the Minotaur, which appears as the chaotic revel climaxed by the lightning bolt.

"Dagon," a story written shortly after the completion of "The Tomb," is about the exploration of an uncharted island. The narrator, who is not named, describes being cast adrift in a seldom-traversed area of the Pacific Ocean. As he sleeps, a mysterious, unexplained change occurs, placing him and his lifeboat upon a deserted island. Some dead and decomposing prehistoric fish around the boat lead him to believe the island is the crest of some recent upheaval of the ocean floor. After two days of waiting for the land to dry and solidify, the narrator walks inland toward a rise or hummock he sees.

He arrives at the bottom of the hill, ascends the rise, and discovers a gigantic canyon. Because it is night, the narrator stands on the brink of total darkness:

> I felt myself on the edge of the world; peering over the rim into a fathomless chaos of eternal night. Through my terror ran curious reminiscences of Paradise Lost, and Satan's hideous climb through the unfashioned realms of darkness.[27]

He descends the dark declivity, "urged on by an impulse which I cannot definitely analyse."[28] He sees a large stone statue, standing at the edge of a small river on the opposite slope of the canyon. The monolith is an image of the fish-god Dagon, carved by a prehistoric race. The statue stands in "its position in an abyss which had yawned

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[27] Ibid. [28] Ibid.

at the bottom of the sea since the world was young."[29] The narrator surmises that the beings which created the statue were members of a tribe "whose last descendant had perished eras before the first ancestor of the Piltdown or Neanderthal Man was born."[30]

Suddenly there is motion, and a monster rises from the water to pay homage to the figure. As the hideous form flings its arms around the giant image, the narrator flees the scene. He returns to his boat as the storm which casts him adrift is brewing. He becomes delirious and regains consciousness in a San Francisco hospital, after his rescue by a freighter. But he is not free of the terror:

> I dream of a day when they [the fish-gods whose likeness he has seen] may rise above the billows to drag down in their reeking talons the remnants of puny, war-exhausted mankind--of a day when the land shall sink, and the dark ocean floor shall ascend amidst universal pandemonium.[31]

Here again are the earmarks of Lovecraft's myth. The walk on the island and the descent into the abyss are the maze. The narrator's fear of "the edge of the world"[32] and the act of worship by the Polyphemus-like monster occupy the position of the Minotaur. Lovecraft compares the stone god in its place within the chasm with Milton's portrayal of Satan's flight through chaos. This comparison reflects Lovecraft's myth, for both narratives depict a monstrous force lurking within chaos. The maze leads the narrator

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[29] Ibid., p. 6. [30] Ibid., p. 7.

[31] Ibid., p. 8. [32] Ibid., p. 5.

toward the inevitable confrontation.

In "Dagon," evolution is woven into the temporal aspect of the maze. Through the persona of the narrator, Lovecraft goes back in time to a point predating neanderthal man. Time and space form the path of devolution. The engulfing of the world by pandemonium suggests Lovecraft's fear that energy will overwhelm his rationality and dissolve his intellectual integrity.

Lovecraft's fear of the unknown is apparent in "The Statement of Randolph Carter," a sketch written in 1919, two years after the completion of "Dagon." In this story, Randolph Carter, the narrator, and his mysterious friend Harley Warren take tools and a portable telephone to an old graveyard. The two men are following instructions that Warren reads from a worm-eaten book of ancient origin. While searching for a nameless horror among the graves, Warren explains his theory that he feels might be the answer to the question of "why certain corpses never decay, but rest firm and fat in their tombs for a thousand years."[33] Carter says that "the picture seared into my soul is of one scene only,"[34] and describes Warren's descent down stone steps into a grave which the two investigators have opened. Carter wishes to descend into the depths, but Warren overrules

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[33] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, At the Mountains of Madness and other Novels, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1964), p. 285.

[34] Ibid.

him, takes one unit of the telephone, and enters the vault-like aperture. He keeps Carter informed of what he is observing. Unable to see for himself, Carter is free to imagine "some peril beyond the radius of the human imagination."[35] Warren meets a menace in the cave-like structure he is exploring and is overcome by it. His last words to Carter are:

> "Curse these hellish things--legions--My God! Beat it! Beat it! BEAT IT!"[36]

This story is the result of a Lovecraft dream of December 1919. He describes the dream in a conversation with his friend Samuel Loveman, a poet:

> I dreamed of a huge and ancient graveyard filled with tombs, and the marble graves as old as eternity, with crawling ivy underfoot, and each moulder-ing slab covered by a growth of green moss and evil lichen. And as I strolled through those ominous precincts, I became aware of a voice that called me. Impelled by fear and urged by sheer horror, I made my way to the one grave that seemed to open and yawn with flaring, blinding lights before me, the voice--your voice--calling--calling. . . . I descended and followed the voice, the voice that was yours, into the hollow obscurity of that unspeakable grave![37]

In this story Lovecraft divides himself into two personas: Carter, who remains outside the grave entrance, and Warren, who enters the maze to meet the embodiment of the Minotaur. The double identity in this story is a reminder of Lovecraft's boyhood tale of the twin brothers, one of whom kills the other. Warren enters the maze and is killed, while

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[35] Ibid., p. 288. [36] Ibid., p. 289.

[37] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 94-97.

Lovecraft's "other half" escapes.

"The Statement of Randolph Carter" is a "milestone"[38] in Lovecraft's maze which yields two opposites: the peaceful slumber suggested by Warren's theory of corpses which do not decay, and the invasion of the world by pandemoniac forces. This invasion is suggested in "Dagon" and appears in a 1919 entry of Lovecraft's Commonplace Book:

> Disturbance of an ancient grave looses a monstrous presence on the world.[39]

The invading forces are the Minotaur, and the death of a Lovecraft "puppet persona" demonstrates the growing strength of the phenomenon. Paradoxically, Lovecraft attains his goal of escape into oblivion through being consumed by the subterranean horror.

In "The Temple," written in 1920, explorations shift to a German U-boat. Under the leadership of the iron-willed narrator, Lieutenant-Commander Karl Heinrich, the U-boat torpedoes a British freighter, sinks the lifeboats, and then submerges. When it rises, a young seaman of Greek descent is found dead but with his hands still gripping the deck. As this man is thrown overboard, he appears to come to life and swim away. Lieutenant Klenze, second in command and possessing a more imaginative mind than the fanatical Heinrich, is shaken by this occurrence. Later the young Greek

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[38] Thomas, p. 18.

[39] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, The Notes and Commonplace Book Employed by the late H. P. Lovecraft, ed. Robert H. Barlow (Lakeport, Calif.: Futile Press, 1938), p. 10.

is seen leading a group of dolphins. Then a mysterious explosion cripples the U-boat, and it drifts toward the sea-bottom at an unknown point. As the submarine is sinking, members of the crew become more and more irrational, and Heinrich and Klenze shoot them:

> The six remaining pigs of seamen, suspecting that we were lost, had suddenly burst into a mad fury . . . and were in a delirium of cursing and destruction. They roared like the animals they were, and broke instruments and furniture indiscriminately; screaming about such nonsense as . . . the dark dead youth who looked at them and swam away.[40]

Lieutenant Klenze goes mad, abandons the ship, and is not seen again.

Later the submarine comes to rest near an undersea cliff:

> I [Heinrich] was confronted by the richly ornate and perfectly preserved facade of a great building, evidently a temple, hollowed from the solid rock.[41]

Awed by the sight, Heinrich comes a step closer to losing his rationality: "In my enthusiasm I became nearly as idiotic and sentimental as poor Klenze":[42]

> In the center yawns a great open door. . . . The art is of the most phenomenal perfection, largely Hellenic in idea, yet strangely individual. It imparts an impression of terrible antiquity, as though it were the remotest rather than the immediate ancestor of Greek art.[43]

Heinrich wishes to explore the temple, but the crew's destruction of materiel prevents more than one exploration. At the dark door of the temple, Heinrich declares:

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[40] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 76. [41] Ibid., p. 80.

[42] Ibid. [43] Ibid., pp. 80-81.

> My rage was unbounded, yet my German sense forbade me to venture unprepared into an utterly black interior which might prove the lair of some indescribable marine monster or a labyrinth of passages from whose windings I could never extricate myself.[44]

In this atmosphere, Heinrich's Prussian rationality continues to falter:

> Moreover, for the first time in my life I experienced the emotion of dread. I began to realize how some of poor Klenze's moods had arisen, for as the temple drew me more and more, I feared its aqueous abysses with a blind and mounting terror.[45]

Heinrich remains within the submarine for two days, but finally he is overmastered by his wish to visit the temple, as perhaps poor Klenze has done before him. Heinrich notes that "later incidents are chaotic."[46] The process of deterioration is complete:

> My own German will no longer controls my acts . . . but I am a Prussian and a man of sense, and will use to the last what little will I have. . . .
>
> I have no fear, not even from the prophecies of the madman Klenze. . . . I shall die calmly, like a German, in the black and forgotten depths. This demoniac laughter which I hear as I write comes only from my own weakening brain. So I will carefully don my suit and walk boldly up to the steps into that primal shrine, that silent secret of unfathomed waters and uncounted years.[47]

"The Temple" is a chronicle of the dissolution of a rational mind. From the first disturbance among the crew to Heinrich's final loss of volition, the disorganization of a firm if ruthless intellect is sustained. The submarine's descent to the ocean floor parallels the devolu-

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[44] Ibid., p. 82. [45] Ibid. [46] Ibid., p. 84.

[47] Ibid., p. 84-85.

tion from rational order to a level of unmitigated abandonment.

The ocean symbolizes the unconscious and the open door of the temple is the doorway to Lovecraft's world of memories. The temple's unearthly power triumphs over the conscious will of first Klenze and then Heinrich. The descent is devolution downward from the realm of intellect to that of emotive force; this descent is the maze. This declination corresponds to the sleep in "Dagon" and the Poe-like other-worldliness of Dudley in "The Tomb." As Lovecraft writes in "Dagon":

> If superior minds were ever placed in fullest contact with the secrets preserved by ancient and lowly cults, the resultant abnormalities would soon not only wreck the world, but threaten the integrity of the universe.[48]

Through his creation of the persona of the U-boat commander, Lovecraft prepares to enter the maze and meet the Minotaur, noted as "some indescribable marine monster"[49] whose lair is within "a labyrinth of passages from whose windings I could never extricate myself."[50] Because of his dread, Heinrich cannot go beyond the yawning door. There is a hint of future exploration in Heinrich's plan to leave the submarine and to die while exploring the temple.

Heinrich's comment that the temple is of pre-Hellenic design suggests that the Minotaur is important in Lovecraft's fiction, because one synonym for "pre-Hellenic"

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[48] Ibid., p. 242. [49] Ibid., p. 82. [50] Ibid.

is "Cretan." This congruity is augmented by Lovecraft's interest in the archaeological work of uncovering the ancient Minoan civilization on the isle of Crete done by Sir Arthur Evans. Such an interest may have found its way into "The Temple."

Conversely, the scene of "The Music of Erich Zann," written approximately one year after "The Temple," is the top of a high hill in Paris, although the city is not named. The unnamed narrator is awed by the steepness and narrowness of the Rue d'Auseil--it is almost a cliff and ends at a high, ivy-covered wall. The houses along its sides are high, old, and lean in every direction; some of them almost touch over the street. The narrator has taken a room near the top of the hill in an old house that is the highest building on the Rue d'Auseil. He moves to the fifth floor, just under the room of an old German violinist named Erich Zann who is dumb, so that he must "speak" through his instrument. Zann has chosen the highest and most isolated room, "whose single gable window was the only point on the street from which one could look over the terminating wall at the declivity and panorama beyond."[51]

The narrator, who knows nothing about music, becomes more and more fascinated with Zann's weird playing. He meets Zann and wonders at the musician's small, twisted

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[51] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror and Others, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1963), p. 90.

physiognomy and "grotesque, satyrlike face."[52] Zann reluctantly leads him to his garret room and plays a fugue of his own invention. The listener whistles an excerpt of Zann's weird music and asks him to play it. "Immediately the wrinkled satyr-like face . . . grew suddenly distorted with an expression wholly beyond analysis,"[53] and Zann looks anxiously to the lone window as if he fears some mysterious invasion. The narrator attempts to look through the window, but the frantic musician pulls him away and writes him a note which says that Zann is "lonely, and afflicted with strange fears and nervous disorders connected with his music and with other things."[54] Zann sends his inquisitive guest away, imploring him not to return.

The narrator tries to learn more about the strange musician and his unearthly music:

> The attic room and the weird music seemed to hold an odd fascination for me. I had a curious desire to look out of that window.[55]

He listens to dreadful sounds at the keyhole of Zann's locked door. One night he hears "the shrieking viol swell into a chaotic babel of sound."[56] Suddenly there is silence; he hears movement as Zann closes the gable window, and then the door is opened:

> This time his delight at having me present was real; for his distorted face gleamed with relief while he

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[52] Ibid., p. 91. [53] Ibid., pp. 91-92.

[54] Ibid., p. 92. [55] Ibid., p. 93.

[56] Ibid., p. 94.

> clutched at my coat as a child clutches at its mother's skirts.[57]

Zann begins to write feverishly "a full account in German of all the marvels and terrors which beset him."[58] Suddenly the two men hear a sound from outside the window:

> [It was] . . . an exquisitely low and infinitely distant musical note, suggesting a player in one of the neighboring houses, or in some abode beyond the lofty wall over which I had never been able to look.[59]

The aged fiddler begins to play frantically, and it is even more horrendous than before, for now the spectator can see the dread in Zann's contorted visage:

> Louder and louder, wilder and wilder, mounted the shrieking and whining of that desperate viol. The player was dripping with an uncanny perspiration and twisted like a monkey, always looking frantically at the curtained window. In his frenzied strains I could almost see shadowy satyrs and bacchanals dancing and whirling insanely through seething abysses of clouds and smoke and lightning.[60]

A strong wind gust blows the sheets of Zann's massage through the window as his playing becomes a blind orgy of fear. The narrator looks through the gable window and sees ". . . the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance of anything on earth."[61] The now violently rushing wind blows out the candles. The listener tries to make Zann stop his mad playing:

> When my hand touched his ear, I shuddered, though I knew not why--knew not why till I felt of the still face; the ice-cold, stiffened, unbreathing face whose glassy eyes bulged uselessly into the void. And

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[57] Ibid. [58] Ibid. [59] Ibid., pp. 94-95.

[60] Ibid., p. 95. [61] Ibid., p. 96.

> then by some miracle, finding the door and the large wooden bolt, I plunged wildly away from that glassy-eyed thing in the dark.[62]

The narrator describes his escape:

> Leaping, floating, flying down those endless stairs through the dark house . . . clattering down steps and over cobbles . . . to the broader, healthier streets and boulevards we know; all these are terrible impressions that linger with me. And I recall that there was no wind, and that the moon was out, and that all the lights of the city twinkled.[63]

After his fearful escape, the narrator is unable to find his way back to the Rue d'Auseil.

The story of the encounter with the strange violinist is another tale which has its genesis in a dream, for according to Alfred Galpin, who was Lovecraft's closest friend:

> It was during this stage of our correspondence . . . [circa 1920] that Howard had a dream which he expressed in the story (published in 1925), The Music of Erich Zann, set in the "rue d'Auseuil" [sic], a most grim and squalid street.[64]

This story from a dream is another illustration of Lovecraft's use of the maze-Minotaur myth.

Lovecraft's love of astronomy is a component of this story. Lovecraft writes in a letter to Reinhardt Kleiner about his early experience with science:

> In the summer of 1903 my mother presented me with a 2-1/2" astronomical telescope, and thenceforward my gaze was ever upward at night. The late Prof. Upton of Brown, a friend of the family, gave me the freedom of the college observatory (Ladd Observatory) & I came and went there at will on my bicycle. Ladd

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[62] Ibid., pp. 96-97. [63] Ibid., p. 97.

[64] Alfred Galpin, "Memories of a Friendship," in The Shuttered Room and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 200.

> Observatory tops a considerable eminence about a mile from the house. I used to walk up Doyle Avenue hill with my wheel, but when returning would have a glorious coast down it. So constant were my observations, that my neck became affected by the strain of peering at a difficult angle. It gives me much pain, & resulted in a permanent curvature perceptible today to a close observer.[65]

The steepness of the Rue d'Auseil corresponds in Lovecraft's mind with the "considerable eminence" atop which Ladd Observatory is built, and Zann's capacious room with its lone gable window in the topmost story corresponds to Lovecraft's memory of the inside of the observatory building, with the gable window as the telescopic instrument. This idea is supported by the narrator's assertion that this single gable window is the only vantage point from which one can view the "panorama beyond."[66] The analogy of the gable window with the observatory telescope accounts for the name of the lost street. Recalling that the old violinist writes messages in both German and French, one might speculate that the name "Auseil" could be a joining of the German word "aus" with the French word "oeil" that means in English "the outward eye." Lovecraft conceives of himself as a withdrawn and passive observer of both mankind and universe, as he writes in his letter of November 20, 1931, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> I am essentially a static, contemplative, and objective person; almost a hermit in daily life, and always preferring to observe rather than to participate. My natural--and only genuine--form of imagination is that of passive witnessing--the idea being

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[65] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1921, p. 38.

[66] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 90.

> that of a sort of floating, disembodied eye which sees all manner of marvelous phenomena without being greatly affected by them.[67]

Here is the telescopic "eye" of Lovecraft in the act of recording, dispassionately and at a tolerable distance, material that he re-experiences in symbolic form through his fiction as he explores the world of his past.

Another determinant of the story of the obsessed violinist is the fact that Lovecraft studied the violin as a boy. He discusses the ordeal in his letter of November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> My rhythmic tendencies led me into a love of melody, and I was forever whistling & humming in defiance of convention & good breeding. I was so exact in time & tune, & showed such a semi-professional precision & flourish in my crude attempts, that my plea for a violin was granted when I was seven years of age, & I was placed under the instruction of the best violin teacher for children in the city--Mrs. Wilhelm Nauck. For two years I made such progress that Mrs. Nauck was enthusiastic, & declared that I should adopt music as a career--but all this time the tedium of practising had been wearing shockingly on my always sensitive nervous system. My "career" extended until 1899, its summit being a public recital at which I played a solo from Mozart before an audience of considerable size. Soon after that my ambition & taste collapsed like a house of cards (to use a trite simile). I began to detest classical music, because it had meant so much painful labour to me; and I positively loathed the violin![68]

Of a later experience Lovecraft writes in the same letter:

> Three or four years ago I picked up my little neglected violin, tuned it after purchasing new strings, & thought I would amuse myself with its sound, even though I did no better than a rustic village fiddler. I drew my bow across the strings,

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[67] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 436.

[68] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 29-30.

> when lo! I discovered that I had forgotten how to play as much as a single note! It was as if I had never touched a violin before!!!![69]

The violin is a source of dreadful associations; Lovecraft may write of his painful memories to free himself of the associations through catharsis. Lovecraft points out in "Supernatural Horror in Literature" that fear is the impulse which drives men to write horror tales, "as if to discharge from their minds certain phantasmal shapes which would otherwise haunt them."[70] The violin is a center of anxiety for Zann because its haunting sound has a deeper significance. Lovecraft writes in a letter dated December 30, 1930:

> It is barely possible that my violin lesson experience, in which the nervous strain of enforced practicing became such a nightmare, developed a definite hostility toward the whole idea of music in my childish mind--an hostility which sank into the subconscious when the lessons were given up, but which nevertheless lurked as a latent influence to colour all my future feelings and build up a wall of resistance (interpreted as indifference when no longer associated with compulsion) and callousness against the aesthetic appeal of music.[71]

The violin lessons with their eerie sounds fuse in Lovecraft's unconscious with another more terrible sound from his early experience. This awful sound, so painful to

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[69] Ibid., p. 30.

[70] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," in Dagon and other Macabre Tales, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 349.

[71] August Derleth, H. P. L.: A Memoir (New York: Ben Abramson, 1945), p. 34.

Lovecraft as to be recalled only in symbolic form, is the frantic screaming of an enraged but helpless infant Lovecraft. Zann's physique comes from Lovecraft's memory of himself as a baby. The small, monkey-like and twisted body with its grotesque, satyr-like face suggests the physique of a baby and is reminiscent of Lovecraft's distaste for his own visage. As Zann hears the visitor's whistling of weird notes and turns toward the window, his face becomes distorted with "an expression wholly beyond analysis."[72] Lovecraft cannot analyze such an expression because he would have to recall the traumatic experience that first evoked the distorted expression. As the narrator attempts to peer through the window to detect the source of Zann's fear, Zann pulls him back; again Lovecraft resists the confrontation of his forgotten past.

Zann's note describes the loneliness and nervousness connected with his music. Part of the nervousness is no doubt connected with Lovecraft's violin lessons, but a deeper connection is the forgotten cries of a rejected baby. Lovecraft writes on November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> As an infant, I had been restless and prone to cry. . . . My nervousness made me a very restless and uncontrollable child.[73]

The fascination with Zann's music perhaps stems from an experience in Lovecraft's past which has become a "phantasmal

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[72] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 92.

[73] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 32.

shape"[74] in his adult mind. This idea is confirmed by Lovecraft's phrasing, for as the narrator creeps back to Zann's door and is let in after hearing a babel of sound, Zann clutches at the narrator's coat as "a child clutches at its mother's skirts."[75] Lovecraft writes in his Commonplace Book:

> Identity. Reconstruction of personality--man makes duplicate of himself.[76]

In "The Music of Erich Zann," Lovecraft explores his past by creating a persona of his early self, watching it act, and occasionally venturing on the stage of the past to interact with it.

Zann's long message in German is Lovecraft's attempt to recall a traumatic event that is behind the closed door of forgetfulness. The sheaf of papers inscribed by Zann forms the book of life, a book of memory which is the record of Lovecraft's past; this manuscript foreshadows the dreaded Necronomicon, a book of black magic that appears in many of Lovecraft's later tales. But Lovecraft's resistance to realization interferes again--a wind blows the pages into blackness. For Lovecraft to read the message from Zann (the infant self who tries to break through the curtain of forgetting) would be for him to remember some horror shrouded in his forgotten beginnings.

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[74] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 349.

[75] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 94.

[76] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 23.

Zann and his spectator hear a sound from beyond the window into Lovecraft's past. An entry from the Commonplace Book reads as follows:

> Sounds, possibly musical, heard in the night from other worlds or realms of being.[77]

The violinist begins to play more frenziedly; this playing perhaps corresponds to the child Lovecraft's screaming because of what transpired just beyond the window of memory. Perhaps a phrase in Lovecraft's story, "shadowy satyrs and bacchanals dancing,"[78] is a clue to these doings. Dancing per se had a strong emotional content and symbolic value in Lovecraft's mind; his letter of November 16, 1916 reads:

> My mother once tried to place me in a children's dancing class, but I abhorred the thought. My reply to her suggestion sheds a light on the nature of my bookish browsings in about the year '98. I said: "Nemo fere saltat sobrius, nisi forte insanit!" [No one entirely sober dances unless he is indeed a madman.] Which is from Cicero's oration against Catiline.[79]

Lovecraft equated dancing with insanity. The dance-like movement beyond the window in "The Music of Erich Zann" is perhaps a shadowy memory from Lovecraft's past. The window-telescope becomes--symbolically at least--a "disembodied eye"[80] that brings all faraway objects "beyond the lofty wall over which I had never been able to look"[81] into focus.

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[77] Ibid. [78] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 95.

[79] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 35.

[80] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 436.

[81] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 95.

The instrument helps Lovecraft maintain his air of objective intellectuality as he looks down the tunnel of time into chaotic beginnings. He writes on June 11, 1920, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> We both see the same things, but because of our dissimilar perceptive or interpretative organisations these things assume with us a totally different order in our active consciousness. You are looking through a microscope, I through a telescope; you tend toward subjectivity, I toward objectivity. Your valuecentric standard is man, mine infinity and eternity.[82]

Lovecraft's "objectivity" appears in his need to maintain some distance from the discord of the dancing bacchanals--embodiments of the chaos he learned to fear. Lovecraft's need to maintain distance in human relations is apparent in his letter of February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird:

> My attitude has always been cosmic, and I looked on man as from another planet. He was merely an interesting species presented for study and classification.[83]

Such a crucial need for distance from his fellow creatures possibly springs from exposure to destructive, irrational parents, both of whom died insane. In self defence, Lovecraft could have retreated to another planet, i.e., his realm of the intellect.

The telescope gives Lovecraft a view of the past. The Commonplace Book gives a precise image:

Magical telescope (or cognate device) shows the

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[82] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 118.

[83] Ibid., p. 302.

past when looked through.[84]

Through this magical contrivance, Lovecraft views his past at close range while yet maintaining the objectifying distance that insures safety. Lovecraft sees shadows of irrational acts committed by his unstable parents in the "outward eye," the window of Zann's room. He sees black space alive with music and motion which is "unlike anything on earth"[85] because these phantasmal shapes are vestiges of terror from the world of his past. The nature of the activity that precipitated unending terror is perhaps indicated by Lovecraft's letter of April 21, 1921, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> I have opposed eroticism . . . because of the acknowledged repulsiveness of direct erotic manifestations. . . . Perusal of representative realistic works without prejudice leads me to attempt a revaluation; a revaluation possible because of my increased impersonalism. When I dissociate myself altogether from humanity, and view the world as through a telescope, I can consider more justly phenomena which at close range disgust me.[86]

Lovecraft's abhorrence of what he terms "direct erotic manifestations" perhaps grows from episodes which he may have witnessed as an infant. As he stands near the window in Zann's chamber, the narrator looks through the mind's eye into the past and sees an explosion of energy. This occurrence is one factor in Lovecraft's fear of chaotic blackness

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[84] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 10.

[85] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 96.

[86] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 129.

"alive with motion and music"[87] which lies at the base of the chronological-evolutionary spiral.

The rushing wind blows out the candle. Zann goes out of control and the narrator flees, "leaping, floating, flying down those endless stairs."[88] This mad flight from the terror of the Rue d'Auseil is like Lovecraft's coasting on his bicycle down Doyle Avenue hill after his frequent visits to Brown University's Ladd Observatory.[89] The idea that "The Music of Erich Zann" is a symbolized facsimile of a visit to the Ladd Observatory of Lovecraft's memories is confirmed by the narrator's remark that the moon is out and all the lights of the city are on, because after the narrator leaves the Rue d'Auseil, he is back in the quietly rational world of 1921, so that the narrator cannot return to the Rue d'Auseil.

Lovecraft's fascination with the release of terrible energies appears in his next story, "The Nameless City," written later in 1921. The story, completed a month or two after "The Music of Erich Zann," takes place in the Arabian desert. The narrator, who remains nameless, finds the ruins of an accursed ancient city. A "viewless aura"[90] repels him, but he explores the ruins. Lovecraft's explorer re-

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[87] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 96.

[88] Ibid., p. 97.

[89] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 38.

[90] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 99.

iterates that he alone has seen this nameless city and that the vision has had a terrible effect upon his face: "That is why no other face bears such hideous lines of fear as mine. . . ."[91] The narrator hears a moaning sound and sees sand shifting as from a storm, although the sky is clear and the rest of the desert is still. As the storm passes, he watches the sun rise.

The sojourner feels that the antiquity of the place is unwholesome, and when the night and the moon return, he decides not to remain in the city. When he wakes at dawn he sees the red sun and another of the peculiarly diminutive sandstorms:

> Once more I ventured within those brooding ruins that swelled beneath the sand like an ogre under a coverlet.[92]

He traces some of the old streets and finds in a cliff low apertures into a temple. The ancient ruins are curiously low, so that the explorer must crawl:

> The lowness of the chiselled chamber was very strange, for I could hardly kneel upright, but the area was so great that my torch showed only part of it at a time.[93]

The explorer is inexplicably disturbed as he investigates the weird structure:

> I shuddered oddly in some of the far corners, for certain altars and stones suggested forgotten rites of terrible, revolting, and inexplicable nature and made me wonder what manner of men could have made and frequented such a temple.[94]

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[91] Ibid. [92] Ibid., p. 100. [93] Ibid., p. 101.

[94] Ibid.

The narrator goes outside again. Another sandstorm begins, and he is shaken when he looks upward and sees that there is no wind atop the cliff. He traces the storm to its source: "It came from the black orifice of a temple."[95] He approaches this source:

> It [sand] poured madly out of the dark door, sighing uncannily as it ruffled the sand and spread among the weird ruins. Soon it grew fainter and the sand grew more and more still, till finally all was at rest again; but a presence seemed stalking among the spectral stones of the city, and when I glanced at the moon it seemed to quiver as though mirrored in unquiet waters. I was more afraid than I could explain, but not enough to dull my thirst for wonder.[96]

He enters this temple and finds an artificial door that opens into a steeply sloping cave. The narrator begins to descend the ladderlike slope.

He moves downward in darkness, finally reaching a level floor, "a Palaeozoic and abysmal place"[97] with glass-fronted cases stacked on both sides along a passage:

> The cases were apparently ranged along each side of the passage at regular intervals, and were oblong and horizontal, hideously like coffins in shape and size.[98]

He explores the passage, moving gradually from darkness into a phosphorescent glow from somewhere ahead. He sees that the cases contain "the mummified forms of creatures outreaching in grotesqueness the most chaotic dreams of man":[99]

> They were of the reptile kind. . . . In size they approximated a small man, and their fore-legs bore delicate and evident feet curiously like human hands and

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[95] Ibid., p. 102. [96] Ibid. [97] Ibid., p. 104.

[98] Ibid. [99] Ibid., p. 105.

> fingers. But strangest of all were their heads. . . . To nothing can such things be well compared--in one flash I thought of comparisons as varied as the cat, the bulldog, the mythic Satyr, and the human being. Not Jove himself had had so colossal and protuberant a forehead, yet the horns and the noselessness and the alligator-like jaw placed the things outside all established categories. I debated for a while on the reality of the mummies . . . but soon decided they were indeed some palaeogean species which had lived when the nameless city was alive.[100]

The narrator describes the world of these creatures:

> The importance of these crawling creatures must have been vast, for they held first place among the wild designs on the frescoed walls and ceiling. With matchless skill had the artist drawn them in a world of their own, wherein they had cities and gardens fashioned to suit their dimensions.[101]

On the walls the explorer traces a narrative epic of these demizens and their wondrous sea-coast city, which declined after its days of glory because of the encroaching desert. The fabulous inhabitants chiselled their way down through the rock to another paradisal world:

> It was all vividly weird and realistic, and its connection with the awesome descent I had made was unmistakable. I even recognized the passages.[102]

As the narrator nears the end of the passage, he sees: "Contrasted views of the nameless city in its desertion and growing ruin, and of the strange new realm of paradise to which the race had hewed its way through the stone."[103] The paintings on the wall record a "decadence of the ancient stock, coupled with a growing ferocity toward the outside world."[104] A final scene portrays a primitive man being

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[100] Ibid. [101] Ibid. [102] Ibid., p. 106.

[103] Ibid. [104] Ibid.

torn apart "by members of the elder race."[105]

At the end of the passageway a brass door opens upon a great void of white radiance. A stairway leads down into it, but the narrator is afraid to descend. Resting at the cavern exit, he wonders at all he has seen:

> The allegory of the crawling creatures puzzled me by its universal prominence, and I wondered that it would be so closely followed in a pictured history of such importance. . . . I thought curiously of the lowness of the primal temples and of the underground corridor. . . . Perhaps the very rites here involved a crawling in imitation of the creatures.[106]

The narrator surveys his surroundings further and reflects upon his aloneness:

> Of what could have happened in the geological ages since the paintings ceased and the death-hating race resentfully succumbed to decay, no man might say. Life once teemed in these caverns and in the luminous realm beyond; now I was alone with vivid relics.[107]

Suddenly the narrator feels the fear that he felt within the nameless city, fears "as inexplicable as they were poignant."[108] He hears the moaning sound again, from the direction of the nameless city:

> It was a deep low moaning, as of a distant throng of condemned spirits. . . . Its volume rapidly grew, till it soon reverberated frightfully through the low passage, and at the same time I became conscious of an increasing draught of cold air, likewise flowing from the tunnels and the city above.[109]

The torrent of wind roars out of control:

> More and more madly poured the shrieking, moaning

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[105] Ibid., p. 107. [106] Ibid., pp. 107-08.

[107] Ibid., p. 108. [108] Ibid., p. 109.

[109] Ibid.

> night wind into the gulf of the inner earth. I dropped prone again and clutched vainly at the floor for fear of being swept bodily through the open gate into the phosphorescent abyss. Such fury I had not expected.[110]

The rational faculties give way before terrible fantasies:

> As I grew aware of an actual slipping of my form toward the abyss I was beset by a thousand new terrors of apprehension and imagination. The malignancy of the blast awakened incredible fancies; once more I compared myself shudderingly to the only human image in that frightful corridor, the man who was torn to pieces by the nameless race, for in the fiendish clawing of the swirling currents there seemed to abide a vindictive rage all the stronger because it was largely impotent. I think I screamed frantically near the last--I was almost mad--but if I did so my cries were lost in the hell-born babel of the howling wind-wraiths.[111]

The narrator is pushed inexorably toward the unknown world beyond the brass door. Only the gods, he says, "know what really took place":[112]

> Monstrous, unnatural, colossal, was the thing--too far beyond all the ideas of man to be believed except in the silent damnable small hours of the morning when one cannot sleep.[113]

The fury of the blast is infernal and cacodaemonical: "its voices were hideous with the pent-up viciousness of desolate eternities."[114] The narrator turns toward the abyss and sees, rushing to meet the terrible blast from above: ". . . a nightmare horde of rushing devils; hate-distorted, grotesquely panoplied, half-transparent devils of a race no man might mistake--the crawling reptiles of the nameless city."[115] As the last of the devils rushes through to

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[110] Ibid. [111] Ibid. [112] Ibid., p. 110.

[113] Ibid. [114] Ibid. [115] Ibid.

meet the dying wind-current, the narrator hurtles through the closing door and plummets to the dark bowels of the earth.

"The Nameless City," like "The Statement of Randolph Carter," developed from a dream. Lovecraft describes the dream in a letter of May 15, 1918, to Maurice Moe:

> Several nights ago I had a strange dream of a strange city--a city of many palaces and gilded domes, lying in a hollow betwixt ranges of grey, horrible hills. . . . I recall a lively curiosity at the scene, and a tormenting struggle to recall its identity; for I felt that I had once known it well, and that if I could remember, I should be carried back to a very remote period--many thousand years, when something vaguely horrible had happened. Once I was almost on the verge of realisation, and was frantic with fear at the prospect, though I did not know what it was that I should recall.[116]

The dream has in common with the story the ancientness of its archaeological remains and the idea or feeling that something horrible has happened within its ruins. The idea of a terrible connection with strange environs appears in the Commonplace Book:

> Coming to unknown place and finding one has some hitherto latent memory of it, or hideous connexion with it.[117]

The hint of some almost-remembered horrible occurrence suggests that the nameless city, too, is an artifact of fantasy, a disguised, disquieting memory.

"The Nameless City" may originate from a dream containing an occurrence from Lovecraft's past. The story is

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[116] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 62.

[117] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 12.

an exploration of the dawn of Lovecraft's life, the dark period that terminates with Lovecraft's first coherent memory:

> The phenomenon of dreaming likewise helped to build up the notion of an unreal or spiritual world; and in general, all the conditions of savage dawn-life so strongly conduced toward a feeling of the supernatural, that we need not wonder at the thoroughness with which man's very hereditary essence has become saturated with religion and superstition. The saturation must, as a matter of plain scientific fact, be regarded as virtually permanent so far as the subconscious mind and the inner instincts are concerned.[118]

The emotive elements of Lovecraft's past form his "savage dawn-life," the beginning of the continuum of his earthly existence. Lovecraft explores this emotive realm because his mind is "sensitive to hereditary impulse."

Lovecraft may sense that a horrible event which he mentions in his dream-account and lists in his Commonplace Book lies within the shadow world of his early past. The dream city is the world of Lovecraft's early childhood--sequestered behind the veil of forgetting. Lovecraft's feeling that "man's very hereditary essence has become saturated with religion and superstition" suggests that such events assume a religious aura, and that the events of Lovecraft's early past are kernels of unresolved emotion. Because the literal facts behind these unresolved emotions lie beyond consciousness, these feelings perhaps appeared to Lovecraft as monstrous fears related to superstition and

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[118] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 348.

religion.

The terror of recall is in both "The Nameless City" and its precipitating dream. The narrator shudders as some of the shrines suggest "forgotten rites of terrible, revolting and inexplicable nature."[119] Their inexplicability rests in Lovecraft's wish not to remember:

> If superior minds were ever placed in fullest contact with the secrets preserved by ancient and lowly cults, the resultant abnormalities would soon not only wreck the world, but threaten the integrity of the universe.[120]

Scientific truth-seeker as he is, Lovecraft draws limits on knowledge of personal emotive material.

The secrets of these "lowly cults" which Lovecraft fears to know flow from his intimate familiarity with the properties prevalent at the lower end of the evolutionary path. Tracing the chronological mode of movement back into Lovecraft's childhood, one finds a flavor of forgotten or not fully understood occurrences, a flavor seen in his essay, "Supernatural Horror in Literature":

> Man's first instincts and emotions formed his response to the environment in which he found himself. Definite feelings based on pleasure and pain grew up around the phenomena whose causes and effects he understood, whilst around those which he did not understand--and the universe teemed with them in the early days--were naturally woven such personifications, marvelous interpretations, and sensations of awe and fear as would be hit upon by a race having few and simple ideas and limited experience. The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial

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[119] Ibid., p. 101. [120] Ibid., p. 242.

> reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof . . . we have no part.[121]

The intellectually limited point of view of our primitive forefathers that Lovecraft describes corresponds to the home he lived in as an infant, which was "the environment in which he found himself." Definite feelings must have attached themselves to the happenings within his vicinity. Many of these occurrences he probably did not understand, for as Lovecraft says, "The universe teemed with . . . [strange and awesome phenomena] in the early days." Lovecraft's dream of the ancient city in which "something vaguely horrible had happened"[122] long ago could be a "marvelous interpretation" of terrible forgotten events which perhaps took place in his infancy. Such events could have occurred in the atmosphere of few and simple ideas in which a "primitive forefather" had been "a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon [the infant Lovecraft] . . . for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons." The conditions these words suggest may have existed during Lovecraft's early childhood and have been a latent force in the choice of these words in the essay, "Supernatural Horror in Literature." Lovecraft's tales of terror relieve his mind of the chaos of memory that invades his fragile world of rational consciousness; he writes that certain writers (including, presumably, himself) write stories "as if to

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[121] Ibid., p. 348.

[122] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 62.

discharge from their minds certain phantasmal shapes which would otherwise haunt them."[123]

Lovecraft's belief that the rational mind is tied to the primal past is more evidence for the appearance of Lovecraft's memories in disguised form in his fictional exploration of an ancient city:

> An infinite reservoir of mystery still engulfs most of the outer cosmos, whilst a vast residuum of powerful inherited associations clings round all the objects and processes that were once mysterious; however well they may now be explained. And more than this, there is an actual physiological fixation of the old instincts in our nervous tissue, which would make them obscurely operative even were the conscious mind to be purged of all sources of wonder.[124]

There is an extrusion of instinctual behavior from primal, "savage dawn-life"[125] into Lovecraft's conscious mind. He believes that no matter how rational the intellect becomes, there will always be a "Physiological fixation of the old instincts in our nervous tissue." Lovecraft's tales are smelted from the residue of a past filled with the sacred rites of a primal, fear-inspiring universe:

> And kind of an unknown world [is] a world of peril and evil possibilities. When to the sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself.[126]

The primal images from the "savage dawn-life" of Lovecraft's

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[123] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 349.

[124] Ibid., p. 348. [125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid., p. 349.

memory form a "composite body of keen emotion" and maintain their potency in Lovecraft's mind for years.

The narrator of "The Nameless City" sees a sandstorm which he describes as being "like an ogre under a coverlet."[127] He wonders what "terrible, revolting and inexplicable"[128] rites the demizens of the cliff-hollowed temple practiced. Lovecraft's persona traces the movement of sand to its source, and he discovers that as the wind current rushes madly out of the dark hole, it sighs uncannily. Even when this activity slows and stops, the narrator is more afraid than he can explain. This inexplicable fear comes from the "physiological fixation" in Lovecraft's "nervous tissue"[129] of the "something vaguely horrible"[130] that happened in the nameless city of Lovecraft's past. Lovecraft feels that if he remembers the nameless city, he will be carried back to "a very remote period"[131]--his infancy. The period of Lovecraft's infancy corresponds on his chronological-evolutionary scale to the "dawn-life"[132] of primal beginnings. His forgotten infancy corresponds to the chaotic, protoplasmically primal phase of evolution's beginnings in the mind of the artist.

One result of residual terror is that Lovecraft

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[127] Ibid., p. 100. [128] Ibid., p. 101.

[129] Ibid., p. 348.

[130] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 62.

[131] Ibid. [132] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 348.

stays clear of that which is overtly physical or animalistic, as he suggests in his letter of February 4, 1934, to J. Vernon Shea:

> My idea of life has always been to depend on the animal and emotional sides--essentially capricious, unstable, and soon exhausted--as little as possible; choosing rather that abstract and contemplative side which involves the independent and permanent elements of reason and imagination.[133]

Lovecraft's aversion to the physical side of life reflects his search for safety through control of his environment, and he sees art as a substitute for the physical control over his environment. He writes to Alfred Galpin on October 6, 1921:

> It is not improbable that all art is merely an unsatisfactory substitute for physical supremacy; the imaginative gratification of that will to power which is frustrated in the objective attainment of its objects. It may be that the finest work of the aesthetick fancy is but a poor makeshift for the victory of one vigorous tribe or individual over another.[134]

Lovecraft's art is a belated effort at control of the disorder that prevailed during the formation of his mind. Through his art, Lovecraft, like the hero Siegfried whom he admires, tries to restore order with "the independent and permanent elements of reason and imagination."[135]

The center around which much of the symbolic ren-

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[133] Barton Levi St. Armand, "H. P. Lovecraft: The Outsider in Legend and Myth: A Biographical and Critical Study," Thesis Brown University 1966, p. 51.

[134] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 155.

[135] Ibid., p. 155.

dition of the past perhaps revolves appears in Lovecraft's letter of September 27, 1919:

> Of course I am unfamiliar with amatory phenomena save through cursory reading. I always assumed that one waited till he encountered some nymph who seemed radically different to him from the rest of her sex, and without whom he felt he could no longer exist. Then, I fancied, he commenced to lay siege to her heart in business-like fashion, not desisting till either he won her for life or was blighted by rejection. . . . Pardon, I pray you, the dulness of one but imperfectly instructed in the details of Paphian emotion.[136]

The movement from uncontrolled "natural excitement" of "Paphian emotion" toward the intellectual control of feelings appears in a Lovecraft letter of February 4, 1934:

> The whole matter of sex was reduced to a prosaic mechanism--a mechanism I rather despised or at least thought non-glamorous because of its purely animal nature and separation from such things as intellect and beauty--and all the drama was taken out of it.[137]

But intellectual knowledge and overt curiosity concerning sex is not lacking in the young Lovecraft. Even in what he terms a "disgusting"[138] area of knowledge, his clue-detecting curiosity is at work. He writes on February 7, 1924, to Frank Belknap Long:

> When I was six or seven I was of course curious about the allusions which I did not understand in adult books, and about the prohibitions imposed by elders upon my conversation. Being of a scientifick and investigative cast, I naturally followed up the mysteries step by step in encyclopaedias and other books--for with my temper no one dared restrict my reading. Ending with the medical books of my physician-uncle, I knew everything there is to be known

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[136] Ibid., p. 88. [137] St. Armand, p. 50.

[138] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 129.

> about the anatomy and physiology of reproduction in both sexes before I was eight years old; after which curiosity was of course impossible.[139]

Such a powerful drive for intellectual knowledge of sexual matters is paradoxical in one so committed to the intellect. But in his letter of January 23, 1920, to Reinhardt Kleiner, Lovecraft explains his view that sexual manifestations occupy the bottom rung of the ladder of evolution:

> Eroticism belongs to a lower form of instincts, and is an animal rather than a nobly human quality. For evolved man--the apex of organic progress on the earth--what branch of reflection is more fitting than that which occupies only his higher and exclusively human faculties? The primal savage or ape merely looks about his native forest to find a mate; the exalted Aryan should lift his eyes to the worlds of space and consider his relation to infinity![140]

Eroticism rests at the lower end of the evolutionary scale. For Lovecraft, eroticism has all the earmarks of animalistic chaos. He writes on April 23, 1921, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> I have opposed eroticism for several reasons, (a) because of the acknowledged repulsiveness of direct erotic manifestations, as felt by all races and cultures and expressed in reticence to a greater or lesser degree, (b) because of the obvious kinship of erotic instincts to the crudest and earliest neural phenomena of organic nature, rather than to the phenomena resulting from complex and advanced development (i.e., purely intellectual phenomena).[141]

Lovecraft's life may be visualized as an attempt to evolve upward toward the "mental perfection" exemplified by the moral courage of the German folk-hero Siegfried. Lovecraft's obsessive need to evolve himself toward a point above chaos

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[139] Ibid., p. 305. [140] Ibid., p. 106.

[141] Ibid., p. 129.

comes from his fear of chaos, based in part on his view of what has taken place within the narrow environment of his infancy.

Lovecraft's strong belief in the repulsiveness of "direct erotic manifestations"[142] could result from the terrors perpetrated by a paretic father totally bereft of reason upon a weak, passive mother in the proximity of an infant son less than three years of age. This environment would be a likely place for rites of a "revolting and inexplicable nature"[143] which might form "an actual physiological fixation of the old instincts"[144] in the nervous tissue which shape Lovecraft's mind and artistic vision into a nightmare quest for order within a chaos in which the only order is the confrontation of disorder--the myth of the maze and the Minotaur.

Lovecraft takes the next step in the maze as the explorer of the nameless city enters the vertical shaft and descends to the dark end of the cave. The trip through the long hall of glass cases and painted murals is Lovecraft's journey along a chronological continuum of memories. Conspicious here, as in the nameless city, is the copious use of the image of crawling--whether done by the explorer or seen in the caves and murals. Lovecraft develops this idea in a letter dated October, 1916, to the friends comprising

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[142] Ibid., p. 129. [143] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 101.

[144] Ibid., p. 348.

the group known as the Kleicomolo:

> [I wish] to find it possible to crawl backward through the Hall of Time to that age which is nearest my own fancy.[145]

Beneath the nameless city the explorer crawls in the long cave; Lovecraft may be remembering "that age which is nearest my own fancy"--i.e., the happier portion of his childhood. The mummified forms in the cases are reminiscent of the wizened, monkey-like form of Zann, and may be various views of the crawling baby as Lovecraft remembers himself. Lovecraft sees his life as an attempt to move forward on the evolutionary scale, confirmed by his conception of his infant self as a crawling reptile with a hideous face--"in one flash I thought of comparisons as varied as the cat, the bulldog, the mythic Satyr, and the human being."[146] Lovecraft writes on September 14, 1919, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> If I were to criticise your present philosophy, it would be that you demand too much emotion--which is, after all, a distinctly inferior form of psychic activity. It may, of course, be pleasant and desirable in a way; but, it involves the play of nervous tissue far less evolved than that wherein true intellection resides. It is a link with the instinct of lower creation, and consequently is not to be fostered or encouraged as a supreme goal of human endeavor. What man should seek, is the pleasure of non-emotional imagination--the pleasure of pure reason.[147]

Lovecraft perhaps conceived his life as an attempt to

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[145] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 27.

[146] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 105.

[147] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 87.

evolve from a reptile, monster self (which has a hideous face and whose home is the primeval forest) toward a final goal of pure reason.

As the explorer ventures along the tunnel, he discovers that the small, manlike forms had "a world of their own, wherein they had cities and gardens fashioned to suit their dimensions."[148] A childhood analogue of this world may appear in some of Lovecraft's letters. An example is Lovecraft's description of his childhood home at 454 Angell Street. He writes on November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> In the mid-seventies, my grandfather transferred all his interests to Providence . . . & erected one of the handsomest residences in the city--to me, the handsomest--my own beloved birthplace! The spacious house, raised on a high green terrace, looks down upon grounds which are almost a park with winding walks, arbours, trees, & a delightful fountain. Back of the stable is the orchard, whose fruits have delighted so many of my . . . childish hours.[149]

Because Lovecraft loves the house his grandfather built, its grounds form in his mind part of the childhood wonderland the explorer sees pictured as he moves between the frescoed walls beneath the nameless city. In a letter to the Gallomo (which includes Alfred Galpin and Maurice Moe) Lovecraft describes a childhood "city" that he constructed to "suit [his] dimensions":[150]

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[148] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 105.

[149] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 31.

[150] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 105.

> My new village was called "New Anvik." . . . As the years stole on, my play became more and more dignified; but I could not give up New Anvik. When the grand disaster came [the death of Grandfather Phillips in 1904], and we moved to this inferior abode [598 Angell Street], I made a second and more ambitious New Anvik in the vacant lot here. This was my aesthetic masterpiece, for besides a little village of painted huts erected by myself and Chester and Harold Munroe [Lovecraft's closest boyhood friends], there was a landscape garden, all of mine own handiwork.[151]

The denizens in the reproductions on the walls in the tunnel perhaps form a pictorial record of such childhood constructions as these. Lovecraft builds cities in his childhood and he is free to explore--at least symbolically--the "nameless city" of his forgotten past, whose landscape garden is a childish attempt to construct an order out of chaos.

Lovecraft's story next records the decline of the beautiful city caused by the encroachment of the desert. A description of a decline in his childhood fortunes appears in his letter of November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> All this time [from 1896 to 1902] my spirits were dampened by a vague sensation of impending calamity. I was not blind to a waning of the family fortune, as evidenced by a decrease in the number of servants & the closing of the stables.[152]

This gradual fade of felicity climaxed in the loss of the Phillips home; later in the same letter Lovecraft writes:

> My home had been my ideal of Paradise & my source of inspiration--but it was to be profaned & altered by other hands.[153]

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[151] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 105.

[152] Ibid., p. 35. [153] Ibid., p. 40.

This decline of the family fortunes and loss of security is reflected in the flight underground by the ancient denizens of the nameless city.

The explorer in Lovecraft's story arrives at the brass door and looks out at the light beyond it. Suddenly his attention is attracted from the rear by "a deep, low moaning, as of a distant throng of condemned spirits."[154] A current of wind springs up and becomes a torrent. The terrified explorer remembers that this is much like the storm in the nameless city. He falls prone and clutches at the floor "for fear of being swept bodily through the open gate into the phosphorescent abyss"[155] beyond. He feels a "fiendish clawing and vindictive rage"[156] in the madly flowing current; he screams frantically as he is forced toward the opening. The story may be a narration of a Lovecraft memory of his infant self as he hears more "amatory phenomena"[157] from the direction of his parents. The baby became distraught and began to scream, because of what he sees and hears:

> Monstrous, unnatural, colossal, was the thing--too far beyond all the ideas of man to be believed.[158]

The explorer turns back toward the brass door and sees racing up from the abyss "a nightmare horde of rushing

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154 Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 109. 155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

157 Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 86.

158 Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 110.

devils; hate-distorted . . . devils of a race no man might mistake--the crawling reptiles of the nameless city."[159] These crawling, rushing devilish reptiles may be memories of multiple embodiments of a frightened, enraged infant, rushing to investigate fearful discord, the destroyer of the infant's "microscopic universe"[160] of mental order. But its screams--"I think I screamed near the last--"[161] have attracted the attention of a "monstrous, unnatural, and colossal"[162] thing, the "ogre under a coverlet,"[163] the infant's paretic father, a man filled with "vindictive rage."[164] He may have forced the screaming baby through a door.

The memory of this doorway scene may be reflected in Lovecraft's remarks to Reinhardt Kleiner in a letter of June 11, 1920:

> About us stretches an illimitable expanse of space filled with other worlds--an expanse wherein we are as nothing--and the titanic questions it suggests fairly beat upon the human mind in a desperate tattoo. What I cannot comprehend, is how your imagination can fail to react to those mysterious abysses; how you can escape the burning curiosity of a child at a nearly-closed door through whose crevice come sounds of strange and unearthly wonder, and fragments of sights that suggest unthinkable things.[165]

The doorway his father shut behind the infant Lovecraft is

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[159] Ibid.

[160] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 64.

[161] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 109.

[162] Ibid., p. 110. [163] Ibid., p. 100.

[164] Ibid., p. 109.

[165] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 117.

like the brass door which shut the explorer out of the place of relics. Lovecraft listened at the crack of this doorway into the past for "sounds of strange and unearthly wonder," and glimpsed "fragments of sights that suggest unthinkable things." Thus Lovecraft met the Minotaur in the maze, and--as the explorer of the nameless city--fell into the abyss, to remain all of his life "The Outsider."

CHAPTER FIVE

MATURITY

Forced bodily from the nameless city of his past, Lovecraft assumed the identity that serves him ever after, an identity suggested by "The Outsider," completed in 1921. The narrator describes lonely childhood hours spent in constant dread of his own abnormality:

> Unhappy is he to whom the memories of childhood bring only fear and sadness. Wretched is he who looks back upon lone hours in vast and dismal chambers with brown hangings and maddening rows of antique books, or upon awed watches in twilight groves of grotesque, gigantic, and vine-encumbered trees that silently wave twisted branches far aloft. Such a lot the gods gave to me--to me, the dazed, the disappointed; the barren, the broken. And yet I am strangely content and cling desperately to those sere memories, when my mind momentarily threatens to reach beyond to the other.[1]

He remembers that his birthplace was a horrible old castle, filled with shadowy fears and the dread associated with dead generations: "It was never light, so that I used sometimes to light candles and gaze steadily at them for relief."[2] One black tower reaches beyond the tall trees surrounding the castle and can be ascended by climbing up the sheer side of the circular inside wall.

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[1] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror and Others, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1963), p. 53.

[2] Ibid.

The solitary one feels that he has been cared for by a very old person somewhat like himself:

> I think that whoever nursed me must have been shockingly aged, since my first conception of a living person was that of something mockingly like myself, yet distorted, shriveled, and decaying like the castle.[3]

The narrator learned all he knows from mouldy books. One symptom of his solitude is his never speaking aloud. Because there are no mirrors in the castle, he likens himself to youthful figures in the books. The lonely one explored his environment but "ran frantically back, lest I lose my way in a labyrinth of nighted silence."[4]

He climbs the black tower, and the inside is a "dead, stairless cylinder of rock."[5] He climbs in darkness and arrives at a square trapdoor: "All at once, after an infinity of awesome, sightless crawling up that concave and desperate precipice, I felt my hand touch a solid thing."[6] Opening the trapdoor and climbing through, he finds a "lofty and capacious observation chamber."[7] The narrator explores the chamber and finds a locked stone doorway which he forces open. He rushes out, and to his amazement, finds:

> Instead of a dizzying prospect of treetops seen from a lofty eminence, there stretched around me on the level through the grating nothing less than the solid ground, decked and diversified by marble slabs and columns.[8]

The narrator is almost unconscious from the shock but de-

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[3] Ibid., pp. 53-54. [4] Ibid., p. 54. [5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 55. [7] Ibid. [8] Ibid., p. 56.

cides to explore this strange land because "my mind, stunned and chaotic as it was, still held the frantic craving for light."[9] The explorer is "determined to gaze on brilliance and gayety at any cost."[10] As he treks across the fields he senses "a kind of fearsome latent memory that made my progress not wholly fortuitous."[11] After two hours of walking, he reaches his goal of "a venerable ivied castle in a thickly wooded park, maddeningly familiar, yet full of perplexing strangeness to me."[12] The windows of this castle are lighted and send forth sounds of revelry. The faces "hold expressions that brought up incredibly remote recollections."[13]

Stepping through a window he meets realization. The revellers see him and pandemonium breaks out; the terrified people flee the castle. The interloper glances through a doorway into a room of similar design and perceives a presence:

> I beheld in full, frightful vividness the inconceivable, indescribable, and unmentionable monstrosity which had by its simple appearance changed a merry company to a herd of delirious fugitives.[14]

There the narrator finds "the putrid, dripping eidolon of unwholesome revelation, the awful baring of that which the merciful earth should always hide":[15]

> I was almost paralyzed, but not too much so to make a feeble effort toward flight; a backward stumble which failed to break the spell in which the nameless, voiceless monster held me. My eyes bewitched by the glassy orbs which stared loathesomely into

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[9] Ibid. [10] Ibid. [11] Ibid. [12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 57. [14] Ibid. [15] Ibid., p. 58.

them, refused to close.[16]

The invader tries to shut out the vision with an upraised hand:

> In one cataclysmic second of cosmic nightmarishness and hellish accident my fingers touched the rotting outstretched paw of the monster beneath the golden arch.[17]

He is stricken by an "avalanche of soul-annihilating memory":[18]

> I knew in that second all that had been; I remembered beyond the frightful castle and the trees, and recognized the altered edifice in which I now stood; I recognized, most terrible of all, the unholy abomination that stood leering before me as I withdrew my sullied fingers from its own.[19]

The final paragraph confirms the narrator's fear of himself:

> For although nepenthe has calmed me, I know always that I am an outsider; a stranger in this century and among those who are still men. This I have known ever since I stretched out my fingers . . . and touched a cold and unyielding surface of polished glass.[20]

"The Outsider" is an expression of the agonizing solitude suffered by a child who, shut away from his parents, is engulfed by an abyss of emptiness that not even Lovecraft's books can fill:

> Such a lot the gods gave to me--to me, the dazed, the disappointed; the barren, the broken.[21]

Lovecraft's persona remarks upon the absence of light; he must light candles and stare at them for relief. This condition may derive from Lovecraft's early life as seen in his letter of November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

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[16] Ibid. [17] Ibid. [18] Ibid. [19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. 59. [21] Ibid., p. 53.

> In January, 1896, the death of my grandmother plunged the household into a gloom from which it never fully recovered. The black attire of my mother & aunts terrified & repelled me to such an extent that I would surreptitiously pin bits of bright cloth or paper to their skirts for sheer relief.[22]

The despair of these lines matches the dark mood of "The Outsider," as both situations force a seeking of relief for the anguish of a child adrift in a world of dread.

The narrator's feeling that he was cared for by someone "shockingly aged . . . something mockingly like myself, yet distorted, shriveled, and decaying" reflects the supposition that the infant Lovecraft was cast aside by his emotionally unbalanced parents and had to rely on the help of more aged residents of the environment at 454 Angell Street:

> Both of my maternal grandparents were then living [when Lovecraft moved back to Providence at the age of three], & my beloved grandfather, Whipple Van Buren Phillips, became the centre of my entire universe. . . . My grandmother was a serene, quiet lady of the old school, & she did her best to correct my increasingly boorish deportment--for my nervousness made me a very restless & uncontrollable child.[23]

Lovecraft writes that his grandfather "was my ideal male."[24] Prior to the decline of the senior Lovecraft, during the family's residence at Auburndale, Massachusetts, the child received much maternal attention from another, even more

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[22] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1911-1924, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 34.

[23] Ibid., p. 33. [24] Ibid., p. 34.

elderly person: the widowed mother of the minor Victorian poet, Louise Imogen Guiney. In his November 16, 1916, letter to Reinhardt Kleiner, Lovecraft writes:

> As an infant, I had been restless and prone to cry; now, when able to talk & walk, my temperamental excitability veered in the opposite direction, & I was nicknamed Little Sunshine by Mrs. Guiney, mother of the poetess. (Imagine the solid old Conservative being called Little Sunshine!!!! Shades of Schopenhauer!!!!!) Mrs. Guiney was a delightfully cultured lady, the widow of a General of Mass. Volunteers.[25]

An atmosphere pervaded with elderly persons, together with the "temperamental excitability" noted by Lovecraft himself, could have given the infant Lovecraft a distorted self-image. Because of the erratic attention of his parents, the faces the young Lovecraft probably saw most were "mockingly like myself, yet distorted, shriveled, and decaying."

The narrator of "The Outsider" seeks surcease in "maddening rows of antique books"; the three and one-half year old Lovecraft likewise turned away from familial companionship to the world of books:

> In 1894 I was able to read fluently, & was a tireless student of the dictionary; never allowing a word to slip by me without ascertaining its meaning. It was then that the mellowed tomes of the family library became my complete world--at once my servants & my masters. I flitted hither and thither amongst them like a fascinated moth. . . . I read everything, understood a little, & imagined more.[26]

The world of books which Lovecraft discovered shaped his childhood into a refuge from rejection. Lovecraft writes

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[25] Ibid., p. 32.

[26] Ibid., p. 34.

on January 1, 1915, to Maurice Moe:

> Amongst my few playmates I was very unpopular, since I would insist on playing out events in history, or acting according to consistent plots. Thus repelled by humans, I sought refuge and companionship in books, and here was I doubly blessed. The library was stocked with the best volumes accumulated both by the Phillipses and the Lovecrafts, including a good many tomes over a century old.[27]

This retreat gave impetus to Lovecraft's view of himself as an outsider and helped to form his view of the human race as puppets. Lovecraft writes in October, 1916, to the group of epistolary companions known as the Kleicomolo:

> Though not a participant in the Business of Life; I am, like the character of Addison and Steele an impartial (or more or less impartial) Spectator, who finds not a little recreation in watching the antics of those strange and puny puppets called men. A sense of humour has helped me endure existence; in fact, when all else fails, I never fail to extract a sarcastic smile from the contemplation of my own empty and egotistical career![28]

Lovecraft's withdrawal from human contact and turn toward the past stimulates him to explore the vertical tunnel into his past by way of his fictive persona. A Commonplace Book entry suggests that Lovecraft had such exploration in mind: "Man journeys into past--or imaginative realm--leaving bodily shell behind."[29] Lovecraft states in a letter of October, 1916, that he wishes to "crawl backward through the Halls of Time to that age which is nearest my own fancy."[30]

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[27] Ibid., p. 7. [28] Ibid., p. 27.

[29] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, The Notes and Commonplace Book Employed by the late H. P. Lovecraft, ed. Robert H. Barlow (Lakeport, Calif.: Futile Press, 1938), p. 17.

[30] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 27.

The narrator of "The Outsider" describes his movement upward within the tower as "sightless crawling up that concave and desperate precipice."

The age toward which Lovecraft crawls suggests his remembered childhood, fashioned in part by his reading within his sanctuary of books. He writes Reinhardt Kleiner November 16, 1916:

> I had read enough idyllic verse to understand that childhood is a golden age in the life of man; never to be regained when once lost.[31]

To reach the realm of his childhood, Lovecraft makes his protagonist crawl up the inside of a tower which is much like the interior of a gigantic telescope, the instrument that "shows the past when looked through"[32] in "The Music of Erich Zann." In crawling up the barrel of the "telescope," Lovecraft again journeys into his early past, the "golden age in the life of man." Such a journey is described in Lovecraft's fragment "Azathoth," written in 1922:

> When age fell upon the world, and wonder went out of the minds of men . . . and childish hopes had gone away forever, there was a man who traveled out of life on a quest into the spaces whither the world's dreams had fled.[33]

The narrator is described as

> . . . coming home at evening to a room whose one window opened not on the fields and groves but on

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[31] Ibid., p. 37.

[32] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 10.

[33] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Dagon and other Macabre Tales, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 335.

> a dim court. . . . The dweller in the room used night after night to lean out and peer aloft to glimpse some fragment of things beyond the waking world. . . . At length his vision opened to many secret vistas whose existence no common eye suspects. And one night a mighty gulf was bridged, and dream-haunted skies swelled down to the lonely watcher's window to merge with the close air of his room and make him a part of their fabulous wonder.[34]

The departure from prosaic mundanity is described:

> Noiseless infinity eddied around the dreamer and wafted him away without even touching the body that leaned stiffly from the lonely window; and for days not counted in men's calendars the tides of far spheres bore him gently to join the dreams for which he longed.[35]

A voyage analogous to this ethereal journey forms the structure of "The Outsider," with one difference: the outsider does not lose himself in cloudy etherealizations, but moves inexorably toward a specific, ordained convergence.

The narrator's arrival in the top of the tower and subsequent venture upon surprisingly solid ground perhaps reflects the Lovecraft family's return from Auburndale to 454 Angell Street after the senior Lovecraft's seizure. Lovecraft writes to Maurice Moe on January 1, 1915:

> [Lovecraft's father's paretic stroke] of course disrupted all plans for the future, caused the sale of the home site in Auburndale, and the return of my mother and myself to the Phillips home in Providence. Here I spent all the best years of my childhood. The house was a beautiful and spacious edifice, with stable and grounds, the latter approaching a park in the beauty of the walks and trees.[36]

The emergence of Lovecraft's persona into the beautiful

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[34] Ibid., pp. 335-36. [35] Ibid., p. 336.

[36] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 6.

park-like world at the tower's top is a parallel for Lovecraft's arrival at 454 Angell Street. The idea that "The Outsider" is a trip into the past is suggested by an entry in the Commonplace Book: "House and garden--old--associations. Scene takes on strange aspect."[37] Such reasoning is confirmed by the narrator's feeling that his progress across the fields "was not wholly fortuitous."[38] The narrator is seeking an antidote for his loneliness, and like Jervas Dudley in "The Tomb," is "determined to gaze on brilliance and gayety at any cost."[39] In "The Outsider" as the narrator wanders over the countryside, Lovecraft tries to regain the lost happiness that was his during his childhood at Grandfather Phillips' estate:

> Over two hours must have passed before I reached what seemed to be my goal, a venerable ivied castle in a thickly wooded park, maddeningly familiar, yet full of perplexing strangeness to me.[40]

The remainder of the narrative exposes the horror Lovecraft discovers within his memory of the old homeplace at 454 Angell Street.

In his letter of January 1, 1915, to Maurice Moe, Lovecraft makes clear his childhood preference for adult company:

> As a child I was very peculiar and sensitive, always preferring the society of grown persons to that of

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[37] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 17.

[38] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 56.

[39] Ibid. [40] Ibid.

other children.[41]

In a letter to Reinhardt Kleiner, Lovecraft describes his childhood feelings concerning his adult companions:

> I was used to adult company and conversation, & despite the fact that I felt shamefully dull beside my elders, I had nothing in common with the infant train.[42]

But Lovecraft's cherished adult companionship did not free him from the fear that he felt; he writes concerning himself in his letter of February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird:

> The child was weak, nervous, and inclined to keep his own company after he found his voluble conversation disrelish'd by those gentlemen of his grandfather's circle who form'd the only persons he ever car'd to talk to.[43]

The sense of inferiority appears in a more intense form in "The Outsider" as Lovecraft's protagonist makes his entrance into the castle which is perhaps the home of his grandfather as Lovecraft remembers it. In his letter of November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner, Lovecraft describes a counterpart for the gayety the outsider wishes to gaze upon:

> My other Aunt [Annie E. Phillips] was yet a very young lady when I first began to observe events about me. She was rather a favourite in the younger social set, & brought the principal touch of gayety to a rather conservative household. To the sprightly conversation & repartee of this younger generation, I owe my first lessons in the school of Pope. I could sense the artificiality of the atmosphere, & often strove to ape the airs and affectations of those whom I observed & studied. I extracted not a little celebrity & egotism from my mimicry of various types of callers.[44]

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[41] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 6.

[42] Ibid., p. 35. [43] Ibid., p. 297.

[44] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

"A touch of gayety" seems to await Lovecraft's outsider as he approaches the memory of the beloved home at 454 Angell Street, with all its joyful associations.

But as the outsider steps through a window, he meets a scene bordering on chaos that triggers a sequence of recollection. The revelers bolt from the room, leaving the narrator to face his reflection. Two Commonplace Book entries illustrate Lovecraft's thinking:

> Man with unnatural face, oddity of speaking. Found to be a mask--revelation.[45]

And:

> Fear of mirrors--memory of dream in which scene is altered and climax is hideous surprise at seeing oneself in the water or a mirror.[46]

The thread of recollection leads Lovecraft through the maze of his past to a confrontation. Through the eyes of a fictive persona Lovecraft sees the most terrible Minotaur of all, his own terrified (and therefore misshapenly monstrous) self-image. The precocious infant Lovecraft, striving for the acceptance he did not receive and feeling ashamed of his dullness in his conversations with his elders, is yet impelled into their midst because he has been cast out of the "nameless city" of family relationship. Lovecraft sees the face of this rejected, shrieking infant as the monster in the polished glass of remembrance.

The outcome of this revelation is the forgetfulness

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[45] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 23.

[46] Ibid., p. 21.

of nepenthe, but Lovecraft continued to search for the monster in his mind. The traumatic occurrences in his past are bound together by the symbolizing power of forgetting with the myth Lovecraft read as a child, the story of Theseus and the Minotaur. As he explores the labyrinth of his past, Lovecraft remembers his way down the tunnel of time to the "savage dawn-life"[47] of his beginnings.

In the summer of 1923, Lovecraft wrote "The Rats in the Walls," a story which, like "The Outsider," has its setting in a castle-like structure. The story begins July 16, 1923, as the reconstruction of the old Exham Priory in England is completed. The protagonist, whose surname is de la Poer, moves in and sets up housekeeping. Exham Priory is the seat of de la Poer's ancestors, the first of whom was granted the site in 1261 as the first Baron Exham. From this date until the early seventeenth century the family line became odd and macabre and was ostracized by the citizens of the neighborhood. During the reign of James I, the eerie family behavior climaxed in the murder of the head of the de la Poer line together with his entire family by the third son, Walter de la Poer, the lineal progenitor of the narrator. To rid himself of the sight and memory of this horror, Walter de la Poer fled to the Virginia Colony where he built Carfax, which remained the family home until it was destroyed by Federal troops near the end of the Civil

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[47] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 348.

War. The grandfather of the narrator, together with a mysterious letter containing the truth about the de la Poer line, was lost in the ensuing destruction. The youthful protagonist emigrated northward from Virginia with his family to Massachusetts, where his father died in 1904. By 1918, having become wealthy through a manufacturing career and being a fancier of history and antiques, the protagonist bought and restored Exham, moving there in 1923.

The Priory is a many layered edifice which tops an ominous precipice:

> Exham Priory [was] much studied because of its peculiarly composite architecture; an architecture involving Gothic towers resting on a Saxon or Romanesque substructure, whose foundation in turn was of a still earlier order or blend of orders--Roman, and even Druidic or native Cymric, if legends speak truly. This foundation was a very singular thing, being merged on one side with the solid limestone of the precipice from whose brink the priory overlooked a desolate valley.[48]

Of help in acquiring and reclaiming Exham is Captain Edward Norrys, a plump, even tempered member of the Royal Air Force, who has aided de la Poer in piecing together what is known of the ancient edifice:

> [De la Poer] deduced that Exham stood on the site of a prehistoric temple; a Druidical or ante-Druidical thing which must have been contemporary with Stonehenge. That indescribable rites had been celebrated there, few doubted, and there were unpleasant tales of the transference of these rites into the Cybele-worship which the Romans had introduced.[49]

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[48] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, pp. 33-34.

[49] Ibid., p. 36.

Exploration of the subcellar yields Latin inscriptions such as "'DIV . . . OPS . . . MAGNA. MAT . . .' sign of the Magna Mater whose dark worship was once vainly forbidden to Roman citizens."[50] These worshippers had "performed nameless ceremonies at the bidding of a Phrygian priest."[51] Later, some of the Saxons had continued the rites, adding to the temple its essential outline:

> About 1000 A.D. the place is mentioned in a chronicle as being a substantial stone priory housing a strange and powerful monastic order and surrounded by extensive gardens which needed no walls to exclude a frightened populace.[52]

Tales of the period from the fourteenth century to the date of the wholesale murder of the de la Poer family that occurred during the reign of James I were frightening:

> They represented my ancestors as a race of hereditary daemons beside whom Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade would seem the veriest tyros.[53]

Some stories told of terrible events on the deserted family holdings, such as the incident involving "the servant who had gone mad at what he saw in the priory in the full light of day."[54] People had searched for vanished peasants when the terror was at its height:

> Prying curiosity meant death, and more than one severed head had been publicly shown on the bastions--now effaced--around Exham Priory.[55]

The most vivid of the tales concerned the rats:

> The scampering army of obscene vermin which had burst forth from the castle three months after the

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[50] Ibid. [51] Ibid. [52] Ibid., pp. 36-37.

[53] Ibid., p. 37. [54] Ibid., p. 38. [55] Ibid.

> tragedy [during James I's reign] that doomed it to desertion--the lean, filthy, ravenous army which had swept all before it and devoured fowl, cats, dogs, hogs, sheep, and even two hapless human beings before its fury was spent. Around that unforgettable rodent army a whole separate cycle of myths revolves, for it scattered among the village homes and brought curses and horrors in its train.[56]

When de la Poer moves into the Priory in 1923, his household consists of several servants and various cats, of which a large black tom named "Nigger-Man" is the favorite. All goes quietly until de la Poer uncovers evidence that his ancestor Walter de la Poer killed the members of the de la Poer household--"a father, three brothers, and two sisters"[57]--two weeks after a shocking discovery which changed the ancestor's whole demeanor:

> Had he, then, witnessed some appalling ancient rite, stumbled upon some frightful and revealing symbol in the priory or its vicinity?[58]

The first incident occurs in the narrator's bedchamber, a room which is "circular, very high, and without wainscotting, being hung with arras which I had myself chosen in London."[59] Before dozing off, de la Poer stares at the aurora visible through the window of his chamber: "I did not draw the curtains, but gazed out at the narrow window which I faced."[60] One night he is awakened by Nigger-Man after the cat has been aroused by the rats within the walls of the chamber.

The following night the narrator is awakened by the rats after a terrible dream:

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[56] Ibid. [57] Ibid., p. 39. [58] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[59] Ibid., p. 41. [60] Ibid.

> I seemed to be looking down from an immense height upon a twilit grotto, knee-deep with filth, where a white bearded daemon swineherd drove about with his staff a flock of fungous, flabby beasts whose appearance filled me with unutterable loathing. Then, as the swineherd paused and nodded over his task, a mighty swarm of rats rained down on the stinking abyss and fell to devouring beasts and man alike.[61]

De la Poer switches on the lights and sees "a hideous shaking all over the tapestry, causing the somewhat peculiar designs to execute a singular dance of death."[62] Although the rats are gone, more sleep is impossible, so de la Poer and his cat descend to lower floors. Here the walls are alive with rats:

> These creatures, in numbers apparently inexhaustible, were engaged in one stupendous migration from inconceivable heights to some depth conceivably or inconceivably below.[63]

Discovering that no one else had heard the rats, the protagonist explores the subcellar of the priory.

De la Poer and Norrys find Roman inscriptions honoring the Eastern god Atys, a fertility god whose lore is mingled with that of Cybele, the Magna Mater. A lower crypt contains a sacrificial altar which cannot be moved. Norrys and de la Poer sleep in the vault and the protagonist has another nightmare:

> I saw again the twilit grotto, and the swineherd with his unmentionable fungous beasts wallowing in filth, and as I looked at these things they seemed nearer and more distinct--so distinct that I could almost observe their features. Then I did observe the flabby features of one of them and awakened.[64]

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[61] Ibid., p. 42. [62] Ibid. [63] Ibid., p. 43.

[64] Ibid., pp. 44-45.

But de la Poer escapes the truth, for "ultimate horror often paralyzes memory in a merciful way."[65]

Norrys awakens the narrator, urging him to listen for the cats:

> An acute terror now rose within me. . . . If these were living vermin, why did not Norrys hear their disgusting commotion?[66]

The by now irrational de la Poer feels "as if the whole cliff below were riddled with questing rats."[67] The narrator's mind is almost unhinged: "My fear of the unknown was at this point very great."[68] The two men try "to move the central altar which we now recognized as the gate to a new pit of nameless fear;"[69] failing this, they retreat to recruit five experts from a London university. One of the university men remarks of de la Poer and his dreams that de la Poer "had now been shown the thing which certain forces had wished to show."[70]

Sir William Brinton, leader of the university men, makes the counterweighted central altar tilt backward:

> Through a nearly square opening in the tiled floor, sprawling on a flight of stone steps so prodigiously worn that it was little more than an inclined plane at the center, was a ghastly array of human or semi-human bones. Those which retained their collocation as skeletons showed attitudes of panic fear, and over all were the marks of rodent gnawing. The skulls denoted nothing short of utter idiocy, cretinism, or primitive semi-apedom.[71]

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[65] Ibid., p. 45. [66] Ibid. [67] Ibid. [68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., p. 46. [70] Ibid., p. 47.

[71] Ibid., p. 48.

The passage, hewn from the rock, leads downward into a vast open space. On the way down the steps, Brinton remarks that "the passage, according to the direction of the strokes, must have been chiseled from beneath."[72] There is light ahead:

> Not any mystic phosphorescence, but a filtered day light which could not come except from unknown fissures in the cliff that overlooked the waste valley. That such fissures had escaped notice from outside was hardly remarkable because . . . the cliff is so high and beetling that only an aeronaut could study its face in detail.[73]

The men discover a grotto of great height, "stretching away farther than any eye could see; a subterraneous world of limitless mystery and horrible suggestion."[74] The protagonist describes the ruins which the group finds:

> A weird pattern of tumuli, a savage circle of monoliths, a low-domed Roman ruin, a sprawling Saxon pile, and an early English edifice of wood.[75]

They find more skeletons in a pile stretching for yards beyond the steps, "these latter invariably in postures of daemoniac frenzy, either fighting off some menace or clutching other forms with cannibal intent."[76] De la Poer describes the heaps of bones:

> They were mostly lower than the Piltdown man in the scale of evolution, but in every case definitely human. Many were of higher grade, and a very few were the skulls of supremely and sensitively developed types. All the bones were gnawed, mostly by rats, but somewhat by others of the half-human drove. Mixed with them were many tiny bones of rats--fallen members of the lethal army which closed the ancient

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[72] Ibid. [73] Ibid. [74] Ibid., p. 49.

[75] Ibid. [76] Ibid.

epic.[77]

The men continue their explorations,

> . . . each stumbling upon revelation after revelation, and trying to keep for the nonce from thinking of the events which must have taken place there three hundred, or a thousand, or two thousand, or ten thousand years ago. It was the antechamber of hell.[78]

Other discoveries are made:

> The quadruped things--with their occasional recruits from the biped class--had been kept in stone pens, out of which they must have broken in their last delirium of hunger or rat-fear.[79]

Brinton translates aloud "the most shocking ritual I have ever known"[80] as he searches the Roman ruin. Norrys explores an ancient butcher's shop, complete with English implements and graffitti, some of them as recent as 1610:

> I could not go in that building--that building whose daemon activities were stopped only by the dagger of my ancestor Walter de la Poer.[81]

In the ruin of a low Saxon edifice the narrator finds:

> A terrible row of ten stone cells with rusty bars. Three had tenants, all skeletons of high grade, and on the bony forefinger of one I found a seal ring with my own coat-of-arms.[82]

The anthropologist Trask opens one of the prehistoric tumuli, and brings to light skulls "slightly more human than a gorilla's."[83]

The men turn from the darkened area foreshadowed in de la Poer's dream to explore another region:

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[77] Ibid. [78] Ibid. [79] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[80] Ibid., p. 50. [81] Ibid. [82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

> [The group approached] that apparently boundless depth of midnight cavern where no ray of light from the cliff could penetrate. We shall never know what sightless Stygian worlds yawn beyond the little distance we went, for it was decided that such secrets are not good for mankind.[84]

In the darkness they find pits where the rats had feasted--lack of replenishment of their carrion diet had forced the rats out on their tidal rampage after Walter de la Poer had stopped the heinous rituals for all time. Some of the pits are "bottomless to our searchlights, and peopled by unnameable fancies."[85] De la Poer almost falls into one of these pits as he hears a sound from the blackness beyond. A searchlight exposes "the plump Capt. Norrys."[86] De la Poer is consumed by atavistic desires:

> Why shouldn't rats eat a de la Poer as a de la Poer eats forbidden things? . . . The Yanks ate Carfax with flames and burnt Grandsire Delapore [spelling of surname adopted in Virginia Colony] and the secret . . . No, no, I tell you, I am not that daemon swineherd in the twilit grotto! Who says I am a de la Poer? . . . Shall a Norrys hold the lands of a de la Poer?[87]

The remainder of de la Poer's ravings are a steady lingual retreat down the halls of history toward aboriginal beginnings:

> Curse you, Thornton, I'll teach you to faint at what my family do! . . . 'Sblood, thou stinkard, I'll learn ye how to gust . . . wolde ye swynke me thilke wys? . . . Magna Mater! Magna Mater! . . . Atys . . . Dia ad aghaidh's ad aodaun . . . agus bas dunach ort! Dhonas 's dholas ort, agus leat-sa! . . . Ungl . . . ungl . . . rrlh . . . chchch . . .[88]

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[84] Ibid., pp. 50-51. [85] Ibid., p. 51. [86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., pp. 51-52. [88] Ibid., p. 52.

The scientists find de la Poer crouched over the partly eaten body of Captain Norrys, with Nigger-Man leaping at the throat of his now irrational master. Exham Priory is dynamited, and de la Poer is put into a padded cell:

> They must know that I did not do it. They must know it was the rats; the slithering, scurrying rats whose scampering will never let me sleep; the daemon rats that pace behind the padding in this room and beckon me down to greater horrors than I have ever known; the rats they can never hear; the rats; the rats in the walls.[89]

"The Rats in the Walls," like "The Outsider," takes place on an elevated piece of ground. The restoration of the old priory is the re-establishment of the Phillips domicile at 454 Angell Street:

> My home had been my ideal of Paradise & my source of inspiration--but it was to be profaned & altered by other hands. Life from that day [1904, when Grandfather Phillips' death forced the sale of the family home] has held for me but one ambition--to regain the old place & reestablish its glory--a thing I fear I can never accomplish. For twelve years I have felt like an exile.[90]

This letter to Reinhardt Kleiner, written November 16, 1916, discloses Lovecraft's strong desire to restore his family mansion. The last sentence of the excerpt gives a clue to the significance of the old priory's name, for "Exham" may be rendered as "the home of the exile."

There are at least two sources for the name of de la Poer, Lovecraft's protagonist. The more apparent of these is the surname of Edgar Allan Poe, for Lovecraft says

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 40.

Poe is his "God of Fiction."[91] A less obvious name determinant appears in Lovecraft's letter of February 4, 1934, to J. Vernon Shea:

> The one time that I seriously thought of suicide was in 1904, when my grandfather died in the midst of business tangles (he was president of a land and irrigation corporation exploiting the Snake River, and the total destruction of the dam on which everything depended had caused a frightful situation) and left us all relatively poor. I was (being predominately geographical minded) tremendously attached to the old home at 454 Angell Street (now housing 12 physicians' offices--I walk by it as often as I can) with its grounds and fountain and stable, but this now had to go.[92]

In the same letter Lovecraft related his decision to accept his loss and make the best of the situation:

> Could it be possible that a poor man without servants or a large house and grounds might get a greater satisfaction from remaining alive and studying and writing than from slipping back to primal nescience and molecular dispersal?[93]

Lovecraft, who could not earn a living wage, was doomed to be poor and "without servants or a large house and grounds." Thus the name de la Poer may be rendered "of the poor," for Lovecraft counts himself a member of that economic class.

The priory sits atop a precipice which represents Lovecraft's view of the precarious position of rational order. This brink foreshadows the subterranean revelations. The priory itself, partly composed of Gothic towers, rests on a layering of Saxon, Romanesque, Roman, Druidic, and native Cymric ruins. This lamination, the evolutionary con-

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[91] Ibid., p. 20. [92] St. Armand, pp. 28-29.

[93] Ibid., p. 32.

tinuum of England's history, rests on the rock of evolution's beginnings. Lovecraft moves toward the terror of this earliest point of mankind as a race and himself as a person.

Several entries in the Commonplace Book show the power of a geographical state of mind and the layering of the past within the ground Lovecraft feels he is exiled from:

> Warning that certain ground is sacred or accursed; that a house or city must not be built upon it; or must be abandoned or destroyed if built; under penalty of catastrophe.[94]

Implicit is Lovecraft's rage at being evicted from his paradise after his grandfather's death. These feelings of loss are explicit in the next entry:

> Reconstruction of ancient temple or rededication of ancient altar evokes dangerous, unbodied forces.[95]

The story's English setting reflects the love of Britain linked with Lovecraft's early home life. He writes on November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> I always had the impression of being English, & when my grandfather told me of the American Revolution, I shocked everyone by adopting a dissenting view. . . . "God Save the Queen!" was a stock phrase of mine.[96]

Lovecraft writes on January 1, 1915, to Maurice Moe:

> I cannot even now excuse the revolution of America from England, and through the influence of heredity am at heart an Englishman despite my American birth.[97]

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[94] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 20.

[95] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[96] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 34.

[97] Ibid., p. 10.

Lovecraft traces his lineage back to England. He writes to Kleiner that his paternal grandfather came from Devonshire to America "on account of a loss of fortune"[98] and "my father's mother was an Allgood of Northumberland, living in N.Y., descended from a British officer who remained in America after the disastrous revolution."[99]

Perhaps this British officer ancestor is a component in Lovecraft's creation of the solidly middle class Captain Edward Norrys of the Royal Air Force. Lovecraft's letter of February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird confirms this English influence:

> His [Lovecraft's] ancestry was that of unmixed English gentry; quite directly on the paternal side, where his own grandfather had left Devonshire as a poorish younger son and sought fortune in the state of New York.[100]

A more proximate biographical determinant of the overweight Captain Norrys is Lovecraft's attitude toward his own weight. He writes on June 5, 1925, to Maurice Moe:

> But my most spectacular feat of the season is reducing. You know how fat I was in 1923 [the time of the composition of "The Rats in the Walls"], and how bitterly I resented the circumstance. In 1924 I grew even worse, till finally I had to adopt a #16 collar! . . . In January when I became absolute autocrat of my breakfast, dinner, and supper table, I flung my hat in the air--or ring--and started reducing in earnest! And I didn't need to be fat at all! It was all the result of acquiescing spinelessly in the dicta of one's solicitous family! How the pounds flew! . . . It was dramatic--breathless--sensational--this reclamation of a decade-lost statue from the vile mud which had so long encrusted it. . . . If you were to meet me on the street tomorrow you would not know me except from the very earliest pic-

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[98] Ibid., p. 31. [99] Ibid. [100] Ibid., p. 296.

> tures you ever saw. . . .[101] And I mean to stay that way a long, long while!

Lovecraft despises the "vile mud" of excess weight, as evidenced by his letter of April 2, 1925, to his Aunt Lillian Lovecraft Clark:

> Enough is as good as a feast, & I certainly get enough--enough to feed a normal frame, but not such a gross excess as to build an additional burden of useless adipose tissue which is itself a debilitating drag & consumer of valuable energy.[102]

Lovecraft feels antipathy for any adipose tissue, which cuts into the function of his intellect and prevents movement upward along his scale of mental evolution. Perhaps Lovecraft disposes of this excess weight by projecting it onto Norrys, whom he depicts as complacent and obtuse. Lovecraft dispenses with his burden so the slender "statue" of his mentality can emerge.

Captain Norrys' name suggests obtuseness and lack of perspicacity. The German adjective "narrisch" can be translated as "foolish, crazy, silly, [or] mad,"[103] so that the man's character appears in his appellation. Lovecraft's opinion of the mental capacity of his friend Reinhardt Kleiner is perhaps a source of Norrys' insensitivity. Lovecraft writes him on June 11, 1920:

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[101] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, pp. 18-19.

[102] James Warren Thomas, "Howard Phillips Lovecraft: A Self Portrait," Thesis Brown University, 1950, p. 69.

[103] Karl Breul, The New Cassell's German-English Dictionary, ed. Harold T. Betteridge (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1958), p. 335.

> Your recent indifference to cosmical ideas is actually puzzling to me. . . . What I cannot comprehend, is how your imagination can fail to react to those mysterious abysses; how you can escape the burning curiosity of a child at a nearly closed door through whose crevice come sounds of strange and unearthly wonder, and fragments of sights that suggest unthinkable things. How, after these terrible glimpses, you can still remain indifferent to ultra mundane hints; can still take tiny mankind and his affairs and desires seriously, I find actual difficulty in understanding. My only solution is that in you emotion replaces imagination; that the keenly sensitive development which in the philosopher affects the imaginative and speculative functions, in the poet affects those simple nervous-ganglial centres which give rise to the emotions of human relationship.[104]

Lovecraft cannot understand why Kleiner turns his energy toward human relationship and away from the philosophical issues of the intellect and the imagination. His letter to Kleiner continues:

> You and I undoubtedly represent cases of unusually localised and precisely opposite nervous development. I am objective enough to realise that my lack of interest in purely human matters is in its way as inexplicable to the humano-centrist, as his lack of interest in cosmic problems is to me. We both see the same things, but because of our dissimilar receptive or interpretative organisations these things assume with us a totally different order in our active consciousness. You are looking through a microscope, I through a telescope; you tend toward subjectivity, I toward objectivity. Your valucentric standard is man, mine infinity and eternity.[105]

For Lovecraft "narrischness" consists of a comfortable, "humano-centrist" world view fostered by "simple nervous-ganglial centres that give rise to the emotions of human relationship." This attitude is characteristic of Captain

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[104] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 117.

[105] Ibid.

Norrys and gives him an air of nearsighted swinishness like the "microscope" Lovecraft believes his friend Kleiner looks through. This emotion-based state of mind, with its gregarity, keeps the "narrisch" Kleiner from looking through Lovecraft's telescope of intellectual, cosmic objectivity, and places him on a level--at least in Lovecraft's mind--with the other, "swinish" members of the "humano-centrist" herd. Lovecraft writes to Frank Belknap Long in a letter dated February 20, 1924:

> And as for Puritan inhibitions--I admire them more every day. They are attempts to make of life a work of art--to fashion a pattern of beauty in the hog-wallow that is animal existence--and they spring out of that divine hatred of life which marks the deepest and most sensitive soul. . . . I have no respect or reverence whatever for any person who does not live abstemiously and purely--I can like him and tolerate him, and admit him to be a social equal as I do Clark Ashton Smith and Mortonius [James F. Morton] and Kleiner and others like that, but in my heart I feel him to be my inferior--nearer the abysmal amoeba and the Neanderthal man--and at times cannot veil a sort of condecension and sardonic contempt for him, no matter how much my aesthetick and intellectual superior he may be. It is a very deep feeling and . . . I hold it to be as sacred and authentic as any other human feeling . . . I am a simple big white man who likes to sit at the edge of the forest at evening, whilst the elders of the tribe draw their cloaks of deer-hide tighter and tell strange stories in the light of dim embers.[106]

Lovecraft feels "in his heart" that Kleiner is his moral inferior, and perhaps sees his friend's face in the fictive guise of Norrys on one of the "unmentionable fungous beasts wallowing in filth." The swineherd is an intimation that Lovecraft sees himself as controller and director of crea-

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[106] Ibid., pp. 315-16.

tures so unfortunate as to allow their emotions to overrule their rational faculties. An earlier fictive corroboration of Lovecraft's view of his friend may appear in "The Temple," as Heinrich's second-in-command, the "soft-headed Rhinelander" Klenze, whose mind is "not Prussian, but given to imaginings and speculations which have no value."[107] The spelling of the names "Klenze" and "Kleiner" are similar, but of more significance is the dichotomy evinced by Commander Heinrich's total disdain for his lieutenant: "In my heart I feel him to be my inferior."[108] The dichotomy is between conscious will and blind emotion, the "simple nervous-ganglial centres" that rank with "the abysmal amoeba and the Neanderthal man." The lower forms of life exemplified by Klenze and Norrys must be controlled by the fully developed intellect--exemplified by the swineherd in the grotto.

With the help of Norrys, de la Poer has discovered that indescribable rites have been celebrated on the prehistoric site of Exham Priory. These rites are a literary manifestation of the discord which for Lovecraft characterizes the "savage dawn-life" of racial beginnings and the personal origins of Lovecraft himself. Toward chaotic beginnings "The Rats in the Walls" moves through layers of historical overlay: Gothic, Saxon, Romanesque, Roman, Druidical, and native Cymric. Lovecraft wants to trace the

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[107] Lovecraft, Dagon, pp. 77-84.

[108] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 315.

maze back to his beginnings by tracing de la Poer's movement down through the laminations of British heritage. Lovecraft writes on February 20, 1924, to Frank Belknap Long:

> All life is hollow and futile--it means nothing, and I want nothing of it but passive dream and simple childhood memory till the greater boon of oblivion comes. My taste? Simply a wistful longing for the perpetuation of those early fancies and tribal memories which molded my imagination when I was very young.[109]

Perhaps Lovecraft continues his investigations begun in childhood of the awe-inspiring scenes of his parents' acts in the "Nameless City" behind the closed door:

> What I cannot comprehend, is . . . how you can escape the burning curiosity of a child at a nearly-closed door through whose crevice come sounds of strange and unearthly wonder, and fragments of sights that suggest unthinkable things.[110]

De la Poer's discovery that his ancestors surpassed even the Marquis de Sade in their feral madness may in some way correspond to the "sounds of strange and unearthly wonder and fragments of sights that suggest unthinkable things" in the "Nameless City" of his past.

Lovecraft approaches the Minotaur of primal energy as de la Poer and the university men make their way beneath the altar in the lowest subcellar of the priory. The worn steps and the bones with their "utter idiocy, cretinism or semi-apedom,"[111] with the marks showing that the passageway was chiseled upward, form the path of evolution from the

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[109] Ibid., p. 316. [110] Ibid., p. 117.

[111] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 48.

primal nescience of dawn-life behind the curtain of forgetting in Lovecraft's mind.

Because of buried emotion, Lovecraft kept other people at a distance. The earmarks of the master swineherd appear in Lovecraft's letter of March 8, 1923, to James F. Morton:

> Oh yes. . . . I'm really frightfully human and love all mankind and all that sort of thing. Mankind is truly amusing, when kept at the proper distance. And common men, if well-behaved, are really quite useful. One is a cynick only when one thinks. At such times the herd seems a bit disgusting because each member of it is always trying to hurt somebody else. . . . I am rather sorry (not outwardly but genuinely so) when disaster befalls a person, . . . To be a real hater one must hate en masse.[112]

Lovecraft considers the "herd" of mankind as "disgusting" and feels a need to control the human race to preserve his intellectual order. He writes on March 1, 1923, to James F. Morton:

> Honestly, my hatred of the human animal mounts by leaps and bounds the more I see of the damned vermin, and the more I see exemplified the workings of their spiteful, shabby, and sadistic psychological processes. Blessed is the plague, which with its divine and health-giving breath, removes these putrescent superfluities by the thousand![113]

Lovecraft's rage toward the masses is without bounds; a Commonplace Book entry reads: "Cities wiped out by supernatural wrath."[114] This rage is embodied in the rats that

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[112] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 211-12.

[113] Ibid., p. 211.

[114] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 22.

overwhelm the countryside and rain down upon the herded swine in the grotto. The story is an allegory of Lovecraft's vitriolic hatred of ignorance and untutored emotion. Havoc wreaked by rodents appears in a Commonplace Book entry: "Rats multiply and exterminate first a single city and then all mankind. Increased size and intelligence."[115] The force of the "blessed plague" of rats swarming upon the swine in the grotto consumes Lovecraft himself, the guardian swineherd.

Down into the hollow rock go the explorers, as Lovecraft continues to grope behind the screen of nepenthe which protects him from the full recollection of the past. Lovecraft's persona goes back beyond the point of return as does Eugene O'Neill's character of Brutus Jones (whose lines Lovecraft knew by heart).[116] The first sight at the bottom of the stairway is the pile of bones:

> Those which retained their collocation as skeletons showed attitudes of panic fear. . . . The skulls denoted nothing short of utter idiocy, cretinism, or primitive semi-apedom.[117]

As the men reach the bottom of the steps and look beyond the bones, they see "not any mystic phosphorescence, but a filtered daylight" which comes through unknown fissures in the cliff beneath the priory. This phrase is reminiscent of the arrival of the explorer at the end of the tunnel in "The Nameless City," for in that story the narrator finds "a gate

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[115] Ibid., p. 24. [116] Thomas, p. 6.

[117] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 48.

through which came all the illuminating phosphorescence [which is] . . . an infinity of subterranean effulgence." The worn stairs beneath the priory are the same stairs that lead down into the glowing radiance beneath the nameless city:

> Reaching down from the passage into the abyss was the head of a steep flight of steps--small numerous steps like those of black passages I had traversed--but after a few feet the glowing vapours concealed everything.[118]

Because the mysterious phosphorescence has been swept aside by filtered daylight, there is no longer any mist to hide the bones that cover the floor beneath the stairsteps, the same steps that appear in "The Nameless City":

> That a weird world of mystery lay far down that flight of peculiarly small steps I could not doubt, and I hoped to find there those human memorials which the painted corridor had failed to give. The frescoes had pictured unbelieveable [sic] cities, and valleys in this lower realm, and my fancy dwelt on the rich and colossal ruins that awaited me.[119]

"Those human memorials [and] . . . colossal ruins" that await the explorer of the nameless city are beneath Exham Priory:

> In one terrified glance I saw a weird pattern of tumuli, a savage circle of monoliths, a low-domed Roman ruin, a sprawling Saxon pile, and an early English edifice of wood--but all these were dwarfed by the ghoulish spectacle presented by the general surface of the ground. For yards about the steps extended an insane tangle of human bones.[120]

The remains are perhaps Lovecraft's childhood shrines to

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[118] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 107. [119] Ibid., p. 108.

[120] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 49.

Greek and Roman gods that he constructed within the microcosm of the Phillips estate, "with its trees and terraces, fountains and stables, walks and gardens."[121] But the quest in the depths reaches beyond the remains of these childhood artifacts. Lovecraft writes: "And best of all [was the Phillips estate's] proximity to the dreaming fields and mystic groves of antique New-England."[122] The Lovecraft family's English heritage, the substance of old New England, reposes beneath the restored Exham Priory.

The bones are another part of the same scene, for the skeletal remains are the remnants of the vanquished denizens of "The Nameless City" that rush toward the closing brass door:

> Turning, I saw outlined against the luminous aether of the abyss that could not be seen against the dusk of the corridor--a nightmare horde of rushing devils; hate-distorted, grotesquely panoplied, half transparent devils of a race no man might mistake--the crawling reptiles of the nameless city.[123]

The time when the demizens of the nameless city were alive is the dark forgotten "savage dawn-life" of Lovecraft's infancy, when "the nameless city was alive."[124] Lovecraft's father, "the ogre under a coverlet," and other male adults, by whom the infant's "voluble conversation [is] disrelish'd," slam the brass door that locks Lovecraft into outsideness.[125] The bones in the grotto, the bones of the "hate-distorted

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[121] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 297.

[122] Ibid. [123] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 110.

[124] Ibid., p. 105. [125] Ibid., p. 297.

. . . devils of a race no man might mistake--the crawling reptiles of the nameless city," are perhaps energyless effigies of the rejected infant outsider trying to reenter the Phillips mansion, the microcosm that protected him from the outside world. The memory of the infant's attempts to reenter suggest Professor Trask's discovery that the passage upward had been "chiseled from beneath."

Lovecraft spent the rest of his life as an outsider, endeavoring to evolve himself up to an intellectual maturity which he lacked as an infant. He learned to conceive of himself as a "crawling reptile"[126] or as some other type of monster with a hideous face, for he sees in the mirror of "The Outsider" all the indignation generated by his family's rejection of him. Because of this rejection Lovecraft had only a fragile intellectual structure to evolve himself out of the void into which he had been hurled. The nature of this delicate, intellectual structure is described by Lovecraft in a letter of November 6, 1930, to James F. Morton:

> No one thinks or feels or appreciates or lives a mental-emotional-imaginative life at all except in terms of the artificial reference-points supply'd him by the enveloping body of race-tradition and heritage into which he is born. We form an emotionally realizable picture of the external world, and an emotionally endurable set of illusions as to values and direction in existence, solely and exclusively through the arbitrary concepts and folkways bequeathed to us through our traditional culture-stream. Without this stream around us we are absolutely adrift in a meaningless and irrelevant chaos which has not the least capacity to give us any satisfaction apart from the trifling animal

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[126] Ibid., p. 110.

> ones. Pleasure and pain, time and space, relevance and non-relevance, good and evil, interest and non-interest, direction and purpose, beauty and ugliness--all these words, comprising virtually everything within the scope of normal human life, are absolutely blank and without counterparts in the sphere of actual entity save in connexion with the artificial set of reference-points provided by cultural heritage. Without our nationality--that is, our culture-grouping--we are merely wretched nuclei of agony and bewilderment in the midst of alien and directionless emptiness.[127]

Lovecraft as a child was one of the "wretched nuclei of agony and bewilderment" who evolved upward upon his own single-handedly assembled culture-stream. Lovecraft's letter to Morton continues:

> Apart from his race-stream, no human being exists, mentally as such. He is only one of the hominidae--the raw material of a human being. Therefore a native culture-heritage is the most priceless and indispensable thing any person has--and he who weakens the grasp of a people upon their inheritance is most nefariously a traitor to the human species. Of course our heritage comes in layers of different intensity, each being more vital and potent as it comes closer to our immediate individuality.[128]

This layered heritage, appearing in his childhood as periods of Arabian, Greek, Roman, and English influence, appears in "The Rats in the Walls" as the various ruins in the grotto. Lovecraft explores his intellectual construct and finds it based in the dark beginnings of the evolutional continuum. He discovers the bestial irrationality which lives within his mind and memory.

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[127] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1929-1931, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1971), p. 207.

[128] Ibid., pp. 207-08.

Devolution back to a state of bestiality by a person searching for his past appears in The Commonplace Book:

> Man tries to recapture all of his past, aided by drugs and music acting on memory. Extended process to hereditary memory--even to pre-human days. These ancestral memories figure in dreams. Plans stupendous recovery of primal past--but becomes subhuman, develops a hideous primal odor, takes to the woods and is killed by own dog.[129]

The personal path of devolution is joined to the cultural one. Lovecraft devolves back to the point in his childhood before his intellect developed, where he finds his "pre-human days"[130] filled with hatred of the "damned vermin," the human race. Lovecraft believed that he could overcome and rise above his latent hatred and bestiality through a movement upward along the ladder of mental evolution. He writes on March 8, 1923, to James F. Morton:

> The natural hatefulness and loathesomeness of the human beast may be overcome only in a few specimens of fine heredity and breeding, by a transference of interest to abstract spheres and a consequent sublimation of the universal sadistic fury. All that is good in man is artificial.[131]

Here is the movement upward from Lovecraft's dawn-life of "universal sadistic fury," the realm and essence of the Minotaur.

Exploration of the ruins is completed. De la Poer staggers toward the abyss, that "boundless depth of midnight cavern where no ray of light from the cliff could

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[129] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 12.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 212.

penetrate."[132] De la Poer's mental fall into the abyss is described in a verbally pictorial fashion that derives from Eugene O'Neill's "Emperor Jones," the classic play of devolution into "primitive semi-apedom."[133] Lovecraft describes the play in a letter to Frank Belknap Long dated May 3, 1922:

> Last week I went to see The Emperor Jones by Eugene O'Neill. Have you seen it? It is a thing of terror, ably presented. O'Neill strikes me as the one real dramatist of America today--starkly tragic, and with a touch of the Poe-esque.[134]

Lovecraft places O'Neill near Poe, his "God of Fiction,"[135] and knows the part of Brutus Jones well:

> That Lovecraft had an innate talent for acting is readily apparent both from the melodramatic structure of many of his tales and the testimony of many of his closest acquaintances. . . . Lovecraft was also a life-long master and connoisseur of dialect; his wife remembers, for example, his perfect recitation of the part of Brutus Jones from O'Neill's "Emperor Jones" (complete from memory).[136]

Lovecraft's love of acting no doubt had a part in the monologue that brings "The Rats in the Walls" to its dramatic conclusion. William S. Home writes of the devolutionary process in the story:

> In Lovecraft's best and most important story, which exemplifies his basic theme--the nearness of the beast-self to the surface of modern man and his capacity to revert to it instantaneously--the mutterings of the protagonist at the climax supply a key

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[132] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 50.

[133] Ibid., p. 48.

[134] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 173.

[135] Ibid., p. 20.

[136] St. Armand, p. 6.

> to the immediately preceding, unrecounted act of horror, casting a flicker of light on the steps of that ladder to the black pit of the animal past which the returned de la Poer had descended. The phrases, with the exception of the two final terms of gibberish, are genuine, and successively earlier in time and context, a more striking illustration of the devolutive process than any physical description could have been.[137]

Home discusses the meaning inherent in each phrase which de la Poer utters as he falls further and further into irrationality. This pit, the source of "the natural hatefulness and loathesomeness of the human beast,"[138] is the Minotaur. Home continues his linguistic discussion:

> "Curse you, Thornton [one of the university men], I'll teach you to faint at what my family do!" expresses not so much anterior language as a new identification with the rustic speech of de la Poer's modern, rural (but ancestral) English environment. As he is presented as an elderly manufacturer who, prior to his arrival at Exham Priory, possessed no knowledge of history or its traditions, it is extremely unlikely that he would have had the linguistic background necessary to speak as he does in subsequent lines.[139]

De la Poer's successive exclamations portray steps backward in time and evolution. Home hints at this idea:

> "S'blood, thou stinkard, I'll learn ye how to gust. . . ." contains three words which characterize Elizabethan speech circa 1600 A.D. "S'blood," of course, abbreviates God's blood; stinkard is hardly equivocal, but was a rather stronger epithet than its modern cognate, and throws a sinister note in to the line as it was generally applied to odorous

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[137] William S. Home, "The Lovecraft Books: Some Addenda and Corrigenda," in The Dark Brotherhood and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1969), p. 149.

[138] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 212.

[139] Home, "Addenda" in Dark Brotherhood, p. 150.

> domestic animals--such as pigs. Gust means to relish the taste . . . "God's blood, you pig, I'll teach you to like the taste. . . ."[140]

Home's discussion continues:

> The following line is Middle English of Chaucer's and Langland's period--the mid-fourteenth century. Some of the words are surviving Anglo-Saxonisms, but Lovecraft's use of certain variant spellings over the standards (denoted by moderns for an age which had no standards) were culled from manuscripts dating specifically from this period, leaving doubt neither as to the time nor to the perfectionism of Lovecraft's scholarship. "Wolde ye swynke me thilke wys?" means "Would you toil for me in such a manner (wise)?"[141]

The devolution of de la Poer reaches its misanthropic conclusion:

> Following the invocations of the Phrygians Atys and Cybele (the Magna Mater) are oaths in Gaelic of Scottish orthography. This is a language which has changed very little in the past millenium, but Lovecraft does what he can to indicate age by the use of archaisms (dunach is old-fashioned as is its English equivalent) and semi-archaisms--dhonas and dholas in altered form are used in Irish today rather than in Scottish, indicating that H.P.L. intended the speech of a day when the two cultures were not so distinct. The shortening of agus (and) to 's is of immemorial usage.
>
> "Dia ad aghaidh 's ad aodaun . . ." Aghaidh and aodaun (an old spelling for aodann) have the same meaning--face, visage, or forehead--so the oath is probably a standard one--"God in thy face and thy visage!"
>
> "Augus bas dunach ort! . . ." ". . . And death-woe on thee!"
>
> Dholas (grief, desolation, abhorrence) and dhonas (mischief, misfortune, bad luck) are next wished on Norrys, followed by the leat-sa of which the -sa is an adjection of great emphasis--perhaps rendered best as "Grief and misfortune on thee, and with thee forever and ever!"[142]

With the triumph of unregenerate hatred, the fore-

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[140] Ibid., p. 150. [141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid., pp. 150-51.

shadowing dream is fulfilled; the rats of rage have risen again to consume their hapless prey--in particular the innocuous burgher Captain Norrys, and in general, the whole swinishly materialistic civilization, represented by Thornton and the other university men, who are products of a society beyond Lovecraft's ken:

> Honestly, my hatred of the human animal mounts by leaps and bounds the more I see of the damned vermin. . . . Blessed is the plague, which with its divine and health-giving breath removes these putrescent superfluities by the thousand.[143]

The personal truth mirrored in Lovecraft's letter is acted out:

> With me the hardest emotion to bring under the control of reason was hatred--as expressed in beserk [sic] rages and general pugnacity. I had some fairly rough fights from which I would not retreat but from which I almost always got the worst except when I was able to frighten my foe through a dramatically murderous expression and voice.[144]

Lovecraft's fear is realized in de la Poer's cannibal act as reason loses its grip. Instinctual rage from forgotten, unresolved episodes manifests itself in Lovecraft as abhorrence of the human animal. But in his overwhelming hatred, Lovecraft becomes a monster in his own right, a sort of Jekyll-Hyde Minotaur, exemplified in the blindly ferocious act of the enraged de la Poer at the story's conclusion. Lovecraft becomes his own Minotaur, the monstrosity in the mirror of "The Outsider" and the demon swineherd turned can-

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[143] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 211.

[144] St. Armand, p. 67.

nibal in "The Rats in the Walls." The demise of a tenuous rationality is complete.

Lovecraft's story "He," written in 1925, two years after the composition of "The Rats in the Walls," begins in New York City, the scene of Lovecraft's abortive two-year marriage. The move from the quietly buccolic English countryside of "The Rats in the Walls" to the scene at the beginning of "He" parallels Lovecraft's move from the placid Providence scene to the modern bustle of New York City. "He," which reflects Lovecraft's hatred of New York City, begins as the unnamed narrator sees a mysterious figure whom he knows he must follow:

> I saw him on a sleepless night when I was walking desperately to save my soul and my vision. My coming to New York had been a mistake; for whereas I had looked for poignant wonder and inspiration in the teeming labyrinths of ancient streets that twist endlessly from forgotten courts and squares and waterfronts to courts and squares and waterfronts equally forgotten, and in the Cyclopean modern towers and pinnacles that rise blackly Babylonian under waning moons, I had found instead only a sense of horror and oppression which threatened to master, paralyze, and annihilate me.[145]

New York is "quite dead, its sprawling body imperfectly embalmed and infested with queer animate things which have nothing to do with it as it was in life."[146] This is a horrible revelation for the narrator, but he refrains "from going home to my people lest I seem to crawl back ignobly in defeat."[147]

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[145] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 230. [146] Ibid., p. 231.

[147] Ibid.

The narrator meets a mysterious man in "a grotesque hidden courtyard of the Greenwich section."[148] The man comes upon the narrator early one August morning, "as I was threading a series of detached courtyards."[149] These courtyards are mazes, for they once formed "parts of a continuous network of picturesque alleys."[150] The man's face is shadowed by a wide-brimmed hat "which somehow blended perfectly with the out-of-date cloak he affected."[151] His appearance unnerves the narrator, for his form is slight, "thin almost to cadaverousness,"[152] and his voice is soft and hollow. The stranger introduces himself because he has "inferred that I resembled him in loving the vestiges of former years."[153] The new acquaintance offers to guide the narrator to places unknown to him. Suddenly the narrator is disturbed by a glimpse of his guide's face:

> Perhaps it was too white, or too expressionless, or too much out of keeping with the locality, to make me feel easy or comfortable.[154]

As the guide begins the tour, he makes brief comments regarding names and dates and directs his companion with gestures as the two men "squeezed through interstices, tiptoed through corridors, clambered over brick walls, and once crawled on hands and knees through a low, arched passage of stone whose immense length and tortuous twistings effaced at last every hint of geographical location I had managed to

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[148] Ibid. [149] Ibid., p. 232. [150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid. [152] Ibid. [153] Ibid. [154] Ibid.

preserve."[155]

As they advanced "into this inexhaustible maze of unknown antiquity,"[156] they meet no one, and the lighted windows become fewer. They come upon a mysterious alley:

> This alley led steeply uphill--more steeply than I thought possible in this part of New York--and the upper end was blocked squarely by the ivy-clad wall of a private estate, beyond which I could see a pale cupola, and the tops of trees waving against a vague lightness in the sky. . . . Leading me within, he steered a course in utter blackness over what seemed to be a gravel path, and finally up a flight of stone steps to the door of the house, which he unlocked and opened for me.[157]

Led by his strange guide, the narrator enters an upstairs library which has three small-paned windows. The host draws the curtains of the cupola and the lambent radiance of a new-lit candle shows the room in some detail:

> In this feeble radiance I saw that we were in a spacious, well-furnished and paneled library dating from the first quarter of the Eighteenth Century.[158]

The family portraits on the walls are "all tarnished to an enigmatical dimness, and bear an unmistakable likeness"[159] to the old man who motions his visitor to be seated. The strange guide-turned-host, who has removed his protective cape, stands revealed in eighteenth century costume. He informs the narrator of the history of the estate:

> It hath been my good fortune to retain the rural seat of my ancestors. . . . There were many reasons for the close keeping of this place in my family, and I have not been remiss in discharging such obligations. The squire who succeeded to it in 1768

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[155] Ibid., p. 233. [156] Ibid. [157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., p. 234. [159] Ibid.

> studied sartain arts and made sartain discoveries, all connected with influences residing in this particular plot of ground, and eminently desarving of the strongest guarding.[160]

Stressing the importance of secrecy, the host shows his guest "some curious effects of these arts and discoveries."[161] The host explains that his squire ancestor dealt with certain Indians to determine "the exact inwardness"[162] of the ceremonies they performed, and poisoned them after learning that "all the world is but the smoke of our intellects; past the bidding of the vulgar, but by the wise to be puffed out and drawn in like any cloud of prime Virginia tobacco."[163] The old necromancer offers to show his guest "a better sight of sartain other years than your fancy affords you,"[164] and leads him to the windows. The narrator is alarmed by the old man's touch, for the host's flesh is as cold as ice.

Motioning with his hand, the old man causes a scene to appear in the window:

> Then, as if in response to an insidious motion of my host's hand, a flash of heat-lightning played over the scene, and I looked out upon a sea of luxuriant foliage--foliage unpolluted, and not the sea of roofs to be expected by any normal mind. . . . In the distance ahead I saw the unhealthy shimmer of a vast salt marsh constellated with nervous fireflies.[165]

But this view is a mistake and he causes a scene of old New York to show itself. The timid guest asks: "'Can you--

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[160] Ibid. [161] Ibid. [162] Ibid., p. 235.

[163] Ibid., pp. 235-36. [164] Ibid., p. 236.

[165] Ibid.

dare you--go far?'"[166] The answer comes quickly: "Far? What I have seen would blast ye to a mad statue of stone!"[167] The host shows another scene more terrible than the others:

> I saw the heavens verminous with strange flying things, and beneath them a hellish black city of giant stone terraces with impious pyramids flung savagely to the moon, and devil-lights burning from unnumbered windows. And swarming loathsomely on aerial galleries I saw the yellow, squint-eyed people of that city, robed horribly in orange and red, and dancing insanely to the pounding of fevered kettle-drums, the clatter of obscene crotala, and the maniacal moaning of muted horns whose ceaseless dirges rose and fell undulantly like the waves of an unhallowed ocean of bitumen.[168]

The narrator hears "the shrieking fulfilment of all the horror which that corpse-city had ever stirred in my soul,"[169] and "screamed and screamed and screamed as my nerves gave way and the walls quivered about me."[170]

The host is frightened: "He tottered, clutched at the curtains as I had done before, and wriggled his head wildly, like a hunted animal."[171] There is a sound from outside the chamber:

> . . . As the echoes of my screaming died away there came another sound so hellishly suggestive that only numbed emotion kept me sane and conscious. It was the steady, stealthy creaking of the stairs behind the locked door, as with the ascent of a barefoot or skin-shod horde.[172]

When there is a rattling of the latched door, the old man begins to "shrivel and blacken as he lurched near and strove to rend me with vulturine talons."[173] Only his eyes remain

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[166] Ibid., p. 237. [167] Ibid. [168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid. [170] Ibid. [171] Ibid. [172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid., p. 238.

whole and "glared with a propulsive, dilated incandescence which grew as the face around them charred and dwindled."[174] The door to the room bursts inward:

> I did not move, for I could not; but watched dazedly as the door fell in pieces to admit a colossal, shapeless influx of inky substance starred with shining, malevolent eyes. It poured thickly like a flood of oil bursting a rotten bulkhead, overturned a chair as it spread, and finally flowed under the table and across the room to where the blackened head with the eyes still glared at me. Around that head it closed, totally swallowing it up, and in another moment it had begun to recede; bearing away its invisible burden without touching me, and flowing again out that black doorway and down the unseen stairs, which creaked as before, though in reverse order.[175]

The narrator escapes the house of terror and is found in poor condition by a passing stranger. The story ends on a characteristic note:

> I never sought to return to those tenebrous labyrinths, nor would I direct any sane man thither if I could. Of who or what that ancient creature was, I have no idea; but I repeat that the city is dead and full of unsuspected horrors. Whither he has gone, I do not know; but I have gone home to the pure New England lanes up which fragrant sea-winds sweep at evening.[176]

"He" opens as a transparent attempt to escape the squalor and alienation of New York City. August Derleth writes in his memoir of Lovecraft that "in the story 'He' Lovecraft writes passages which grew out of experience, passages which are pure autobiography."[177] Lovecraft has come to New York looking for "poignant wonder and inspira-

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[174] Ibid. [175] Ibid. [176] Ibid., p. 239.

[177] August Derleth, H. P. L.: A Memoir (New York: Ben Abramson, 1945), p. 45.

tion in the teeming labyrinths of ancient streets," but finds "squalor and alienage."[178] In a letter of March 22, 1924, to Frank Belknap Long, Lovecraft describes a world infested with strange animate things which he fears will engulf him:

> At present I find it hard to conceive of anything more utterly and ultimately loathesome than certain streets of the lower East Side where Kleiner took Loveman and me in April 1922. The organic things--Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid--inhabiting that awful cesspool could not by any stretch of the imagination be call'd human. They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous slime of earth's corruption, and slithering and oozing in and on the filthy streets, or in and out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities.[179]

Lovecraft's conception of the inhabitants of the metropolis continues:

> They--or the degenerate gelatinous fermentation of which they were composed--seem'd to ooze, seep and trickle thro' the gaping cracks in the horrible houses. . . . And I thought of some avenue of Cyclopean and unwholesome vats, crammed to the vomiting point with gangrenous vileness, and about to burst and inundate the world in one leprous cataclysm of semi-fluid rottenness.[180]

Such description reflects primal terror buried in Lovecraft's past. The description continues:

> From that nightmare of perverse infection I could not carry away the memory of any living face. The individually grotesque was lost in the collectively devastating, which left on the eye only the broad, phantasmal lineaments of the morbid soul of disin-

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[178] Lovecraft, Dagon, pp. 230-31.

[179] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 333-34.

[180] Ibid., p. 334.

> tegration and decay . . . a yellow leering mask with sour, sticky, acid ichors oozing at eyes, ears, nose, and mouth, and abnormally bubbling from monstrous and unbelievable sores at every point.[181]

Localized detail merges into a quagmire of emotion, and the Minotaur, "the morbid soul of disintegration and decay" is "left on the eye"[182] forever.

To probe fulminating formlessness Lovecraft recruits a guide and explores the twisting maze that forms an older section of New York City. He writes on November 24, 1923, to Maurice Moe:

> Not a stone's throw from the travell'd business section, tuck't quietly in behind Broad and Weybosset Streets, lurk the beginnings of a squalid colonial labyrinth in which I mov'd as an utter stranger, each moment wondering whether I were in truth in my native town or in some leprous distorted witch-Salem of fever or nightmare. . . . Eddy [C. M. Eddy, student and friend of Lovecraft] knew it, and was my guide. Led by him I wandered. . . . Dirty small pan'd windows leer'd malevolently on all sides, and sometimes glasslessly, from gouged sockets. There was a fog, and out of it and into it again mov'd dark monstrous diseas'd shapes. They may have been people, or what once were, or might have been, people. Only the gods know who can inhabit this morbid maze--On through the fog we went, threading our way through narrow exotick streets and unbelievable [sic] courts and alleys, sometimes having the antient houses almost meet above our heads, but often emerging into unwholesome little squares or grassless parks at crossings or junctions where five or six of the tangled streets or lanes meet and open out into expanses as loathesome as Victor Hugo's Cour des Miracles. Eddy inform'd me, that these little squares are characteristick of the old west side of Providence, but I had never heard of them.[183]

Here is the prototype of the maze for Lovecraft's story, "He," with its interstices, brick walls, and ancient linteled win-

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[181] Ibid. [182] Ibid. [183] Ibid., pp. 269-70.

dows.

But the labyrinth in "He," an "inexhaustible maze of unknown antiquity," is a temporal continuum as well as a physical reality. Lovecraft writes on March 3, 1927, to Bernard Dwyer:

> Being highly imaginative, and sensitive to the archaic influences of this old town [Providence] with its narrow hill streets and glamorous Colonial doorways, I conceived the childish freak of transporting myself altogether into the past.[184]

In New York City Lovecraft constructed a "time chamber" in an attempt to remove himself from the "stone and stridor" of the modern metropolitan environment, as he writes on August 8, 1925:

> I am unable to take pleasure or interest in anything but a mental recreation of other & better days. . . . So in order to avoid the madness which leads to violence & suicide I must cling to the few shreds of old days & old ways which are left to me. Therefore no one need expect me to discard the ponderous furniture & paintings & clocks & books which help to keep 454 Angell Street always in my dreams. When they go, I shall go, for they are all that make it possible for me to open my eyes in the morning or look forward to another day of conciousness without screaming in sheer desperation & pounding the walls in a frenzied clamour to be waked up out of the nightmare of "reality" to my own room in Providence.[185]

Writing to his Aunt Lillian Phillips Clark, Lovecraft declares that "cold or hot, this room has to be a separate entity--a little Angell Street in the midst of chaos!"[186] The library in the old mansion of "He" is a facsimile of

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[184] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 107.

[185] Ibid., p. 21. [186] Thomas, p. 90.

the library at the Phillips home at 454 Angell Street, which is Lovecraft's goal in "He":

> [I] . . . crawled on hands and knees through a low, arched passage of stone whose immense length and tortuous twistings effaced at last every hint of geographical location I had been able to preserve.[187]

With "every hint of geographical location" erased, Lovecraft follows the pathway up the steeply rising hill reminiscent of the Rue d'Auseil in "The Music of Erich Zann."

The upstairs room with its weird window is like the magical opening in Zann's chamber, and the old necromancer of "He" occupies the same position as Zann. The row of tarnished portraits on the walls of the magician's room is like the history of the childhood epic woven into tapestries in the tunnel beneath the nameless city; this analogy makes the Zann-like figure of the old guide into another imago of Lovecraft as a baby. The melting down of the old man into a head that spits hatred from its eyes suggests that the old necromancer is a mummified imago of Lovecraft as a child preserved in the "tomb" of his mind. But Lovecraft goes beyond reliance upon impressions of the past for inspiration, because there is a "physiological fixation"[188] of memories in his mind. He writes on February 20, 1929, to Frank Belknap Long that a cause of religious belief on the part of educated persons is such a fixation:

> Most potent of all--an out and out infantile fixation developed by early childhood influences and absolutely shutting off the current of brain-power

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[187] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 233. [188] Ibid., p. 348.

> from areas of religious and philosophical speculation.[189]

Such an influence ties Lovecraft to his past at 454 Angell Street and causes him to build "a little Angell Street in the midst of chaos"[190] while in New York. Because of a need to experience the past, Lovecraft's fictive guide shows him more of the terror which lies behind the curtain of forgetting--for Lovecraft wishes for "a better sight of sartain other years than [his] fancy affords [him]."

To move back into the past, Lovecraft traverses the dual continuum of evolutionary and chronological development. He believes that to move backward in chronological time is to devolve down the evolutionary continuum, as he writes in his Commonplace Book:

> Man tries to recapture all of his past, aided by drugs and music acting on memory. Extends process to hereditary memory--even to pre-human days. These ancestral memories figure in dreams. Plans stupendous recovery of primal past--but becomes sub-human, develops a hideous primal odor, takes to the woods, and is killed by own dog.[191]

Lovecraft tries to regain his primal past with the window visions of primal dawn-life which his baby-self, the old necromancer, shows him. His fear of being consumed by the chaos he discovers appears in the sub-humanness noted in the Commonplace Book.

The first view through the window of the old mansion

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[189] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 272.

[190] Thomas, p. 90.

[191] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 12.

in "He" is of "a sea of luxuriant foliage. . . . I saw the unhealthy shimmer of a vast salt marsh, constellated with nervous fireflies." Memory plays a strong role in Lovecraft's imagery, as is suggested by the Commonplace Book:

> Biological-hereditary memories of other worlds and universes. Death lights dancing over a salt marsh.[192]

This vision is a glimpse of the base of the evolutionary scale, a base which corresponds to the mode of primal existence. The swamp scene is the bottom of the chronological-historical scale, which lies alongside the scale of "personal evolution" by which Lovecraft measures his daily progress toward intellectual maturity and self-control. A more violent window scene appears, a vision of verminous flying things and an ancient black city of chaos, populated by macabre creatures:

> [They were] . . . dancing insanely to the pounding of fevered kettle-drums, the clatter of obscene crotala, and maniacal moaning of muted horns whose ceaseless dirges rose and fell undulantly like the waves of an unhallowed ocean of bitumen.[193]

Here is the movement of Minotaural forces that terrify Lovecraft and haunt him in the form of "certain phantasmal shapes."[194]

The return of Lovecraft's persona to the old mansion, together with the unnerving vision, are suggested by Commonplace Book entries:

A return to a place under dreamlike, horrible, and

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[192] Ibid., p. 28. [193] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 237.

[194] Ibid., p. 349.

> only dimly comprehended circumstances. Death and decay reigning. Town fails to light up at night--revelation.[195]

Here is the nighted city of black stone terraces the narrator of "He" sees through the window. The gyrating, animalistic creatures inhabiting this nameless city appear in an additional Commonplace Book entry: "Odd nocturnal ritual. Beasts dance and march to music."[196] The city, with its "impious pyramids flung savagely to the moon," is a town of terror floating on a sea of sound, which is the moaning "of a distant throng of condemned spirits"[197]--spirits of the mad parents, "whose ceaseless dirges rose and fell undulantly like the waves of an unhallowed ocean of bitumen."

The overwhelming of a mind by such forces may account for the fact that the adult Lovecraft, whom the terrified infant became is in such a mental state that a view of New York City coalesces in his mind to primal chaos:

> From that nightmare of perverse infection I could not carry away the memory of any living face. The individually grotesque was lost in the collectively devastating, which left on the eye only the broad, phantasmal lineaments of the morbid soul of disintegration and decay.[198]

Recurrent terror merges into the faceless chaos of the Minotaur. Lovecraft disembodies the particular, revolting actions he has probably witnessed and projects them outward into a generalized terror beyond his control. Lovecraft

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[195] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 42.

[196] Ibid., p. 17. [197] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 109.

[198] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 334.

lives with such annihilative fear by projecting it upon the universe. He writes on April 23, 1921, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> I have not much interest in anything nowadays unless it is wild and weird. I am so beastly tired of mankind and the world that nothing can interest me unless it contains a couple of murders on each page or deals with horrors unnamable and unaccountable that leer down from the external universes.[199]

Lovecraft's impotent rage from the unsettling events in his childhood is projected outward and remains to "leer down from the external universes." This ferocity appears in "The Rats in the Walls" in the lethal rain of rats into the grotto and "He" as "the heavens verminous with strange flying things." This is a symbolization of the rage in the walls of Lovecraft's mind, an anger made vindictive because "largely impotent."[200] The anger lies dormant but ever ready to rise within Lovecraft's mind as the Minotaur.

Lovecraft's adult persona in "He" begins to scream as he gazes through the eerie window at the corpse-city of chaos; these screams precipitate the interruption of the footsteps on the stairs and the knock on the door. The re-enactment of a window-drama such as that in "The Music of Erich Zann" suggests that the purpose of "He" is to resurrect images of Lovecraft's past. He writes on March 3, 1927, to Bernard Dwyer:

> Usually, though, I know what is going to happen in a story--for that is why I write it. . . . To me authorship is only a mechanical means of getting formulated and preserved certain fugitive images

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[199] Ibid., p. 128. [200] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 109.

which I wish formulated and preserved.[201]

The nature of the "fugitive images" from his past that Lovecraft wishes to preserve appears in the same letter:

> I am fundamentally a cynic, a sceptic, and an Epicurean--a conservative and quietist without any great breadth of taste or depth of ability, and with a literary ambition confined altogether to the recording of certain images connected with bizarrerie and antiquarianism.[202]

Lovecraft's literary ambition is to restore certain bizarre, antiquarian images from his past. These images flow from his memory of that past which lies beyond the curtain of forgetting, for Lovecraft writes in his Commonplace Book:

> Time and space. Past event, 150 years ago, unexplained. Modern period. Person intensely homesick for past says or does something which is physically transmitted back and actually causes the past event.[203]

Here is some fleeting impression which Lovecraft wishes to recall. The active recalling of such a forgotten event from early times is made plain by the underlining in the entry. The agent in this re-creation is Lovecraft's screaming narrator in "He," because it is the shrieking which brings the attack on the locked door.

The recall of the past is prominent in other Commonplace Book entries:

> Coming to unknown place and finding one has some hitherto latent memory of it, or hideous connexion with it.[204]

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[201] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 111.

[202] Ibid. [203] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 35.

[204] Ibid., p. 12.

The protagonist of "He" travels back in time through an "inexhaustible maze of unknown antiquity" to arrive at a mysterious old mansion that contains a "latent memory . . . [and a] hideous connexion with it." This tie to the past is a "physiological fixation of the old instincts":[205]

> Entire scene and set of events caused by hypnosis--proceeding either from living person or from corpse, or other harbourer of residual psychic force.[206]

The hypnotic, autonomous mental force within Lovecraft's mind may emanate from his forgotten father, who early disappears from the young child's environment. Lovecraft writes to Frank Belknap Long on July 17, 1921:

> My father died when I was very young--so that he is only the vaguest of memories to me.[207]

The senior Lovecraft, a traveling salesman who "has been described as 'pompous,'"[208] was away on business much of the time, as Lovecraft writes on March 3, 1927, to Bernard Dwyer:

> [I] had always admired the fame of the late poetess Louise Imogen Guiney, whom my parents knew, and at whose house we stayed during the winter of 1892-93, when my father's affairs kept him in Boston.[209]

Lovecraft's father shrinks to a vague memory because the elder Lovecraft remains out of the family group for much

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[205] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 348.

[206] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 12.

[207] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 141.

[208] Derleth, p. 9.

[209] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 107.

of the time.

Another reason for Lovecraft's forgetting of his father is perhaps violent behavior engendered by the father's advanced case of paresis, which in 1893 "took him to the hospital for the remaining five years of his life."[210] Such erratic behavior, combined with copious absenteeism of that member from the family circle, could have generated the Commonplace Book entry which follows:

> Boy reared in atmosphere of considerable mystery. Believes father is dead. Suddenly is told that father is about to return. Strange preparations--consequences.[211]

Because the father returned to the Lovecraft domicile only at such sporadic intervals and his actions there were probably so uncontrolled as to alarm his infant son, Lovecraft converted his early experiences into the "vaguest of memories."[212] One of these memories perhaps appears in the Commonplace Book: "A household in great terror of the coming of some unknown doom."[213] This terrified household could be that of the young Lovecraft and his mother as they awaited the return of the invading father and husband, whose eccentric, self-centered behavior is perhaps reflected in another Commonplace Book entry:

> Man has sold his soul to the devil--returns to

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[210] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 6.

[211] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 36.

[212] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 141.

[213] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 10.

> family from trip. Life afterward--fear, culminating horror. Novel length.[214]

Lovecraft compresses the actual "novel long" memory of his father's return into a "great terror of the coming of some unknown doom." The memory of the trauma-inspiring behavior may be echoed in Lovecraft's comments on the nature of childhood in his letter of May 27, 1918, to Alfred Galpin:

> The cry of a child for food is instinctive and inborn, as is its automatic flinching if approached by a seemingly menacing object, or its fear of the dark.[215]

The memory of his father in the guise of "residual psychic force"[216] that haunted Lovecraft is reflected in the terrible knock upon the locked door of the chamber in "He." The feeble old necromancer, the fictive embodiment of Lovecraft's infant self, shows the narrator, who represents the adult Lovecraft, a terrifying scene from the past of the "phantasmal shapes"[217] Lovecraft tried to discharge from his mind by writing "He."

An instinctual fixation draws Lovecraft into the past. The creak of the stairs and knock on the door in "He" has an analogue in a Commonplace Book notation: "Calling on the dead--voice of familiar sound in adjacent room."[218]

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[214] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

[215] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 67.

[216] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 12.

[217] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 349.

[218] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 22.

The familiar noise from the next room is perhaps Lovecraft's memory of his father's return home and forceful efforts to quell the screams of the infant whose wailing had temporarily attracted his unfavorable attention. Such a traumatic memory probably emerges in a different form, given as another note in the Commonplace Book: "Disturbance of an ancient grave looses a monstrous presence on mankind."[219] The deep-seated memory of the angry onslaught by Lovecraft's father has become an indistinct but fearful presence which threatens Lovecraft's world.

In "He," the awakened image of the senior Lovecraft flows through the doorway of Lovecraft's mind into consciousness. There Lovecraft watches in horrified fascination as his father, in the form of "a colossal, shapeless influx of inky substance, starred with shining, malevolent eyes," pours into the theatre of remembrance to consume Lovecraft's infant self, which gives way before chaos. A primal drama is enacted; the monstrous father attacks his infant son, and the son returns the hatred as his eyes "glared with a propulsive, dilated incandescence" at the invading outsider who destroys the calm world the infant Lovecraft shared with his mother. Such hatred later generalized to include all of the newly arrived invaders of the peaceful colonial scene so dear to Lovecraft.

Another entry in the Commonplace Book perhaps refers

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[219] Ibid., p. 10

to what happened to the child's world when the father returned:

> Life and Death. Death--its desolation and horror--black spaces--sea bottom--dead cities. But life--the greater horror! Vast unheard of reptiles and leviathans--hideous beasts of prehistoric jungle--rank slimy vegetation--evil instincts of primal man. Life is more horrible than death![220]

Here is the primal scene in which the "evil instincts of primal man" terrified the Lovecraft household. The absorption of the shriveled head in "He," all that is left of Lovecraft's infant self, has an analogue in the Commonplace Book: "Vampire visits man in ancestral abode: is his own father."[221] This entry suggests that the Minotaur is merged in Lovecraft's mind with a dim memory of the senior Lovecraft.

Because it is in a vague, terrifying form, Lovecraft's memory of his fear-inspiring father is free to expand and occupy successively larger areas of his mind, as is attested by two entries in the Commonplace Book:

> Anencephalous or brainless monster who survives and attains prodigious size.[222]

The second entry follows:

> Powers of darkness (or cosmic outsideness) besiege or take over sacred edifice.[223]

The helplessness of the infant before the tide of malevolence perhaps appears in Lovecraft's cosmology, for the universe is the "brainless monster who survives and attains prodigious

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[220] Ibid., p. 19. [221] Ibid., p. 28.

[222] Ibid., p. 26. [223] Ibid., p. 9.

size." Lovecraft writes on May 3, 1922, to Frank Belknap Long:

> I like to view the universe as an isolated, cosmic intelligence outside time and space--to sympathise not only with man, but with forces opposed to man, or forces which have nothing to do with man, and do not realise that he exists.[224]

Thus the "residual psychic force"[225] becomes an "isolated cosmic intelligence."

The absorption of the necromancer's head by the black substance is a "merging with the infinite blackness"[226] of dissolution, the source of forces that "leer down from the external universes"[227] as Lovecraft faces the shapeless Minotaur in his mind, is the "physiological fixation of the old instincts in [his] nervous tissue."[228] The consuming attack by the anencephalous monster father is generalized in Lovecraft's mind to include the cosmos. The universe becomes the invader from outside, the "powers of darkness (or cosmic outsideness) [that] besiege or take over [the] sacred edifice" of Lovecraft's world. "He" marks the stage of the maze's exploration at which the Minotaur is launched into the universe from its mental vault of unconsciousness. The Minotaur returns as the plasma of the infinite, a meteoric messenger from the abyss, in "The Colour Out of Space."

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[224] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 172.

[225] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 12.

[226] St. Armand, p. 31.

[227] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 128.

[228] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 348.

H. P. LOVECRAFT: THE MAZE AND THE MINOTAUR

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CHAPTER SIX

THE ARTISTIC HARVEST

"The Colour Out of Space" begins as a surveyor arrives to examine a deserted valley west of Arkham, Massachusetts, which is to become a reservoir for its water supply. No one except an old man named Ammi Pierce at the edge of the valley will talk of this strangely blighted area, a region deserted since the "strange days"[1] and the coming of the "blasted heath."[2] The new arrival goes into the valley to examine the terrain:

> Upon everything was a haze of restlessness and oppression; a touch of the unreal and the grotesque, as if some vital element of perspective or chiaroscuro were awry.[3]

He recognizes the desolate heath the moment he comes upon it:

> It must, I thought as I viewed it, be the outcome of a fire; but why had nothing new ever grown over those five acres of grey desolation that sprawled open to the sky like a great spot eaten by acid in the woods and fields?[4]

At twilight, after his day's work, the topographer takes a circuitous route toward town:

> I vaguely wished some clouds would gather, for an odd timidity about the deep skyey voids above had

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[1] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror and Others, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1963), p. 62.

[2] Ibid., p. 61. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid.

crept into my soul.[5]

The next day the surveyor seeks out Ammi Pierce, and after some cautious preliminaries, the old man tells the surveyor the story of the strange days. In the 1880's, a meteorite came in broad daylight and embedded itself near the well on the Nahum Gardner farm:

> That was the house which had stood where the blasted heath was to come--the trim white Nahum Gardner house amid its fertile gardens and orchards.[6]

Several scientists examine the slowly shrinking stone, "the weird visitor from unknown stellar space,"[7] and remove a sample of the oddly malleable material for laboratory examination. Both sample and meteorite refuse to cool, and after some baffling behavior in the laboratory, the shriveling sample disappears, leaving the scientists none the wiser:

> Aside from being almost plastic, having heat, magnetism, and slight luminosity, cooling slightly in powerful acids, possessing an unknown spectrum, wasting away in air, and attacking silicon compounds with mutual destruction as a result, it presented no identifying features whatsoever.[8]

The scientists' conclusion is inevitable:

> It was nothing of this earth, but a piece of the great outside; and as such dowered with outside properties and obedient to outside laws.[9]

On their next expedition the professors find a surprise as they dig into the stone:

> They had uncovered what seemed to be the side of a large coloured globule embedded in the substance. The colour, which resembled some of the bands in the

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[5] Ibid., p. 62. [6] Ibid., p. 64. [7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., p. 66. [9] Ibid.

> meteor's strange spectrum, was almost impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it colour at all.[10]

One of the scientists taps the globule with a hammer and it bursts "with a nervous little pop."[11] Nothing tangible is emitted, but the globule vanishes. After the scientists leave, there is a thunderstorm and the magnetic meteorite seems to attract the lightning. By the next day, the "stony messenger from the stars"[12] has disappeared:

> 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.[13]

The business of farming goes forward. Nahum Gardner, "a genial person of about fifty,"[14] lives with his wife and three sons and exchanges visits with his friend Ammi Pierce. The first sign that things are not as they should be is the ripening fruit of the orchards:

> The fruit was growing to phenomenal size and unwonted gloss, and in such abundance that extra barrels were ordered to handle the future crop. But with the ripening came sore disappointment, for of all that gorgeous array of specious lusciousness not one single jot was fit to eat. Into the fine flavour of the pears and apples had crept a stealthy bitterness and sickishness, so that even the smallest bites induced a lasting disgust.[15]

The other produce is likewise spoiled, and Gardner blames the meteorite. A cold winter comes, and Nahum begins to

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[10] Ibid., pp. 65-66. [11] Ibid., p. 66.

[12] Ibid., p. 65. [13] Ibid., p. 66.

[14] Ibid., p. 67. [15] Ibid.

have a look of "reserve or melancholy."[16] The Gardner family begins a withdrawal from social intercourse; the boys do not return to school, and Ammi becomes the only person to visit. Animals around the farm begin to exhibit weirdly altered tracks and appearance. By the next spring, the melting snow reveals monstrous skunk-cabbages with coloring like the spectrum of the stone. A spectroscopic analysis of dust from the Gardner farm yields the band of anomalous color from "the brittle globule found imbedded in the stone from the abyss."[17]

At the Gardner home, conditions continue to change. The prematurely budded trees begin a slight sway, even when wind is absent. Orchard trees blossom in strange colors; "everywhere were those hectic and prismatic variants of some diseased, underlying primary tone without a place among the known tints of earth."[18] Every plant becomes a twisted anomaly, "and the bloodroots grew insolent in their chromatic perversion."[19] May brings a nightmare of buzzing insects.

The Gardners too are affected:

> The entire Gardner family developed the habit of stealthy listening, though not for any sound which they could consciously name. The listening was, indeed, rather a product of moments when consciousness seemed half to slip away. . . . The Gardners took to watching at night--watching in all directions at random for something--they could not tell what. . . . They were failing curiously both phy-

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[16] Ibid. [17] Ibid., p. 69. [18] Ibid., p. 70.

[19] Ibid.

sically and mentally.[20]

During the summer months Mrs. Gardner becomes insane:

> It happened in June, about the anniversary of the meteor's fall, and the poor woman screamed about things in the air which she could not describe. In her raving there was not a single specific noun, but only verbs and pronouns. Things moved and changed and fluttered, and ears tingled to impulses which were not wholly sounds. Something was taken away--she was being drained of something--something was fastening itself on her that ought not to be--someone must make it keep off--nothing was ever still in the night--the walls and windows shifted. Nahum did not send her to the county asylum, but let her wander about the house as long as she was harmless to herself and others. Even when her expression changed he did nothing. But when the boys grew afraid of her, and Thaddeus nearly fainted at the way she made faces at him, he decided to keep her locked in the attic. By July she had ceased to speak and crawled on all fours, and before that month was over Nahum got the mad notion that she was slightly luminous in the dark.[21]

By September all the vegetation is turning gray and the swine and cattle are beginning to turn gray and die. Ammi tells his friend that the well water is no good, but the family continues to drink it.

By this time Mrs. Gardner's insanity is affecting the entire household:

> His wife now had spells of terrific screaming, and he and the boys were in a constant state of nervous tension. . . . There was something of stolid resignation about them all, as if they walked half in another world between lines of nameless guards to a certain and familiar doom.[22]

Thaddeus goes mad, and Nahum locks him in a room adjacent to that of the mother:

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[20] Ibid., pp. 69-70. [21] Ibid., p. 71.

[22] Ibid., p. 72.

> The way they screamed at each other from behind their locked doors was very terrible, especially to little Merwin, who fancied they talked in some terrible language that was not of earth.[23]

Thaddeus dies; Ammi tries to console Nahum. But he cannot stay long and hastens home, "the screams of the mad woman and the nervous child [Merwin] ringing horribly in his ears."[24] The next to die is Merwin, who fails to return from a trip to the tainted well: "Something was creeping and creeping and waiting to be seen and heard."[25]

On another visit to the farm, Ammi inquires of the missing Zenas. Nahum replies: "In the well--he lives in the well--."[26] Because the farmer has lost his mind, Ammi searches the upstairs rooms. He finds Mrs. Gardner reduced to a gray, disintegrating mass: "The terrible thing about the horror was that it very slowly and perceptibly moved as it continued to crumble."[27] Ammi kills the object and stumbles away, locking the door behind him. As he descends the stair, he hears a thud and choked-off scream:

> Halted by some vague fear, he heard still further sounds below. Indubitably there was a sort of heavy dragging, and a most detestably sticky noise as of some fiendish and unclean species of suction. . . . What eldritch dream-world was this into which he had blundered?[28]

Ammi completes his descent and meets what is left of Nahum Gardner, who is a disintegrating mass of scaling greyness.

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[23] Ibid., p. 73. [24] Ibid., p. 74.

[25] Ibid., p. 75. [26] Ibid. [27] Ibid., p. 76.

[28] Ibid., p. 77.

Ammi asks his friend what has caused the terrible change, and the thing on the floor croaks a final answer:

> "Nothin' . . . nothin' . . . the colour . . . it burns . . . cold an' wet, but it burns . . . it lived in the well . . . I seen it . . . a kind of smoke . . . jest like the flowers last spring . . . the well shone at night . . . Thad an' Merwin an' Zenas . . . everything alive . . . suckin' the life out of everything . . . in that stone . . . pizened the whole place . . . dun't know what it wants . . . that round thing them men from college dug outen the stone . . . they smashed it . . . it was the same colour . . . jest the same, like the flowers an' plants. . . . It beats down your mind an' then gets ye . . . burns ye up . . . in the well water . . . you was right about that . . . evil water . . . Zenas never come back from the well . . . can't git away . . . draws ye . . . ye know summ'at's comin' but tain't no use. . . . An' it burns an' sucks . . . it comes from some place whar things ain't as they is here. . . ."[29]

Ammi makes his escape and reports the demise of the Gardner family to the authorities in Arkham. Six men follow him back to the scene:

> The whole aspect of the farm with its grey desolation was terrible enough, but those two crumbling objects [Gardner and his wife] were beyond all bounds. No one could look long at them, and even the medical examiner admitted that there was very little to examine.[30]

The investigators empty and explore the well: "The men sniffed in disgust at the fluid, and toward the last held their noses against the foetor they were uncovering."[31] They find the remains of Merwin and Zenas, together with what is left of some animals. At twilight the men confer in the Gardner house:

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[29] Ibid., p. 78. [30] Ibid., p. 79.

[31] Ibid., p. 80.

> The men were frankly nonplussed by the entire case, and could find no convincing common element to link the strange vegetable conditions, the unknown disease of live-stock and humans, and the unaccountable deaths of Merwin and Zenas in the tainted well. They had heard the common country talk, it is true; but could not believe that anything contrary to natural law had occurred.[32]

In the darkness there is a faint luminosity upon everything--but the coroner sees a more distinct glow:

> But this new glow was something definite and distinct, and appeared to shoot up from the black pit like a softened ray from a searchlight, giving dull reflections in the little ground pools where the water had been emptied. It had a very queer colour, and as all the men clustered round the window Ammi gave a violent start. . . . He had seen that colour before, and feared to think what it might mean.[33]

When the horses stampede, Ammi tells his companions not to go outside:

> "Dun't go out thar," he whispered. "They's more to this nor what we know. Nahum said somethin' lived in the well that sucks your life out. He said it must be some'at growed from a round ball like one we all seen in the meteor stone that fell a year ago June. Sucks an' burns, he said, an' is jest a cloud of colour like that light out thar now, that ye can hardly see an' can't tell what it is. Nahum thought it feeds on everything livin' an' gits stronger all the time."[34]

The light from the well grows stronger. Suddenly the men notice the trees:

> They were twitching morbidly and spasmodically, clawing in convulsive and epileptic madness at the moonlit clouds; scratching impotently in the noxious air as if jerked by some allied and bodiless line of linkage with subterrene horrors writhing and struggling below the black roots.[35]

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[32] Ibid. [33] Ibid., pp. 80-81.

[34] Ibid., p. 81. [35] Ibid., p. 82.

As a cloud hides the moon, they see tree branches tipped with points of fire:

> It was a monstrous constellation of unnatural light, like a glutted swarm of corpse-fed fireflies dancing hellish sarabands over an accursed marsh.[36]

The shaft of light is growing:

> It was no longer shining out; it was pouring out; and as the shapeless stream of unplaceable colour left the well it seemed to flow directly into the sky.[37]

The luminosity on everything is brighter:

> "It spreads on everything organic that's been around here," muttered the medical examiner.[38]

Ammi remarks that the thing from beyond seems to be returning where it came: "Now it's goin' home--."[39] The colour continues to grow brighter:

> At this point . . . the column of unknown colour flared suddenly stronger and began to weave itself into fantastic suggestions of shape. . . . Each minute saw it strengthen, and at last it was very plain that healthy living things must leave that house.[40]

The men leave the valley by way of a back path. From a safe distance, they observe the spectral Gardner farm:

> Over all . . . reigned that riot of luminous amorphousness, that alien and undimensioned rainbow of cryptic poison from the well--seething, feeling, lapping, reaching, scintillating, straining, and malignly bubbling in its cosmic and unrecognizable chromaticism.
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> Then without warning the hideous thing shot vertically up toward the sky like a rocket or meteor, leaving behind no trail and disappearing through a round and curiously regular hole in the clouds before any man could gasp or cry out.[41]

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[36] Ibid., p. 83. [37] Ibid. [38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., p. 84. [40] Ibid. [41] Ibid., p. 85.

There is the sound of crackling wood from the valley:

> . . . in one feverish kaleidoscopic instant there burst up from that doomed and accursed farm a gleamingly eruptive cataclysm of unnatural sparks and substance . . . sending forth to the zenith a bombarding cloudburst of such coloured and fantastic fragments as our universe must needs disown.[42]

Old Pierce's story inspires weird ruminations by the enthralled surveyor:

> Do not ask me for my opinion. I do not know--that is all. . . . But whatever demon hatching is there, it must be tethered to something or else it would quickly spread. Is it fastened to the roots of those trees that claw the air? One of the current Arkham tales is about fat oaks that shine and move as they ought not to do at night.
>
> What it is, only God knows. . . . This was no fruit of such worlds and suns as shine on the telescopes and photographic plates of our observatories. This was no breath from the skies whose motions and dimensions our astronomers measure or deem too vast to measure. It was just a colour out of space--a frightful messenger from unformed realms of infinity beyond all Nature as we know it; from realms whose mere existence stuns the brain and numbs us with the black extra-cosmic gulfs it throws open before our frenzied eyes.[43]

The surveyor hastens to Boston to give up his commission:

> I hurried back before sunset to my hotel, unwilling to have the stars come out above me in the open; and the next day returned to Boston to give up my position. I could not go into that dim chaos of old forest and slope again, or face another time that grey blasted heath where the black well yawned deep beside the tumbled bricks and stones. The reservoir will soon be built now, and all those elder secrets will be safe forever under watery fathoms. But even then I do not believe I would like to visit that country by night--at least not when the sinister stars are out; and nothing could bribe me to drink the new city water of Arkham.[44]

The surveyor is relieved to hear that the reservoir project

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[42] Ibid. [43] Ibid., pp. 87-88. [44] Ibid., p. 63.

will continue:

> The blasted heath will slumber far below blue waters whose surface will mirror the sky and ripple in the sun. And the secrets of the strange days will be one with the deep's secrets; one with the hidden lore of old ocean, and all the mystery of primal earth.[45]

The maze in "The Colour Out of Space" takes Lovecraft into a realm far from the world he despises:

> Narrator walks along unfamiliar country road--comes to strange region of the unreal.[46]

This Commonplace Book entry is like the surveyor's arrival at the gloomy heath. The atmosphere of restlessness and oppression in the story is reflected in Lovecraft's letter of May 12, 1927, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> Enclosed is The Colour Out of Space, which you can return at your convenience. It lacks completeness and climax, perhaps, but must be taken as an atmospheric study rather than as a tale.[47]

According to Lovecraft, the mood of the story is as important as its events. He writes in his letter dated March 29, 1926, to Annie Phillips Gamwell:

> It may be taken as axiomatic that the people of a place matter absolutely nothing to me except as components of the general landscape & scenery. . . My life lies not among people but among scenes.[48]

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[45] Ibid., p. 61.

[46] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, The Notes and Commonplace Book Employed by the Late H. P. Lovecraft, ed. Robert H. Barlow (Lakeport, Calif.: Futile Press, 1938), p. 16.

[47] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1925-1929, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1968), p. 127.

[48] James Warren Thomas, "Howard Phillips Lovecraft: A Self Portrait," Thesis Brown University, 1950, p. 127.

The distorting element of chiaroscuro in "The Colour Out of Space" is suggested by a Commonplace Book entry:

> Explorer enters strange land where some atmospheric quality darkens the sky to virtual blackness--marvels therein.[49]

Another Commonplace Book entry augments this idea:

> Change comes over the sun--shows objects in strange form, perhaps restoring landscape of the past.[50]

This anomalistic condition reflects an attempt by Lovecraft to examine his forgotten "landscape of the past." Further reference to the Commonplace Book confirms Lovecraft's fictive search:

> Coming to unknown place and finding one has some hitherto latent memory of it, or hideous connexion with it.[51]

The weirdly picturesque, deserted place to be explored by the surveyor is perhaps a scene of which Lovecraft has a vivid impression. The chiaroscuro in the story is suggested by August Derleth in a comment on Lovecraft:

> His concept of Providence and his home were [sic] as part of a landscape which was forever one of dusk and twilight, like something with blurred outlines, an air of unreality and the charm of something remote, personal, and unchanging.[52]

Such a remembered scene from the "remote, personal, and unchanging" past in Lovecraft's mind unfolds as "The Colour

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[49] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 31.

[50] Ibid., p. 26. [51] Ibid., p. 26.

[52] August Derleth, "Addenda to 'H. P. L.: A Memoir,'" in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 251.

Out of Space."

The occupation of Lovecraft's explorer suggests the nature of Lovecraft's journey. An important tool of the surveyor's trade is the transit, or small horizontal telescope, which forms an important avenue to the past: "Magical telescope (or cognate device) shows the past when looked through."[53] The journey through the telescope to the past is suggested by other Commonplace Book entries:

> Unnatural life in a picture--transfer of life from person to picture. . . .
> Changes in a picture corresponding to actual events--present or old--in scene it depicts.[54]

The picture the surveyor sees in the telescope is perhaps a record of past events which find a symbolic rendition upon the dismal heath, the chiaroscuro land of Lovecraft's memories.

"The trim white Nahum Gardner house amidst its fertile gardens and orchards" is a replica of Lovecraft's birthplace. He writes in his letter of February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird:

> Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born on August 20, 1890, in a large Victorian house in Providence, set on a terrace amidst expansive, shady grounds, and close to the fields of what was then the edge of the settled district.[55]

That memories of such a landmark of Lovecraft's past find

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[53] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 10.

[54] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[55] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1911-1924, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 296.

their way into the Commonplace Book and from thence into his fiction is suggested by another entry in the source book of Lovecraft's fictive thought: "House and garden--old--associations. Scene takes on strange aspect."[56] Lovecraft's love of the Phillips estate is plain in his letter of November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> In the mid-seventies my grandfather transferred all his interests to Providence (where his office had always been) & erected one of the handsomest residences in the city--to me the handsomest--my own beloved birthplace! The spacious house, raised on a high green terrace, looks down upon grounds which are almost a park, with winding walks, arbours, trees, & a delightful fountain. Back of the stable is the orchard, whose fruits have delighted so many of my sad (?) childish hours. The place is sold now, & many of the things I have described in the present tense, ought to be described in the past tense.[57]

He names the owner of the domicile in his narrative after the occupation of the gardner on the Phillips estate:

> My house, tho' an urban one on a paved street, had spacious grounds & stood next to an open field with a stone wall (now urbanized into a modern little court as you saw when we drove past) where great elms grew & my grandfather had corn & potatoes planted, & a cow pastured under the gardner's care. . . . I know the old New England country as well as if I had been a farmer's boy; for I paused long at all the antient white farmsteads (some still remaining, tho' ingulphed by new urban streets).[58]

Lovecraft's love of farm life and lore is attested in his letter of February 27, 1931, to Frank Belknap Long:

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[56] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 17.

[57] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 31.

[58] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1929-1931, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1971), p. 317.

> I read the Farmer's Almanack through from 1815 to the present and came early to think of every turn & season of the year in terms of the crops, the zodiac, the moon, the ploughing and reaping, the face of the landscape, & all the other primeval guideposts. . . . This is the kind of thing which held me spellbound through my youth--and which, alas, I saw perish bit by bit as the greedy tentacles of the town overran it bit by bit. Now . . . the old countryside is almost gone, though one farm still remains as a farm with a few acres of antient field & orchard & garden around the antient (1735) house, & forms the goal of many a walk of mine.[59]

The Gardner homestead is a composite of the farm which "forms the goal of many a walk of mine" and the big white house at 454 Angell Street which Lovecraft "saw perish bit by bit as the greedy tentacles of town overran it bit by bit."

The Gardner place is the goal of a journey, for Lovecraft travels through the surveyor's telescope into the past prior to the loss of his birthplace. But once in the past, the demise of his childhood happiness comes inexorably upon him. The gradual destruction of the Gardner farm mirrors Lovecraft's memory of the slow, steady failure at 454 Angell Street. Lovecraft writes to Reinhardt Kleiner on November 16, 1916:

> All this time my spirits were dampened by a vague sensation of impending calamity. I was not blind to a waning of the family fortune, as evidenced by a decrease in the number of servants & the closing of the stables.[60]

The steadily worsening financial condition of the family, together with the final catastrophic loss of the Phillips

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[59] Ibid., pp. 317-18.

[60] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 35.

estate, appears in the narrative as the coming of the meteorite and decay of the Gardner homestead. The meteor is a symbol of the financial ruin, as Lovecraft writes on April 5, 1931, to Maurice Moe:

> But actual decline did set in when I was about ten years old; so that I saw a steady dropping of servants, horses, and other adjuncts of domestic management. Even before my grandfather's death a sense of peril and falling-off was strong within me, so that I felt a kinship to Poe's gloomy heroes with their broken fortunes. And of course the frightful crash itself--in 1904, when the death of my grandfather broke up all his recouperative plans and forced the sale of the old home--gave me a tremendous and positive melancholy. All the air rotted with decay, and the moon itself was putrescent.[61]

The financial crash and the resultant mood of melancholy is the mood which plagues Nahum Gardner in "The Colour Out of Space." The "crash" appears as the landing of a meteor in a typical dream of Lovecraft; he writes on May 21, 1920, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> Last night I had a brief but typical dream. I was standing on the East Providence shore of the Seekonk River, about three-quarters of a mile south of the foot of Angell Street, at some unearthly nocturnal hour. The tide was flowing out horribly--exposing parts of the river bed never before exposed to human sight. Many persons lined the banks, looking at the receding waters and occasionally glancing at the sky. Suddenly a blinding flare--reddish in hue--appeared high in the southwestern sky; and something descended to earth in a cloud of smoke, striking the Providence shore near the Red Bridge--about an eighth of a mile south of Angell Street. The watchers on the bank screamed in horror--"It has come--It has come at last!" and fled away into the deserted streets. But I ran toward the bridge instead of away; for I was more curious than afraid. When I reached it I saw hordes of terror-stricken people in hastily donned clothing fleeing across from the Providence side as

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[61] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 367.

from a city accursed by the gods.[62]

The dream continues:

> There were pedestrians, many of them falling by the way, and vehicles of all sorts. Electric cars--the old small cars unused in Providence for six years--were running in close procession--eastward--away from the city on both of the double tracks. Their motormen were frantic and small collisions were numerous. By this time the river bed was fully exposed--only the deep channel filled with water like a serpentine stream of death flowing through a pestilential plain in Tartarus. Suddenly a glare appeared in the West, and I saw the dominant landmark of the Providence horizon--the dome of the Central Congregational Church, silhouetted weirdly against a background of red. And then, silently, that dome abruptly caved in and fell out of sight in a thousand fragments. And from the fleeing populace arose such a cry as only the damn'd utter--and I waked up, confound the luck, with the very deuce of a headache![63]

The uncovering of the river bottom is like the surveyor's investigation of the land to be covered by the reservoir. The destruction of Lovecraft's world appears as the stampeding people and the shattering hemisphere of the church, and the financial failure is symbolized in the crashing meteor. The idea of displacement, having appeared in a dream sixteen years after the event precipitating it, might easily appear in a Lovecraft narrative seven years later in 1928.

The symbolism of the river in the dream has a personal significance for Lovecraft, who writes on February 4, 1934, to J. Vernon Shea:

The one time that I seriously thought of suicide was

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[62] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 113-14.

[63] Ibid., p. 114.

> in 1904, when my grandfather died in the midst of business tangles (he was president of a land and irrigation corporation exploiting the Snake River, and the total destruction of the dam on which everything depended had caused a frightful situation) and left us all relatively poor. I was (being predominately geographical-minded) tremendously attached to the old home at 454 Angell Street (now housing 12 physicians [sic] offices--I walk by it as often as I can) with its grounds and fountain and stable, but this now had to go.[64]

The uncovering of the river bed with its "serpentine stream of death" is perhaps a reference to the breaking of the dam across the Snake River, the event that brought about the financial crash. The "hordes of terror-stricken people in hastily donned clothing fleeing" are the doomed stockholders of the corporation. Lovecraft writes concerning his grandfather to Reinhardt Kleiner on November 16, 1916:

> As President of the Owyhee Land & Irrigation Co., an Idaho corporation with Providence offices, he had struggled hard to achieve vast success in the reclamation of Western land. He had weathered many calamities such as the bursting of his immense dam on Snake River; but now that he was gone, the company was without its brains. He had been a more vital & important figure than even he himself had realized; & with his passing, the rest of the board lost their initiative & courage. The corporation was unwisely dissolved at a time when my grandfather would have persevered--with the result that others reaped the wealth which should have gone to its stockholders.[65]

The breaking of the dam which overwhelmed Grandfather Phillips' precarious order appears in "The Colour Out of Space" as the newly planned reservoir that covers the remains

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[64] Barton Levi St. Armand, "H. P. Lovecraft: The Outsider in Legend and Myth: A Biographical and Critical Study," Thesis Brown University 1966, pp. 28-29.

[65] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 40.

of the Gardner farm. Old Ammi Pierce, who lives just beyond the boundaries of the new water supply, is a portrait of Lovecraft in exile, for Lovecraft continued to live on Angell Street, near the lost Phillips estate. He writes on February 4, 1934, to J. Vernon Shea: "My mother and I moved into a 5-room-and-attic flat, two squares further east (598 Angell Street. . . .)"[66] Lovecraft's fondest wish is to restore the Phillips estate, "to regain the old place & re-establish its glory--a thing I fear I can never accomplish. For twelve years I have felt like an exile."[67] Old Ammi's position is apparent in Lovecraft's letter of February 4, 1934, to Shea:

> I felt that I had lost my entire adjustment to the cosmos--for what was H.P.L. without the remembered rooms and hallways and hangings and paintings . . . and yard and walks and cherry trees and fountain and ivy-grown arch and stable and garden and all the rest? How could an old man of 14 (and I surely felt that way!) readjust his existence to a skimpy flat and new household programme and inferior household setting in which nothing familiar remained?[68]

This lament appears in old Pierce's first name--Ammi, i.e., ah, me! Lovecraft, like Hamlet, feels "pierced" by the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."[69] He gives Ammi's age at the time of the calamity as forty, which is his way of saying that he (Lovecraft) is "an old man of 14," who has been deprived of his "entire adjustment to the cosmos."

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[66] St. Armand, p. 29.

[67] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 40.

[68] St. Armand, p. 29.

[69] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 76-77.

Lovecraft's loss is a key to Nahum Gardner's melancholy and its close relation to the colour from space. The so-called "colour" is indescribable; it is "only by analogy that they called it colour at all." The malignancy from the meteor that Gardner says is "suckin' the life out of everything" may not be colour at all, but the choler or rage of an inimical, invading universe as it pervades and destroys Lovecraft's fragile world. The idea of an invasion of his microcosm by the impervious universe is generated by his early fear of his father, who in "He" expands to a consuming, star-flecked immensity. This engulfing force inspires Lovecraft's pugnacious response to the world around him. Lovecraft sees mankind as a bringer of chaos and an enemy of the ordered world of his art, as he writes on March 8, 1923, to James F. Morton:

> To be a real hater [of mankind], one must hate en masse. . . . For mankind as mankind I have a most artistically fiery abhorrence and execration, I spit upon them!
>
> The natural hatefulness and loathsomeness of the human beast may be overcome only in a few specimens of fine heredity and breeding, by a transference of interests to abstract spheres and a consequent sublimation of the universal sadistic fury.[70]

Lovecraft sees the loss of 454 Angell Street as the pernicious act of an omnipotent, choleric universe. Lovecraft's hopes and happiness are crushed (quite literally) once and for all by the meteor filled with "choler" from out of space.

Lovecraft's ordered world includes his family, the

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[70] Ibid., p. 212.

members of which did their utmost to protect him from a world of strangers. But Grandfather Phillips died when Lovecraft was fourteen years old and still in need of him. Lovecraft writes on November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> But my progress had received its severest blow in the spring of 1904. On March 28th of that year my beloved grandfather passed away as the result of an apoplectic stroke, & I was deprived of my closest companion. I was never afterward the same. . . . The combined loss of grandfather & birthplace made me the most miserable of mortals.[71]

The Gardner family situation is analogous to Lovecraft's situation. Nahum Gardner, fifty years old as the story begins, ages rapidly and dies. Grandfather Phillips' death in 1904 caused the loss of the Phillips residence. The gradual decay of Nahum Gardner corresponds to the continuous strain placed on Lovecraft's grandfather by his business ventures. A direct precipitant of Phillips' stroke was the destruction of his company's dam which appears in "The Colour Out of Space" as the flooding of the farm by the reservoir.

Lovecraft may telescope his mother's long illness and subsequent death in 1921 into his tale of familial dissolution. Mrs. Gardner passes through a rapid mental and physical deterioration which corresponds in some respects to the decline suffered by Mrs. Lovecraft, who was an introverted person unable to function in her social milieu. Glimpses of Mrs. Lovecraft are given by Clara Hess, a friend of the Lovecraft family, who writes that Lovecraft's mother

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[71] Ibid., p. 40.

"was an extremely nervous person."[72] Mrs. Hess writes of a visit she paid to Lovecraft's mother:

> After many urgent invitations I went in to call upon her. She was considered then to be getting rather odd. My call was pleasant enough but the house had a strange and shutup air and the atmosphere seemed weird and Mrs. Lovecraft talked continuously of her unfortunate son who was so hideous that he hid from everyone and did not like to walk upon the streets where people could gaze at him.
>
> When I protested that she was exaggerating and that he should not feel that way, she looked at me with a rather pitiful look as though I did not understand about it. I remember that I was glad to get out into the fresh air and sunshine and that I did not repeat my visit! Surely it was an environment suited for the writing of horror stories.[73]

"The Colour Out of Space" arises from the creepy environment Mrs. Hess describes. And Mrs. Gardner's fear that "something was fastening itself on her that ought not to be" has a congruency with another comment from Mrs. Hess:

> I remember that Mrs. Lovecraft spoke to me about weird and fantastic creatures that rushed out from behind buildings and from corners at dark, and that she shivered and looked about apprehensively as she told her story.[74]

Likewise, the effect of Mrs. Gardner's madness upon her children has its origin in the influence exerted on the young Lovecraft by his mother. August Derleth comments upon the relationship of Lovecraft mother and son:

> There can be no doubt whatsoever that Mrs. Lovecraft grew steadily more deranged. Though it is probable that Lovecraft never knew the cause of his father's

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[72] Clara L. Hess, n.t., Providence Journal (Sept. 19, 1948), rpt. in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 247.

[73] Ibid., p. 248 [74] Ibid., p. 249.

> institutionalization and death five years later, it is certain that he felt the effect of it upon his mother. It is likewise evident, though he carefully avoided mentioning the subject in his letters later, that he was cognizant of his mother's mental state, as the precocious child he was became the equally precocious adolescent.[75]

The screaming of Mrs. Gardner finds a counterpart in the erratic behavior of Lovecraft's mother, as Winfield Townley Scott writes:

> [Mrs. Lovecraft] suffered periods of mental and physical exhaustion. She wept a great deal under emotional strains. In common phrase, she was a woman who had "gone to pieces."[76]

Lovecraft suffered intense anxiety which began almost at birth; he writes on March 5, 1931, to Maurice Moe:

> As for a physique--I didn't inherit a very good set of nerves, since near relatives on both sides of my ancestry were prone to headaches, nerve-exhaustion, and breakdowns. My grandfather had frightful blind headaches, and my mother could run him a close second . . . My own headaches and nervous irritability and exhaustion-tendency began as early as my existence itself.[77]

Much of Lovecraft's anxiety grew out of the haunted atmosphere in which he lived, as does the anxiety of the Gardner children. Lovecraft writes to Robert H. Barlow on March 25, 1935:

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[75] August Derleth, "Addenda to 'H. P. L.: A Memoir,'" in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 250.

[76] Winfield Townley Scott, "His Own Most Fantastic Creation" in Marginalia, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1944), p. 319.

[77] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 368.

> In youth I seemed to have all sorts of definite physical illnesses; yet in later life it became apparent that most of them were the effects of a hypersensitive nervous system and easily jangled psychological equilibrium.[78]

Reinhardt Kleiner suggests that the environment Lovecraft had been raised in was directly responsible for Lovecraft's "hypersensitive nervous system" and general inability to cope with the world:

> It has always seemed to me that Lovecraft's fundamental instincts were entirely normal. Removed from the repressive sickroom atmosphere of his home and the attendance of his mother or his aunts, he blossomed out astonishingly.[79]

The shaping of Lovecraft's life by the "repressive sickroom atmosphere" of his home environment takes its toll, for as August Derleth says in his Memoir, Lovecraft was never a wage earner. Lovecraft makes his fear of the outside world plain as he writes of himself on February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird:

> Snatches of school appear here and there, but only snatches. . . . In those middle years the poor devil was such a nervous wreck that he hated to speak to any human being, or even to see or be seen by one; and every trip down town was an ordeal.[80]

An aversion to the world of realities turned Lovecraft inward to his own resources. He early adopts the scientific, questing state of mind, as Winfield Townley

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[78] St. Armand, p. 11.

[79] Reinhardt Kleiner, "A Memoir of Lovecraft," in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 220.

[80] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 297-98.

Scott writes:

> His interest in the sciences began when he was only eight; and that was the year his father died and the year in which Lovecraft was removed from school. His mother considered his health too frail to permit normal schooling and thereafter until he attended Hope High School, probably about 1904-1908, his education was got from tutors and from his own extraordinary nose for knowledge.[81]

Lovecraft wants nothing so much as freedom from his earthly environment with its boorish, intrusive people. He writes on August 8, 1925, to his aunt, Lillian Phillips Clark, of his need for independence from the external world:

> One may write well only after an emphatic gesture of rebellion against intrusive distractions, & an equally emphatic determination to be oneself in spite of all the heterogenous advice of well-meaning multitudes. My nervous poise & aesthetic articulateness are to be attained only by telling the world to go to the deuce, and proceeding to set down the transformations which a naturally fantastic imagination makes in the visual images set before it.[82]

In "telling the world to go to the deuce," Lovecraft concentrates his energy on the inner world of his intellect. He writes on February 4, 1934, to J. Vernon Shea:

> Why, good god, a man might keep busy forever even in an uncongenial environment, learning new things . . . pleasantly busy, too, for each new point of satisfied curiosity gave a hell of a kick.[83]

The two important avenues toward "points of satisfied curiosity" for Lovecraft are the mythological and the scientific. These twin avenues follow the main strands in Lovecraft's maze of intellectual development. He writes on

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[81] Scott, pp. 312-13. [82] Thomas, p. 83.

[83] St. Armand, p. 32.

February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird:

> The most poignant sensations of my existence are those of 1896, when I discovered the Hellenic world, and of 1902, when I discovered the myriad suns and worlds of infinite space. Sometimes I think the latter must be the greater, for the grandeur of that growing conception of the universe still excites a thrill hardly to be duplicated. I made of astronomy my principal scientific study, obtaining larger and larger telescopes.[84]

The world of science (particularly of astronomy) and the world of antiquity (particularly ancient Greece) are bound together and depend upon each other in Lovecraft's mind. His letter to Baird continues:

> Always partial to antiquity, I allowed myself to originate a sort of one-man cult of retrospective suspiration. . . . My attitude has always been cosmic, and I looked on man as from another planet. He was merely an interesting species for study and classification.[85]

Following the two interweaving threads of his imagination, Lovecraft leaves the world of man behind. He writes on November 20, 1931, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> My perspective is too inherently cosmic and analytical to make me feel the importance of what the tridimensional world regards as changes in the relative setting of dust-grains as negligible as terrestrial men. The only things I can conceive as worthy protagonists of cosmic drama are basic natural forces and laws, and what spells interest for me is simply the convincing illusion of the thwarting, suspension, or disturbance of such forces and laws. To me a climax is simply an effective demonstration of a temporary defeat of the cosmic order.[86]

Because Lovecraft's life was made of scenes rather than peo-

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[84] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 302.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 436.

ple, basic natural entities are the forces in his cosmic drama. Through his withdrawal from the world Lovecraft gathers his energies to accomplish a thwarting of natural law in a "temporary defeat of the cosmic order."

Such a turn of events transpires in Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space." The natural order of human events is disrupted amid a "setting of dust-grains as negligible as terrestrial men,"[87] the miniscule moveable quantities which adorn the disrupted landscape. Lovecraft's letter to Smith continues:

> I use human puppets as symbols, but my interest is not with them. It is the situation of defeat [of natural] law itself--and the sensation of liberation therein implicit--which provides me with the thrill and catharsis of aesthetic endeavour.[88]

Lovecraft's bid for independence goes beyond the human realm to freedom from natural law. In "The Colour Out of Space," the "catharsis of aesthetic endeavour" takes the form of the withdrawal of energy from the hapless "puppets" on the Gardner farm. The flow of energy is to the colour in the well, the center of a circumference of harvest. The transmutation of matter to energy is indicated by Lovecraft in his article, "The Materialist Today":

> We see very clearly that [energy] is most eminently subject to transformations from one form to another. Mechanical energy becomes electricity under the appropriate conditions, and, under other conditions, that electricity becomes light and heat. Nothing

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 436.

is lost, but all is changed.[89]

Before the meteor comes, Lovecraft's energy is the matter of the entities, human, animal, and vegetable, on the farm. Lovecraft writes on February 20, 1929, to Frank Belknap Long:

> Wandering energy always has a detectable form--that if it doesn't take the form of waves or electron-streams, it becomes matter itself.[90]

In his imagination, Lovecraft reverses the process that he notes in his letter to Long by reaching back into his past through the telescope of his imagination. Lovecraft relives the catastrophic loss of his home, and through the fictive reliving of his loss he triumphs over the inevitability of natural law and its universe. He writes on November 20, 1931, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> It is the situation of defeat [of natural law] itself--and the sensation of liberation therein implicit--which provides me with the thrill and catharsis of aesthetic endeavour.[91]

In his letter of April 5, 1931, to Maurice Moe, Lovecraft's imagination turns from the devastating shock of the loss of his home to the idea of limitless cosmic exploration:

> After the loss of 454 Angell Street I was about ready to cash in myself. . . . But I didn't--for I was only fourteen after all. . . . And there was the mystery of the limitless cosmos to penetrate. . . .

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[89] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "The Materialist Today," in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 157.

[90] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, pp. 266-67.

[91] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 436.

> the tantalising void with the unknown circling orbs, and the power of imagination to piece out what science couldn't tell.[92]

Lovecraft's stories are vehicles for the exploration of cosmic depths. He continues in his letter to Moe:

> Cosmic mystery was always my goal in one way or another--but I saw that the pen would get me a bigger slice of it than would the more exacting telescope, mathematical formula, or laboratory.[93]

Lovecraft combines the energy in his memories of his past by "suckin' the life out of everything." Through "a sort of one-man cult of retrospective suspiration"[94] Lovecraft is able with his imagination "to regain the old place & reestablish its glory."[95] The glory he establishes is a star of energy that consumes his family and, in the forms of Zenas and Merwin, Lovecraft himself, "as if the element of mystical cosmic beauty were dissolving me."[96] As a disembodied sphere of energy, Lovecraft liberates himself, as he confirms in his letter of January 18, 1931, to Maurice Moe:

> But life is a bore! . . . That's why I light out for the fifth dimension and the galaxies beyond the rim of Einsteinian space-time--to escape the concentrated ennui to which all phases of objective life . . . ultimately boil down.[97]

The plot of "The Colour Out of Space" is Lovecraft's metaphoric statement: "I light out for the fifth dimension and

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[92] Ibid., p. 367. [93] Ibid., p. 369.

[94] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 302.

[95] Ibid., p. 40. [96] St. Armand, p. 30

[97] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 266.

the galaxies beyond. . . ."

Lovecraft reaffirms his low opinion of the world he escapes as he writes in a letter of February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird:

> I am not of the world, but an amused and sometimes disgusted spectator to it. I detest the human race and its pretences and swinishnesses--to me life is a fine art, and although I believe the universe is an automatic, meaningless chaos devoid of ultimate values or distinctions of right and wrong, I consider it more artistic to take into account the emotional heritage of our civilisation and follow the patterns, which produce the least pain for delicate sensibilities.[98]

To reduce the pain to his delicate sensibilities, Lovecraft moves upward to the highest, most refined level of evolved being, above the "pretences and swinishnesses" of the world. The letter to Baird continues:

> Thus, although holding the pompous and theocratic philosophy of the Puritans in the most abysmal contempt, I believe in an honour and fastidiousness of conduct which makes me act like a Puritan and earn the name of Puritan from all who are not of that dull breed of cattle themselves. I am myself--alone--as the Bard makes crookback'd Richard say.[99]

Notable is the animal imagery of the pigs and cattle, the creatures destroyed in "The Colour Out of Space." Lovecraft is the central fire assimilating the energy of his animalistic, less-evolved brethren. With this act, he meets the Minotaur of chaotic force that besets him on every side. As the choler from space, Lovecraft returns through the tunnel of time to the scene of chaos' crime to win a mental

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[98] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 298.

[99] Ibid.

victory.

Lovecraft turns his attention skyward toward the glittering beauties of the cosmos, as he writes to Frank Belknap Long on May 3, 1922:

> My own view toward aesthetic things has always been one of awe at the mystery of the cosmos. The dominant sensation has been a kind of ecstatic wonder at the unfathomed reaches of nighted space and the glittering jewels of nebular, solar, and planetary fire. Amidst this colossal, kaleidoscopic, undying and unbounded drama of infinite time and space, everything terrestrial and human has seemed to shrink away to insignificance. There is, to my mind, a kind of hideous irony in the assumption of the human point of view at all.[100]

He evolves up to the realm of the intellect:

> Decadents will argue, metaphysically, that human things must be supreme because we can perceive the universe only through human eyes, and with human brains. This contention is sound only on the assumption that art must be approached emotionally, and sensuously, without the exercise of abstract reason as one of the factors of perception and appreciation. This assumption I emphatically dispute, as something altogether arbitrary and formalistically dogmatic. I believe that no honest aesthetic canon can exclude that highest of organic faculties--the pure, ice-cold reason; which gives man his sole contact with things outside himself, and which must be superimposed upon emotion before anything like <u>imagination</u> can be produced.[101]

Lovecraft's goal of evolution through the lower realm of Minotaural energy to the higher plane of "the pure, ice-cold reason" appears in an attempt to rise to the perfection of the reasonable attitude of the eighteenth century:

> Why must men of science thus delude themselves with notions of personal and "loving" gods, spirits, and demons? All this sort of thing is good enough for the rabble, but why should rational brains be tor-

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[100] Ibid., p. 172. [101] Ibid., pp. 172-73.

> mented with such gibberish? It is perfectly true that the concept of a personal force is a vast help in managing the millions, and in giving them much hope and happiness that truth does not convey. Viewing the question in that light, I am a friend of the church, and would never seek to disturb or diminish its influence among those who are able to swallow its doctrines. I even wish I could believe them myself--it would be so comfortable to know that someday I should sprout wings and go up to heaven for a talk with Alexander Pope and Sir Isaac Newton![102]

Lovecraft's letter of April 5, 1931, to Maurice Moe suggests the goal of his skyward evolution in its juxtaposition of the love of Greek antiquity and childhood pleasures:

> My array of toys, books, and other youthful pleasures was virtually unlimited. . . . [I was] a simple, unplaced entity like the carefree figures moving through the Hellenick myths.[103]

Lovecraft moves through the Hellenic myth of Theseus and the Minotaur as he enters the heavenly playground of his imagination, for in his story of the destruction of the Gardner family, the colour coalesces into an exploratory entity prior to its ascent. And science, the strand of the maze interwoven with the thread of antiquity, is equally as important in Lovecraft's imaginary explorations, as he writes on December 19, 1929, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> About that "interplanetary" idea of mine--it would begin as a dream-phenomenon creeping on the victim in the form of recurrent nightmares, as a result of his concentration of mind on some dim, transgalactic world. Eventually it would enmesh him totally--leaving his body to vegetate in a coma in some madhouse whilst his mind roamed desolate & unbodied forever above the half-litten stones of an aeon-dead

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[102] Ibid., p. 28.

[103] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 367.

> civilisation of alien Things on a world that was in decay before the solar system evolved from its primal nebula.[104]

Here is a brief synopsis of "The Colour Out of Space." The Gardner woman's nightmares come from Lovecraft's assimilation of her energies "as a result of his concentration of mind on some dim, trans-galactic world" of his lost childhood, for the "aeon-dead civilisation" is like Lovecraft's fictive exploration of "The Nameless City." His journey to the world of his past is suggested in a Commonplace Book entry dated shortly after the writing of "The Colour Out of Space":

> 1928--Adventure of a disembodied spirit--through dim, half-familiar cities and over strange moors; through space and time--other planets and universes in the end.[105]

The nameless city of his past is "half-familiar" to Lovecraft because he is trying to return there "through space and time." Two additional Commonplace Book entries, both dated 1919, parallel such action as concludes Lovecraft's "Colour" narrative:

> Moving away from earth more swiftly than light. Past gradually unfolded.

And:

> Disintegration of all matter to electrons and finally empty space assured, just as devolution of energy to radiant heat is known. Case of acceleration--man passes into space.[106]

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[104] Ibid., pp. 95-96.

[105] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 34.

[106] Ibid., p. 20.

Lovecraft attains his goal, for as the colour rises, a "man passes into space."

The launching mechanism for the vehicular evolution may have its inception during the period just prior to the loss of the Phillips home in 1904. Lovecraft writes in his letter of November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> In the summer of 1903 my mother presented me with a 2-1/2" astronomical telescope, and thenceforward my gaze was ever upward at night. The late Prof. Upton of Brown, a friend of the family, gave me the freedom of the college observatory, (Ladd Observatory) & I came and went there at will. . . . So constant were my observations, that my neck became affected by the strain of peering at a difficult angle.[107]

Just as Lovecraft's "gaze was ever upward at night" during the time of the great loss, so he rises starward after the demise of his home. The telescope is Lovecraft's doorway to the heavens as well as his doorway to the past. In the climax of "The Colour Out of Space," the "round and curiously regular hole in the clouds" is the barrel of his "astronomical telescope" through which, as mental energy, he passes vicariously into the star-strewn abyss.

Akin to the single-mindedness of the ancient Greek philosophers and scientists is Lovecraft's oneness of purpose as he uncovers the wonders of the universe; he writes on February 27, 1931, to Frank Belknap Long:

> The thing I respect is the selfish, independent, individualistic instinct-gratification of Thales and Pythagoras, Leucippus and Democritus, Heraclitus & Empedocles. I want my curiosity authentically gratified. . . . The process of delving into

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[107] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 38.

> the black abyss is to me the keenest form of fascination, & it is my conviction that this process demands the exercise of those parts of the human organism which represent the latest & most complex degree of evolution. I burn, I admire, I respect . . . & what I crave, admire, & respect is the pure & abstract abyss-plunging which enthralled Anaxagoras, Anaximenes, & Anaximander. . . . I want the straight dope on the clear-cut is or isn't proposition as far as it can be pushed, & a weeding out of all silly, unmotivated, & gratuitous guesswork & lie-faking in the unknown gulph beyond the present radius of the is or isn't searchlight.[108]

Lovecraft "burns" to gratify his curiosity by "delving into the black abyss" with the "is or isn't searchlight," the colour out of space. The searchlight from the well passes through the telescope barrel of cloud layering, and by "moving away from earth more swiftly than light"[109] passes back through time into the abyss of Lovecraft's memory. Thus he joins the scientific application "of those parts of the human organism which represent the latest & most complex degree of evolution" to the search for his mythic past, which unrolls before him like a beautiful dream. The confluence of science and myth is affirmed by August Derleth:

> For the unknown must have appealed to him as but another face of that intimate world of his own, with a personal relationship to that world of twilight Providence, as remote, as charming--and yes, terrible, too--as unchanging, so that the flight forward into the unknown paralleled the flight backward into memory, where the passage of time glossed over and palliated the less happy experiences of those years when his sensitivity to the disturbingly contradictory impressions . . . helped to mould and shape his direction in the world of American letters.[110]

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[108] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 299.

[109] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 20.

[110] Derleth, "Addenda to 'H.P.L.: A Memoir,'" p. 252.

In re-enacting his loss of the estate at 454 Angell Street, Lovecraft moves into "that intimate world of his own" formed of the mystery of the abyss and the beauties of the past. Lovecraft writes on December 25, 1930, to Derleth:

> [I have] impressions that certain vistas, particularly those associated with sunsets, are avenues of approach to spheres or conditions of wholly undefined delights and freedoms which I have known in the past and have a slender possibility of knowing again in the future. Just what these delights and freedoms are, or even what they approximately resemble, I could not concretely imagine to save my life; save that they seem to concern some ethereal quality of indefinite expansion and mobility, and of a heightened perception which shall make all forms and combinations of beauty simultaneously visible to me, and realisable by me. I might add, though, that they invariably imply a total defeat of the laws of time, space, matter, and energy--or rather, an individual independence of these laws on my part, whereby I can sail through the varied universes of space-time as an invisible vapour might. . . . The commonest form of my imaginative aspiration--that is, the commonest definable form--is a motion backward in time, or a discovery that time is merely an illusion and that the past is merely a lost mode of vision which I have a chance of recovering.[111]

The rocket-like rise of the colour out of space is a metaphor:

> [I have] . . . an individual independence of these laws [of time, space, matter, and energy] on my part, whereby I can sail through the varied universes of space-time as an invisible vapour might. . . .[112]

Through his motion into the past, Lovecraft arrives in a world of Greek philosophical and mythological thought. Lovecraft discusses his discovery of the world of classical mythology with its maze motif in his letter of February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird:

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[111] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 243.

[112] Ibid.

> When I was six my philosophical evolution received its most aesthetically significant impulse--the dawn of Graeco-Roman thought. . . . A tiny book in the private library of my elder aunt--the story of the Odyssey in Harper's Half-Hour Series--caught my attention. From the opening chapter I was electrified, and by the time I reached the end I was for evermore a Graeco-Roman. . . . [Lovecraft's mind was filled with] visions of fragrant templed groves, faun-peopled meadows in the twilight, and the blue, beckoning Mediterranean that billowed mysteriously out from Hellas into the reaches of haunting wonder, where dwelt Lotophagi and Laestrygonians, where Aeolus kept his winds and Circe her swine, and where in Thrinacian pastures roamed the oxen or [sic] radiant Helios. . . . In 1897 my leading literary work was a "poem" entitled The Poem of Ulysses, or, The New Odyssey.[113]

The twin elements of scientific curiosity and Greek myth weave the maze, the quintessential quest. The Odyssey itself forms a labyrinth, so that Lovecraft the "Graeco-Roman" is well prepared to pursue his quest for "the straight dope on the clear-cut is or isn't proposition as far as it can be pushed"[114] within the mythic maze. Lovecraft seeks the Minotaur distended to universal proportions with his "process of delving into the black abyss." He strives to exterminate the principle of disorder with the searchlight of intellect.

The meteor which began the chain of events is a counterpart of the great stone lifted from the sword and sandals by Theseus. Lovecraft accepts a similar challenge, by raising the skystone; he converts its matter to fuel for his voyage into blackness.

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[113] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 299.

[114] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 299.

From his vicarious voyage into the cosmos, Lovecraft returns to earth for the drama of "The Dunwich Horror." On the bank of the Miskatonic, amid the haunted hills around the river's source, lies the hamlet of Dunwich, Massachusetts, whose "sparsely scattered houses wear a surprisingly uniform aspect of age, squalor, and dilapidation."[115] The people are quiet and furtive:

> . . . the natives are now repellently decadent, having gone far along that path of retrogression so common in many New-England backwaters. They have come to form a race by themselves, with the well-defined mental and physical stigmata of degeneracy and inbreeding.[116]

Only two or three "armigerous families"[117] of gentry have managed to hold themselves above the decadence. No one understands what is wrong:

> No one . . . can say just what is the matter with Dunwich; though old legends speak of unhallowed rites and conclaves of the Indians, amidst which they called forbidden shapes of shadow out of the great rounded hills, and made wild orgiastic prayers that were answered by loud crackings and rumblings from the ground below.[118]

There are airy, spirit-like presences in the ravines, and the natives are afraid of the Devil's Hop Yard, "a bleak, blasted hillside where no tree, shrub, or grass-blade will grow."[119] Dunwich is an old township, but older elements abound in the area:

> Oldest of all are the great rings of rough-hewn

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[115] Lovecraft, The Dunwich Horror, p. 160.

[116] Ibid., p. 162. [117] Ibid. [118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid., p. 163.

> stone columns on the hilltops, but these are more generally attributed to the Indians than to the settlers. Deposits of skulls and bones, found within these circles and around the sizeable table-like rock on Sentinel Hill, sustain the popular belief that such spots were once the burial-places of the Pocumtucks; even though many ethnologists, disregarding the absurd improbability of such a theory, persist in believing the remains Caucasian.[120]

Wilbur Whateley is born February 2, 1913. His mother, Lavinia Whateley, has no known husband:

> . . . the mother was one of the decadent Whateleys, a somewhat deformed, unattractive albino woman of 35, living with an aged and half-insane father about whom the most frightful tales of wizardry had been whispered in his youth.[121]

The child's mother is not ashamed of her odd son:

> On the contrary, she seemed strangely proud of the dark, goatish-looking infant who formed such a contrast to her own sickly and pink-eyed albinism, and was heard to mutter many curious prophecies about its unusual powers and tremendous future.[122]

Lavinia wanders alone in the hills and reads the arcane, decaying books passed down through two centuries of Whateleys; she is filled with the disjointed lore of her old father:

> Isolated among strange influences, Lavinia was fond of wild and grandiose day-dreams and singular occupations; nor was her leisure much taken up by household cares in a home from which all standards of order and cleanliness had long since disappeared.[123]

The first time people outside the small family circle learn of Wilbur's arrival (at which no doctor presided) is a week after the birth when old man Whateley drives into Dunwich:

> "I dun't keer what folks think--ef Lavinny's boy looked like his pa, he wouldn't look like nothin'

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[120] Ibid. [121] Ibid., p. 164. [122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

> ye expeck. Ye needn't think the only folks is the folks hereabouts. . . . An' ef ye knowed as much abaout the hills as I dew, ye wouldn't ast no better church weddin' nor her'n. Let me tell ye suthin'--some day yew folks'll hear a child o' Lavinny's a-callin' its father's name on the top o' Sentinel Hill!"[124]

Almost immediately the Whateleys begin a steady purchase of cattle which lasts until 1928 and the advent of the horror. But at no time does their herd become large:

> There came a period when people were curious enough to steal up and count the herd that grazed precariously on the steep hillside above the old farmhouse, and they could never find more than ten or twelve anaemic, bloodless-looking specimens. Evidently some blight or distemper, perhaps sprung from the unwholesome pasturage or the diseased fungi and timbers of the filthy barn, caused a heavy mortality amongst the Whateley animals. Odd wounds or sores, having something of the aspect of incisions, seemed to afflict the visible cattle; and once or twice during the earlier months certain callers fancied they could discern similar sores about the throats of the grey, unshaven old man and his slatternly, crinkly-haired albino daughter.[125]

After Wilbur's birth, Lavinia carries him on her rambles in the hills:

> Wilbur's growth was indeed phenomenal, for within three months of his birth he had attained a size and muscular power not usually found in infants under a full year of age. His motions and even his vocal sounds shewed a restraint and deliberateness highly peculiar in an infant, and no one was really unprepared when, at seven months, he began to walk unassisted, with falterings which another month was sufficient to remove.[126]

The boy begins to talk at eleven months, and shows other signs of precocity:

> His speech was somewhat remarkable both because of its difference from the ordinary accents of the

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[124] Ibid., p. 165. [125] Ibid. [126] Ibid., p. 166.

> region, and because it displayed a freedom from infantile lisping of which many children of three or four might well be proud. The boy was not talkative, yet when he spoke he seemed to reflect some elusive element wholly unpossessed by Dunwich and its denizens.[127]

The baby is "exceedingly ugly despite his appearance of brilliancy."[128] There is something goatish about his appearance, so that "he was soon disliked even more decidedly than his mother and grandsire. . . ."[129]

Repair of the barn-like Whateley house begins:

> [The house is] . . . a spacious, peaked-roof affair whose rear end was buried entirely in the rocky hillside, and whose three least-ruined ground-floor rooms had always been sufficient for himself [old Whateley] and his daughter.[130]

The carpentering began with Wilbur's birth, "when one of the many tool sheds had been put suddenly in order, clapboarded, and fitted with a stout fresh lock."[131] The old man fits up another downstairs room for Wilbur:

> This chamber he lined with tall firm shelving; along which he began gradually to arrange, in apparently careful order, all the rotting ancient books and parts of books which during his own day had been heaped promiscuously in odd corners of the various rooms.[132]

The grandfather says of the books:

> "I made some use of 'em. . . . But the boy's fitten to make better use of 'em. He'd orter hev 'em as well so as he kin, for they're goin' to be all of his larnin'."[133]

By the time Wilbur is a year and a half old, he is as large

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[127] Ibid. [128] Ibid., p. 167. [129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid. [131] Ibid. [132] Ibid., p. 168.

[133] Ibid.

as a child of four and is "a fluent and incredibly intelligent talker."[134] He accompanies his mother on her wanderings in the fields and hills and studies diligently "the queer pictures and charts in his grandfather's books,"[135] while his grandfather instructs him daily. When the work on the house is completed, people notice that the old toolhouse has been abandoned again. By this time, four-year-old Wilbur resembles a boy of ten. He reads in the old books constantly but talks much less, as "a settled taciturnity was absorbing him, and for the first time people began to speak specifically of the dawning look of evil in his goatish face."[136] He frightens people with his bizarre jargon. Dogs seem to hate him, so that he is obliged to carry a pistol to protect himself:

> His occasional use of the weapon did not enhance his popularity amongst the owners of canine guardians.[137]

The few visitors usually find Lavinia alone on the first floor, "while odd cries and footsteps resounded in the boarded-up second story."[138] Dunwich residents puzzle over the disappearing cattle and weird hill noises and wonder about "the strange things that are called out of the earth when a bullock is sacrificed at the proper time to certain heathen gods."[139] Several people notice the odd stench from the sealed upper story.

By 1923, in a carpentry project on the upper story

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[134] Ibid. [135] Ibid. [136] Ibid., p. 169.
[137] Ibid. [138] Ibid. [139] Ibid.

of the old house, Wilbur and his grandfather "knocked out all the partitions and even removed the attic floor, leaving only one vast open void between the ground story and the peaked roof."[140] By the time of August 1, 1924, Old Whateley is dying in a coma, but regains consciousness:

> "More space, Willy, more space soon. Yew grows--an' that grows faster. It'll be ready to sarve ye soon, boy. Open up the gates to Yog-Sothoth with the long chant that ye'll find on page 751 of the complete edition, an' then put a match to the prison. Fire from airth can't burn it nohaow."
>
> He was obviously quite mad. After a pause . . . he added another sentence or two.
>
> "Feed it reg'lar, Willy, an' mind the quantity; but dun't let it grow too fast fer the place, fer ef it busts quarters or gits aout afore ye opens to Yog-Sothoth, it's all over an' no use. Only them from beyont kin make it multiply an' work. . . . Only them, the old uns as wants to come back. . . ."[141]

After his grandfather's death and the strange disappearance of his albino mother, Wilbur repairs a shed in 1927 and moves his books and effects into it. He boards up the doors and windows of the ground floor and removes the inner partitions as he and his grandfather have done before. By this time Wilbur is seven feet tall, and his growth has shown no signs of abatement.

In an attempt to find the mysterious "complete edition"[142] mentioned by his grandfather, the youth has begun to correspond with various rare book librarians, including those at Harvard University in Boston and at Miska-

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[140] Ibid., p. 171. [141] Ibid., pp. 171-72.

[142] Ibid., p. 172.

tonic University in Arkham. In search of an old volume he desperately needs, Wilbur ventures into Arkham to examine the copy at Miskatonic University:

> Almost eight feet tall . . . this dark and goatish gargoyle appeared one day in Arkham in quest of the dreaded volume kept under lock and key at the college library--the hideous Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred in Olaus Wormius' Latin version, as printed in Spain in the seventeenth century.[143]

Wilbur has an imperfect English version which his grandfather left him, and after gaining access to the Latin manuscript, he begins to collate the texts. Young Whateley is compelled to admit to the librarian, erudite Dr. Henry Armitage, that he is looking for a formula or incantation containing the name Yog-Sothoth. Armitage observes that the Latin version of the formula Wilbur finds contains monstrous threats to world order:

> Nor is it to be thought, (ran the text as Armitage mentally translated it) that man is either the oldest or the last of earth's masters, or that the common bulk of life and substance walks alone. The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. Not in the spaces we know, but between them, They walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. Yog-Sothoth knows the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the key and guardian of the gate. Past, present, future, all are one in Yog-Sothoth. He knows where the Old Ones broke through of old, and where They shall break through again. He knows where They have trod earth's fields, and where They still tread them, and why no one can behold Them as They tread. By Their smell can men sometimes know Them near, but of Their semblance can no man know, saving only in the features of those They have begotten on mankind; and of those are there many sorts, differing in likeness from man's truest eidolon to that shape without sight or substance which is Them. . . . They bend the forest

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[143] Ibid., pp. 173-74.

> and crush the city, yet may not forest or city behold the hand that smites. . . . As a foulness shall ye know Them. Their hand is at your throats, yet ye see Them not; and Their habitation is even one with your guarded threshold. Yog-Sothoth is the key to the gate, whereby the spheres meet. Man rules now where They ruled once; They shall soon rule where man rules now. After summer is winter, and after winter summer. They wait patient and potent, for here shall They reign again.[144]

The thoroughly aroused Armitage studies Whateley at closer range:

> The bent, goatish giant before him seemed like the spawn of another planet or dimension; like something only partly of mankind, and linked to black gulfs of essence and entity that stretch like titan phantasms beyond all spheres of force and matter, space and time.[145]

Whateley tries to borrow the book but is refused. Armitage begins to think about what he has heard of Dunwich and "to sense the close presence of some terrible part of the intruding horror. . . ."[146] He considers the most dreadful question:

> "But what thing--what cursed shapeless influence on or off this three-dimensioned earth--was Wilbur Whateley's father?"[147]

During the following weeks, Armitage gathers all possible information about "the nature, methods, and desires of the strange evil so vaguely threatening this planet."[148]

Because Wilbur cannot borrow the Necronomicon anywhere else, he later returns to break into the Miskatonic University library. A watchdog kills Whateley in one of

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[144] Ibid., pp. 174-75. [145] Ibid., p. 175.

[146] Ibid., p. 176. [147] Ibid. [148] Ibid., p. 177.

the library's reading rooms before Armitage arrives. The librarian motions to two colleagues, Professor Warren Rice and Dr. Francis Morgan, to follow him inside. The dog's barking has subsided to a low moan. Armitage turns on the light in the library's genealogical reading room:

> The thing that lay half-bent on its side in a foetid pool of greenish-yellow ichor and tarry stickiness was almost nine feet tall, and the dog had torn off all the clothing and some of the skin. . . . It was partly human, beyond a doubt, with very manlike hands and head, and the goatish, chinless face had the stamp of the Whateleys upon it. But the torso and lower parts of the body were teratologically fabulous, so that only generous clothing could ever have enabled it to walk on earth unchallenged or uneradicated.[149]

The description continues:

> Above the waist it was semi-anthropomorphic; though its chest . . . had the leathery, reticulated hide of a crocodile or alligator. The back was piebald with yellow and black, and dimly suggested the squamous covering of certain snakes. Below the waist, though, it was the worst; for here all human resemblance left off and sheer phantasy began. The skin was thickly covered with coarse black fur, and from the absomen a score of long greenish-grey tentacles with red sucking mouths protruded limply. Their arrangement was odd, and seemed to follow the symmetries of some cosmic geometry unknown to earth or the solar system. On each of the hips, deep set in a kind of pinkish, ciliated orbit, was what seemed to be a rudimentary eye; whilst in lieu of a tail there depended a kind of trunk or feeler with purple annular markings, and with many evidences of being an undeveloped mouth or throat. The limbs, save for their black fur, roughly resembled the hind legs of pre-historic earth's giant saurians; and terminated in ridgy-veined pads that were neither hooves nor claws. . . . Of genuine blood there was none; only the foetid greenish-yellow ichor which trickled along the painted floor beyond the radius of the stickiness, and left a curious discolouration behind it.[150]

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[149] Ibid., pp. 178-79. [150] Ibid., p. 179.

Rapid shrinkage and degeneration takes place on the floor:

> . . . aside from the external appearance of face and hands, the really human element in Wilbur Whateley must have been very small. . . . Apparently Whateley had no skull or bony skeleton; at least, in any true or stable sense. He had taken somewhat after his unknown father.[151]

The Whateley estate is examined, but the fearful officials do not investigate the sounds from the shell of a farmhouse. A clue is found inside the old shed that served as a habitation for Wilbur:

> An almost interminable manuscript in strange characters, written in a huge ledger and adjudged a sort of diary because of the spacing and the variations in ink and penmanship, presented a baffling puzzle to those who found it on the old bureau which served as its owner's desk.[152]

This log, together with the Whateley book collection, is sent to Miskatonic University for examination by Armitage.

On the night of the ninth of September, the horror breaks out of the Whateley barn. A hired boy, sent for some cows, returns to report what he has seen:

> "Up thar in the rud beyont the glen, Mis' Corey--they's suthin' ben thar! It smells like thunder, an' all the bushes an' little trees is pushed back from the rud like they'd a haouse ben moved along of it. An' that ain't the wust, nuther. They's prints in the rud, Mis' Corey--great raound prints as big as barrel-heads, all sunk daown deep like a elephant had ben along, only they's a sight more nor four feet could make!"[153]

Another boy returns with the report that the walls and roof of the Whateley barn have been blown away, but that the black, sticky floor remains. Some cattle are found, but

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[151] Ibid., p. 180. [152] Ibid., p. 181.

[153] Ibid., pp. 181-82.

they are in a poor condition:

> "Haff on 'em's clean gone, an' nigh haff o' them that's left is sucked most dry o' blood, with sores on 'em like they's ben on Whateley's cattle ever senct Lavinny's black brat was born."[154]

The horror disappears into the dark entrance of Cold Spring Glen and remains there during the day. The men of Dunwich examine the signs of the colossus: the cattle, the wrecked farmhouse, and the bruised vegetation. The creature has retreated into the ravine, "as though a house, launched by an avalanche, had slid down through the tangled growths of the almost vertical slope."[155] The men stand and argue, "rather than descend and beard the unknown Cyclopean horror in its lair."[156] All cattle are boarded up as Dunwich awaits the return of the horror. During the night, the cattle and barn of the Elmer Frye family are destroyed. Two nights later, tracks are made to and from Sentinel Hill:

> As before, the sides of the road showed a bruising indicative of the blasphemously stupendous bulk of the horror; whilst the conformation of the tracks seemed to argue a passage in two directions, as if the moving mountain had come from Cold Spring Glen and returned to it along the same path. . . . Whatever the horror was, it could scale a sheer stony cliff of almost complete verticality; and as the investigators climbed around to the hill's summit by safer routes they saw that the trail ended--or rather, reversed--there.[157]

The table-like rock atop Sentinel Hill is covered with the same kind of tarry stickiness on the remains of the Whateley house. The next night the entity again asserts its presence,

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[154] Ibid., p. 182. [155] Ibid., pp. 183-84.

[156] Ibid., p. 184. [157] Ibid., pp. 185-86.

for when the night is over, "the Elmer Fryes had been erased from Dunwich."[158]

Meanwhile, in his library at Arkham, Armitage works feverishly to crack the code of the Whateley manuscript, "as a quieter yet even more spiritually poignant phase of the horror had been blackly unwinding itself behind the closed door of a shelf-lined room in Arkham."[159] The characters of the cipher resemble "the heavily-shaded Arabic used in Mesopotamia."[160] Perhaps its secret alphabet has come down from the cults of the Saracenic wizards in the ancient world. Armitage discovers that the ancient symbols form words in the English language; he reads from the diary the entry dated November 26, 1916:

> Today learned the Aklo for the Sabaoth (it ran), which did not like, it being answerable from the hill and not from the air. That upstairs more ahead of me than I had thought it would be, and is not like to have much earth brain. . . . Grandfather kept me saying the Dho formula last night, and I think I saw the inner city at the 2 magnetic poles. I shall go to those poles when the earth is cleared off. . . . They from the air told me at Sabbat that it will be years before I can clear off the earth, and I guess grandfather will be dead then, so I shall have to learn all the angles of the planes and all the formulas between the Yr and the Nhhngr. They from outside will help, but they cannot take body without human blood. That upstairs looks it will have the right cast. I can see it a little when I make the Voorish sign or blow the powder of Ibn Ghazi at it, and it is near like them at May Eve on the Hill. The other face may wear off some. I wonder how I shall look when the earth is cleared and there are no earth beings on it. He that came with the Aklo Sabaoth said I may be transfigured there being much of outside to work on.[161]

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[158] Ibid., p. 186. [159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid., p. 187. [161] Ibid., pp. 188-89.

For the next two days Armitage deciphers the rest of the diary. Eating almost nothing, he grows weaker but finishes the manuscript. Becoming delirious, he raves of the coming doom; his wilder wanderings include frantic appeals that something in a boarded-up farmhouse be destroyed:

> [He made] . . . fantastic references to some plan for the extirpation of the entire human race and all animal and vegetable life from the earth by some terrible elder race of beings from another dimension. He would shout that the world was in danger, since the Elder Things wished to strip it and drag it away from the solar system and cosmos of matter into some other plane or phase of entity from which it had once fallen, vigintillions of aeons ago.[162]

Physically sound despite his seventy-three years, Armitage sleeps off the disorder. He confers with Rice and Morgan and "the three men tortured their brains in the wildest speculation and the most desperate debate."[163] Books are read and formulas are copied:

> The more he [Armitage] reflected on the hellish diary, the more he was inclined to doubt the efficacy of any material agent in stamping out the entity which Wilbur Whateley had left behind him--the earth-threatening entity which, unknown to him, was to burst forth in a few hours and become the memorable Dunwich horror.
>
> . . . Armitage knew he would be meddling with terrible powers, yet saw that there was no other way to annul the deeper and more malign muddling which others had done before him.[164]

The three men arrive at Dunwich and learn the fate of the Frye family. They examine the terrain, seeking signs of the horror's presence: "The trail up and down Sentinel Hill seemed to Armitage of almost cataclysmic significance,

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[162] Ibid., p. 190. [163] Ibid. [164] Ibid., p. 191.

and he looked long at the sinister altar-like stone on the summit."[165] The men prepare for darkness, as "night would soon fall, and it was then that the mountainous blasphemy lumbered upon its eldritch course."[166] The next day, during a dark rainstorm, the monster begins to move. A terrified man reports that nothing can be seen or heard but the bending of trees and underbrush:

> ". . . they was a swishin', lappin' saound, more nor what the bendin' trees an' bushes could make, an' all on a suddent the trees along the rud begun ter git pushed one side, an' they was a awful stompin' an' splashin' in the mud."[167]

Another house is crushed as the creature makes its way from the ravine toward the top of Sentinel Hill. Armitage tells the rustics that they must follow the horror:

> "We must follow it, boys." He made his voice as reassuring as possible. "I believe there's a chance of putting it out of business."[168]

The men follow the tracks to Sentinel Hill. The fearful rustics hesitate at the Whateley place: "It was no joke tracking down something as big as a house that one could not see, but that had all the vicious malevolence of a daemon."[169] When they reach the hill, Armitage hands the men a small telescope and continues toward the summit with Rice and Morgan. The three men draw near the monster and prepare to spray some visibility powder in its direction. Curtis Whateley, a Dunwich resident, sees the horror through

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[165] Ibid., p. 192. [166] Ibid. [167] Ibid., p. 194.
[168] Ibid., p. 195. [169] Ibid., p. 197.

the telescope and describes the vision:

> "Bigger'n a barn . . . all made o' squirmin' ropes. . . . Hull thing sort o' shaped like a hen's egg bigger'n anything with dozens o' legs like hogs-heads that haff shut up when they step . . . nothin' solid abaout it--all like jelly, an' made o' sep'rit wrigglin' ropes pushed clost together . . . great bulgin' eyes all over it . . . ten or twenty maouths or trunks a-stickin' aout all along the sides, big as stove-pipes, an' all a-tossin' an' openin' an' shuttin' . . . all grey, with kinder blue or purple rings . . . an' Gawd in Heaven--that haff face on top! . . ."[170]

At this point the man faints. Another man takes the telescope and reports that the three men have arrived on a level with the table-rock, and that one of the men is waving his hands:

> . . . the crowd seemed to hear a faint, half-musical sound from the distance, as if a loud chant were accompanying the gestures. The weird silhouette on that remote peak must have been a spectacle of infinite grotesqueness and impressiveness, but no observer was in a mood for aesthetic appreciation. "I guess he's sayin' the spell," whispered Wheeler as he snatched back the telescope. The whippoorwills were piping wildly, and in a singularly curious rhythm quite unlike that of the visible ritual.[171]

Rumblings from both earth and sky accompany a perceptible lessening of the sunlight that occurs without the interference of clouds:

> A purplish darkness, born of nothing more than a spectral deepening of the sky's blue, pressed down upon the rumbling hills.[172]

Suddenly there are "deep, cracked, raucous vocal sounds"[173] whose source is the table-like altar stone on

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[170] Ibid., p. 198. [171] Ibid., p. 199.

[172] Ibid. [173] Ibid., p. 200.

the hill's peak:

> Not from any human throat were they born, for the organs of man can yield no such acoustic perversions.[174]

The substance of this "ghastly, infra-bass timbre spoke to dim seats of consciousness and terror far subtler than the ear."[175] Yet these hideous sounds have the form of "half-articulate words."[176] The crowd at the hill's base huddles in terrified expectation:

> "Ygnaiih . . . ygnaiih . . . thflthkh'ngha . . . Yog-Sothoth . . ." rang the hideous croaking out of space. "Y'bthnk . . . h'ehye--n'grkdl'lh . . ."
>
> The speaking impulse seemed to falter here, as if some frightful psychic struggle were going on. Henry Wheeler strained his eye at the telescope, but saw only the three grotesquely silhouetted human figures on the peak, all moving their arms furiously in strange gestures as their incantation drew near its culmination. From what black wells of Acheron-tic fear or feeling, from what unplumbed gulfs of extra-cosmic consciousness or obscure, long-latent heredity, were those half-articulate thunder-croak-ings drawn? Presently they began to gather renewed force and coherence as they grew in stark, utter, ultimate frenzy:
>
> "Eh-ya-ya-ya-yahaah--e'yayayayaaaa . . . ngh'aaaaa . . . ngh'aaa . . . h'yuh . . . h'yuh . . . HELP! HELP! . . . ff--ff--ff--FATHER! FATHER! YOG-SOTHOTH! . . ."[177]

The crowd reels at the unmistakably English words that had come from the altar-stone. A terrific noise seems to rend the hills:

> A single lightning bolt shot from the purple zenith to the altar-stone, and a great tidal wave of view-less force and indescribable stench swept down from the hill to all the countryside.[178]

Later Armitage explains:

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[174] Ibid. [175] Ibid. [176] Ibid. [177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid., p. 201.

> "The thing has gone for ever," Armitage said. "It has been split up into what it was originally made of, and can never exist again. It was an impossibility in a normal world. Only the least fraction was really matter in any sense we know. It was like its father--and most of it has gone back to him in some vague realm or dimension outside our material universe; some vague abyss out of which only the most accursed rites of human blasphemy could ever have called him for a moment on the hills."[179]

At this moment Curtis Whateley, who fainted after glimpsing the horror, returns to consciousness:

> "Oh, oh, my Gawd, that haff face--that haff face on top of it . . . that face with the red eyes an' crinkly albino hair, an' no chin, like the Whateleys. . . . It was a octopus, centipede, spider kind o' thing, but they was a haff-shaped man's face on top of it, an' it looked like Wizard Whateley's, only it was yards an' yards acrost . . ."[180]

There was enough of the outsideness in Wilbur Whateley, Armitage says, "'to make a devil and a precocious monster of him, and to make his passing out a pretty terrible sight.'"[181] Armitage concludes:

> "But as to this thing we've just sent back--the Whateleys raised it for a terrible part in the doings that were to come. It grew fast and big from the same reason that Wilbur grew fast and big--but it beat him because it had a greater share of the outsideness in it. You needn't ask how Wilbur called it out of the air. He didn't call it out. It was his twin brother, but it looked more like the father than he did."[182]

"The Dunwich Horror," Lovecraft's most powerful work, illustrates his most personal thoughts. The adventitious and precocious growth of Wilbur Whateley is a sharply drawn self-portrait of Lovecraft's early life and adolescence.

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[179] Ibid. [180] Ibid., pp. 201-02.

[181] Ibid., p. 202. [182] Ibid.

Lavinia Whateley, a rundown edition of Mrs. Lovecraft, has "wild and grandiose day dreams" about her son's "tremendous future." Such hopes and dreams appear in the early life of Lovecraft as August Derleth says of Mrs. Lovecraft in his Memoir that she "believed that her son was a poet of the highest order."[183] James Warren Thomas writes that Mrs. Lovecraft was preoccupied with the overprotection of her precocious son:

> Under the delusion that her son was a poetic genius, she sheltered him and coddled him until the time of her death in Butler Hospital, a hospital for the mentally ill, in 1921.[184]

Lavinia is likewise preoccupied by her son and his strange doings until her death in 1926.

Particular events of Lovecraft's childhood are echoed in the Dunwich narrative. A strong influence of Lovecraft's early years is his close relationship with his mother. Lavinia's carrying Wilbur on her hillside rambles parallels Lovecraft's walks with his mother, of which he writes in his letter of February 27, 1931, to Frank Belknap Long:

> From the age of three my mother always took me walking in the fields & ravines, & along the high wooded riverbank.[185]

The close relationship with his mother took its toll on Lovecraft, as Clara Hess writes in her reminiscence of him:

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[183] August Derleth, H. P. L.: A Memoir (New York: Ben Abramson, 1945), p. 14.

[184] Thomas, p. 13.

[185] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 317.

> [Lovecraft] even as a young boy was strange and rather a recluse, who kept by himself and hid from other children, because, as his mother said, he could not bear to have people look upon his awful face. She would talk of his looks (it seemed to be an obsession with her) which would not have attracted any particular attention if he had been normal as were the other children in the community.[186]

Sarah Lovecraft's infectious preoccupation with her son's looks is a factor in his loneliness and appears in his story as Wilbur's goatish features and ostracism. Lovecraft writes of his childhood aloneness in his letter of November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> You will notice that I have made no reference to childish friends & playmates--I had none! The children I knew disliked me, & I disliked them. I was used to adult company and conversation, & despite the fact that I felt shamefully dull beside my elders, I had nothing in common with the infant train.[187]

Lovecraft's childhood dislike of children appears in Wilbur's pugnacity.

Wilbur's "appearance of brilliancy" and his precocity as a "fluent and incredibly intelligent talker" parallels Lovecraft's own premature perspicacity:

> [At the age of a year and a half] I began to display a precocity which ought to have warned my parents of that mediocre older life which too often follows such an infancy. At the age of two I was a rapid talker.[188]

Lovecraft's development parallels Wilbur's in other ways. By the time Wilbur is four years old, he has retreated to

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[186] Hess, p. 247.

[187] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 35.

[188] Ibid., p. 32.

his books and talks much less, as a "settled taciturnity was absorbing him." This absorption has a counterpart in Lovecraft's childhood. He writes (in the third person) to Edwin Baird:

> The child was weak, nervous, and inclined to keep his own company after he found his voluble conversation disrelish'd by those gentlemen of his grandfather's circle who form'd the only persons he ever car'd to talk to.[189]

And, like Wilbur Whateley, Lovecraft turns for solace to books; he writes to Maurice Moe on January 1, 1915:

> As a child I was very peculiar and sensitive, always preferring the society of grown persons to that of other children. I could not keep away from printed matter. I had learned the alphabet at two, and at four could read with ease, though making most absurd errors in the pronunciation of the long words I loved so well. At five I added penmanship to the list of my accomplishments.[190]

The downstairs room Old Whateley prepares for Wilbur perhaps corresponds to the family library which Lovecraft fell heir to; he writes on November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> In 1894 I was able to read fluently, & was a tireless student of the dictionary; never allowing a word to slip by me without ascertaining its meaning. It was then that the mellowed tomes of the family library became my complete world--at once my servants & my masters. . . . I read everything, understood a little & imagined more.[191]

In his letter to Edwin Baird, written February 3, 1924, Lovecraft suggests the great age of most of the books in the library he inherits--an ancientness of tome important

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[189] Ibid., p. 297. [190] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[191] Ibid., p. 34.

in "The Dunwich Horror":

> With the house was a vast array of books--the fusion of two hereditary libraries--and to this the rising aesthete turned when, at four, the ars legendi became his. By a curious twist of taste, only old-fashioned things and fantastic things attracted the infant marvel.[192]

These books are, as Old Whateley would put it, all of Lovecraft's learning.

But Wilbur's room is not the only portion of the Whateley house to interest Lovecraft. The entire "spacious, peaked-roof affair" occupies his attention. He writes on September 2, 1931, to August Derleth:

> All rural and architectural beauty have acquired for me a symbolic value, with bearings on my own personal past and on the vividly envisaged past of my family and race-stock.[193]

The connection of architecture with the personal past emerges as Lovecraft continues:

> Certain collocations of scenic or architectural details have the most powerful imaginable effect on my emotions--evoking curious combinations of poignant images derived from reading, pictures, and experience. Old farmhouses . . . give me a vague, elusive sense of half-remembering something of great and favourable significance.[194]

What Lovecraft grasps for lies within his experience. His letter to Derleth continues its tone of reminiscent longing:

> I hate to see the old things go. Just now my greatest loss has been the stable of my birthplace; for years in decay. . . . The old barn went down a month ago to make way for a modern dwelling, and it seemed

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[192] Ibid., p. 297.

[193] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 405.

[194] Ibid., p. 405.

> as though half of my linkage with youth went with it--for it was my exclusive playhouse after financial decline wiped out our horses and carriages.[195]

This bygone barnlike stable of Lovecraft's youth appears in "The Dunwich Horror" as the old Whateley house.

Other aspects of Lovecraft's childhood find their places within the Dunwich narrative. The toolshed that is put in order at the time of Wilbur's birth has a counterpart in Lovecraft's childhood playhouse:

> When I was very small, my kingdom was the lot next my birthplace, 454 Angell St. Here were trees, shrubs, and grasses, and here when I was between four and five the coachman built me an immense summer-house all mine own--a somewhat crude yet vastly pleasing affair, with a staircase leading to a flat roof from which in later years I surveyed the skies with my telescope. The floor was Mother Earth herself, for at the time the edifice was constructed I had a definite purpose for it. I was then a railway man, with a vast system of express-carts, wheelbarrows, and the like; plus some immensely ingenious cars made out of packing cases. I had also a splendid engine made by mounting a sort of queer boiler on a tiny express-wagon. The new building, therefore, must needs be my grand terminal and roundhouse combined; a mighty shed under which my puffing trains could run, even as the big trains of the outside world ran under the sheds at the old depots in Providence and Boston.[196]

The Whateley toolshed is a replica of the playhouse built by the family coachman in Lovecraft's fifth year. Lovecraft has a "definite purpose for it," for the toolshed becomes the living space for the embryonic Dunwich horror. The horror is a live embodiment of Lovecraft's toy engine, "made by mounting a sort of queer boiler on a tiny express-wagon."

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[195] Ibid.

[196] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 104.

Lovecraft likens his toy train to "the big trains of the outside world," a comparison that foreshadows the growth of the Dunwich entity.

The power of the locomotive image in Lovecraft's mind is evidenced by his letter of November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> And now comes the personal element, for it is there, in Auburndale, amidst the most poetic of poetic auspices, that consciousness first came to my infant mind. I distinctly recall the quiet, shady suburb as I saw it in 1892--it is a rather curious psychological fact that at this early age I was impressed most of all with the railway bridge & the four tracked Boston & Albany road which extended beneath it. The trains fascinated me, & to this day I have a love for everything pertaining to railways.[197]

This energized image, born in Lovecraft's mind when he was two years old, matures into the implement of Lovecraft's art; this growth is recorded in "The Dunwich Horror." The continued strength of the railway concept appears in Lovecraft's memory of his childhood back yard. During these years the yard was covered by the network of model railroad that began in the playhouse built by the coachman. Lovecraft writes to Alfred Galpin and Maurice Moe of his childhood preoccupation:

> The building [Lovecraft's playhouse] became, in familiar household parlance "The Engine House"--and how I loved it! From the gate of our yard to the Engine House I had a nice track--or path--made and leveled for me; a continuation of the great railway system formed by the concrete walks in the yard. And here, in supreme bliss, were idled away the days of my youth. As I grew older, I took the road and its buildings more and more under my personal man-

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[197] Ibid., p. 32.

> agement. I began to make repairs myself, and when I was six I constructed many branch lines. Once I carefully laid a track with wooden rails and sleepers--forgetting the trivial detail that I had nothing to run on it! But it looked nice anyway![198]

A drastic change for the worse in the Lovecraft family finances had its effect on Lovecraft's environment, as his letter to Galpin and Moe continues:

> Then came changes--one day, there was not any coachman to help me, whereat I mourned; but later on I had compensation--the horses and carriages were sold, too, so that I had a gorgeous, glorious, titanic, and unbelievable new playhouse--the whole great stable with its immense carriage room, its neat-looking "office," and its vast upstairs, with the colossal (almost scareful) expanse of the grain loft, and the little three-room apartment where the coachman and his wife had lived. All this magnificence was my very own, to do with as I liked! Many were the uses to which I put that stable. The carriage room was now the main terminal of my railway.[199]

Lovecraft puts the stable to literary use as the barn-like Whateley house in his Dunwich narrative. The "almost scareful" grain loft is the original of the boarded up area where the horror thrives, while the coachman's three-room apartment corresponds to the "three least-ruined ground-floor rooms which had always been sufficient for himself [Old Whateley] and his daughter." The change of the "Engine House" from the playhouse to the larger structure parallels the transferral of the expanding horror from the toolshed to the spacious attic floor of the Whateley house.

Lavinia Whateley remains on the first floor, while the two males tend the entity above. The odd behavior of

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[198] Ibid., p. 104. [199] Ibid., pp. 104-05.

the albino woman derives in part from the eccentric behavior of Lovecraft's mother. The remarks of Clara Hess, a Lovecraft neighbor, are helpful:

> One day, after many urgent invitations, I went in to call upon her. She was considered then to be getting rather odd. . . . The house had a strange and shutup air and the atmosphere seemed weird and Mrs. Lovecraft talked continuously of her unfortunate son who was so hideous that he hid from everyone and did not like to walk upon the streets where people could gaze at him.[200]

The atmosphere is like that at the Whateley home. Mrs. Hess continues:

> I remember that I was glad to get out into the fresh air and sunshine and that I did not repeat my visit! Surely it was an environment suited for the writing of horror stories.[201]

The strangeness and disappearance of Lavinia Whateley parallels the odd behavior of Mrs. Lovecraft. The Hess article continues:

> After a time one did not meet Mrs. Lovecraft very often. . . . Sometimes when going around the corner to mail a letter on an early summer evening, one would see a dark figure flittering about the shrubbery of her home, and I discovered that it was Mrs. Lovecraft.[202]

After the death of two family members, Wilbur examines the mysterious Necronomicon in an older, Latin translation. This strange book is a key to Lovecraft's past, as is suggested in several Commonplace Book entries:

> Vision opened by evil book. . . . Peculiar odor of book of childhood induces repetition of childhood fancy.[203]

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[200] Hess, p. 248. [201] Ibid. [202] Ibid.

[203] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 20.

The Necronomicon is a gateway to the dream world of childhood Lovecraft remembers:

> Perusal of a certain hideous book or possession of a certain awful talisman places person in touch with shocking dream or memory world which brings him eventual destruction.[204]

In the person of the lonely, hideous Wilbur Whateley, Lovecraft is seeking to reopen the book of memory and to enter and explore the strange dream world of his past:

> Hideous world superimposed on visible world. Gate through--power guides narrator to ancient and forbidden book with directions for access.[205]

This Commonplace Book entry states the thrust of "The Dunwich Horror." The story is a fictive attempt to overwhelm and clear the earth of men for the reassertion on a grand scale of Lovecraft's childhood dream world. The Latin version of the Necronomicon contains the incantation that opens the gate for the demizens that populated the world long ago. For Lovecraft, the past includes the time in his childhood that allowed him the freedom to while away the hours with his trains and his reading.

The diary written by Wilbur Whateley is a key to Lovecraft's imagination. The relationship of Whateley and Armitage is vital to the story's purpose. The natures of the two personages are precisely opposed. The ugliness of the monstrous Wilbur is exposed as he dies in the reading room at Miskatonic University; he is more dinosaur than man. He is a composition in evolution, all the way from his

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[204] Ibid., p. 11. [205] Ibid., p. 31.

dinosaur-like lower limbs to his semi-anthropomorphic torso. He is the identity Lovecraft assumes to journey through the maze of evolution toward the chaotic energy at the base of evolution's spiral. Various Commonplace Book entries suggest that Lovecraft assumes this "monster identity":

> Man with unnatural face, oddity of speaking. Found to be a mask--revelation.[206]

The masked creature comes from another world:

> Inhabitant of another world--face masked, perhaps with human skin, or surgically altered to human shape, but body alien beneath robes. Having reached earth, tries to mix with mankind. Hideous revelation.[207]

These creatures from the Commonplace Book parallel the revelation of Wilbur Whateley. The process of devolution is in other Commonplace Book entries:

> Individual, by some strange process, retraces the path of evolution and becomes amphibious.
> Doctor insists that that particular amphibian from which man descended is not like any known to paleontology. To prove it, indulges in, or relates strange experiment.[208]

The reptillian Wilbur Whateley who "retraces the path of evolution and becomes amphibious" embodies Lovecraft's belief that man has evolved from some amphibian now lost to science.

At a point on the path of evolution, Wilbur Whateley's purpose is concluded. The form of Wilbur dissolves, and evolutionary metamorphosis to higher levels of perfection

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[206] Ibid., p. 23. [207] Ibid., p. 38.

[208] Ibid., p. 30.

takes place. This additional evolution occurs in the form of Henry Armitage's new and increasing importance. The metamorphic transposition of energy suggests the twin brother syndrome in Lovecraft's early writing. Lovecraft writes on February 2, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> One long destroyed tale was of twin brothers--one murders the other, but conceals the body, and tries to live the life of both--appearing in one place as himself, and elsewhere as his victim. (Resemblance had been remarkable.) He meets sudden death (lightning) when posing as the dead man--is identified by a scar, and the secret finally revealed by his diary. This, I think antedates my eleventh year.[209]

The "twin brother" in the Dunwich narrative is Henry Armitage. Armitage, with three doctoral degrees and the maturity of advanced age, stands at the pinnacle of evolutionary development, at the opposite end of the spectrum from the creature he watches melt to nothingness. Armitage "tries to live the life of both," for the intellect must have the energy that devolution to chaos brings. And a diary-like record of Lovecraft's past reveals the secret of identity in this early story, just as does the diary in the Dunwich narrative.

Lovecraft's interest in heritage and breeding, and by implication, evolution, appears in the old librarian's name. Early in the narrative, Lovecraft refers to certain "armigerous families" as having held themselves above the degenerate rabble of Dunwich proper, and an interest in

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[209] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 20.

genealogy appears in Lovecraft's letter of June 1, 1928, to Wilfrid Talman:

> Thanks for the heraldry--I do feel damn guilty making you look up so much stuff, when I can't afford to come across with the 0.75 to 1.00 per horam! . . . What you get for Carew is not so ambitious as the arrangement recorded in the data I have. As I told you, this outfit has supporters 'n' everything--though I know not on how good authority. Do you suppose the supporters are in error due to the fact that some lone member of the family once gained them through a now-extinct peerage or baronetcy, and that other branches informally but unauthorisedly swiped the critters? Gawd, if that's so, I could tack 'em onto Phillips, since, as you'll recall from a book we saw at the pub, there is now a baronet of the collateral line.[210]

Lovecraft's interest in his racial stock merges with his wish to occupy an elevated, refined level in man's cultural development. There is a broad hint of Wilbur Whateley's relative position as the letter to Talman continues:

> So Gorton had a goat. . . . If you've read anything of R.I. history you'll see how often some of the other colonists got it![211]

Wilbur's goatish appearance suggests his lower position on the evolutionary spiral. Lovecraft's feeling that "goatishness" has infected much of the Rhode Island population helps to account for the decadent inhabitants of Dunwich.

A further move down the scale brings Lovecraft closer to primal beginnings; he writes in the Commonplace Book: "What hatches from primordial egg."[212] The importance of

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[210] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 241.

[211] Ibid. [212] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 36.

devolution and primal beginnings in Lovecraft's fiction is confirmed as he writes on October 17, 1930, to Frank Belknap Long:

> What makes me maddest about this issue [of Weird Tales], damn it, is the dinosaur's egg story given first place and cover design. . . . Now, didn't Grandpa tell a bright young man just eight years ago this month to write a story like that? Didn't Grandpa go and ask at the American Museum about dinosaur eggs (then known only hypothetically) to see whether they were hard or soft, and didn't he tell flaming youth to write a nightmare of a yarn about what lumbered about in the museum basement at night? . . . Why, damn it, boy, I've half a mind to write an egg story myself right now--though I fancy my primal ovoid would hatch out something infinitely more paleogean and unrecognisable than the relatively commonplace dinosaur.[213]

Wilbur Whateley, with his saurian-like underpinnings, is the "paleogean and unrecognisable" dinosaur-like creature that hatched from the "primal ovoid" that moves about the Dunwich countryside much as the railway engines that fascinated Lovecraft.

Confirmation of Wilbur's nature and position in the Dunwich narrative appears in Lovecraft's letter of October 17, 1930, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> The dinosaur's egg story was simply a minus quantity--but it made me curse, because I thought of that same plot, just eight years ago (before any real dinosaur's eggs were discovered). . . . I went so far as to make inquiries of a sub-curator as to whether dinosaurs probably laid real eggs, or whether they were semi-viviparous like some other reptilia. On being told that they were probably truly oviparous, I renewed my urging that Belknap write the tale. . . . Later I thought of writing the tale myself, though I always shelved the idea in favor of others. . . .

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[213] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, pp. 186-87.

> If only Belknap or I had gone ahead & written a real story on the theme! Heaven knows--I may yet, for the idea is none the less mine because of this independent use--or abuse--of it. But if I do use the primordial egg idea, I may introduce variants. Perhaps it won't bring forth a dinosaur at all, but instead a hellish half-man of the pre-human . . . period.[214]

Wilbur Whateley is this "hellish half-man." Lovecraft hatched his dinosaur egg story after an incubation period of six years. The dinosaur's egg story occurred to Lovecraft before the appearance of any physical specimens. An entry in Brewer's Phrase and Fable, a book which Lovecraft refers to in his "Suggestions for a Reading Guide,"[215] is a factor in the growth in his mind of the egg idea:

> The Mundane egg--The Phoenicians, and from them the Egyptians, Hindus, Japanese, and many other ancient nations, maintained that the world was hatched from an egg made by the Creator. Orpheus speaks of this egg.[216]

Lovecraft's "primal ovoid" is the source of all being, a metaphor for his mind. Within such an all-encompassing symbol reposes all of Lovecraft's memories of his personal past, as well as the love of the historical traditions of which he read.

This mental containment of the past is a synthesis of Lovecraft's mental experience. He writes on February 27,

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[214] Ibid., p. 194.

[215] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Suggestions for a Reading Guide," in The Dark Brotherhood and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1966), p. 43.

[216] Ebenezer Cobham Brewer, Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (London: J. B. Lippincott, 1894), p. 407.

1931, to Frank Belknap Long:

> All in all, despite my survival into an age of transition, I think I stand pretty solidly with the basic objective realities of the solid old world that was. . . . I don't have to adopt any conscious "great traditions" in order to line up with the past. It's enough to display the synthesis of my memories & affections.[217]

The Dunwich horror, a "hen's egg bigger 'n anything," is "a display [of] the synthesis of my memories & affections," a retrieval and embodiment of Lovecraft's personal and historical past. "The Dunwich Horror" is a last attempt to thwart time, the great eradicator. Lovecraft writes on November 21, 1930, to August Derleth:

> Time, space, and natural law hold for me suggestions of intolerable bondage, and I can form no picture of emotional satisfaction which does not involve their defeat--especially the defeat of time, so that one may merge oneself with the whole historic stream and be wholly emancipated from the transient and ephemeral.[218]

By reaching back and molding a primal egg of the substance of his past, Lovecraft triumphs over inevitable decay for a fictive instant. The child Lovecraft is personated by Wilbur Whateley, who hatches from Lovecraft's egg of experience, grows up, dies, and gives way to the scholarly Armitage, Lovecraft's adult persona. But this metamorphosis from boy to man marks the failure to stop time, and reverses the thrust of the narrative. The "Armitage" half of the narrative describes the removal of the egg of the past, the

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[217] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 320.

[218] Ibid., p. 220.

savings bank of Lovecraft's experience, from the ravages of time and environment.

The growth of the egg throughout the story is a fictive gathering together of past experience, as Lovecraft writes to Bernard Dwyer on March 3, 1927:

> To me authorship is only a mechanical means of getting formulated and preserved certain fugitive images which I wish formulated and preserved. If anyone else has presented an idea exactly as I feel it I let his work serve me.[219]

The "primal ovoid" in this narrative is a "mechanical means of getting formulated and preserved certain fugitive images" of Lovecraft's personal past and his cultural past. He weaves his memories into an "objectivization of imagination-products"[220] with his Dunwich narrative. He writes on February 27, 1931, to Frank Belknap Long:

> The only permanently artistic use of Yog-Sothothery, I think, is in symbolic or associative fantasy of the frankly poetic type; in which fixed dream-patterns of the natural organism are given an embodiment & crystallisation.[221]

The engine-oval of force is an "embodiment & crystallisation" of past experience. Lovecraft writes on February 25, 1929, to Woodburn Harris:

> The background of individual mental and emotional experience which each of us brings to bear as association-material upon any impression of the external world, of necessity gives every separate person a thoroughly separate set of emotional and imaginative overtones when he looks at a given scene in

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[219] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 111.

[220] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 13.

[221] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 293.

common with others.[222]

Earlier in the same letter to Harris, Lovecraft associates his own "separate set of emotional and imaginative overtones" to both his personal past and the culture-stream to which he belongs:

> I am an aesthete devoted to harmony, and to the extraction of the maximum possible pleasure from life. I find by experience that my chief pleasure is in symbolic identification with the landscape and tradition-stream to which I belong.[223]

The growing nucleus of his experience is the "symbolic identification" composed of the winding thread of Lovecraft's experience amid the great "tradition-stream" to which he belongs. The delicacy of the wound thread sphere of the past appears in his letter of November 21, 1930, to August Derleth:

> Accident has caused a certain momentary energy-pattern to coagulate for an instant in a negligible corner of limitless space. It calls itself "mankind" and has a certain number of basic needs arising from the chance conditions of its formation.[224]

The oval Dunwich horror is a coagulated "energy-pattern," made of the winding maze of human history, the "tradition-stream" which stretches back into the primal ooze. The journey toward evolved order is coiled within the Dunwich spheroid, a smaller likeness of the great Phoenician Mundane egg, the mythic form of the universe.

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[222] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 297.

[223] Ibid., p. 288.

[224] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, pp. 221-22.

Lovecraft reaches through history into the collective mind of man as he writes in his February 25, 1929, letter to Woodburn Harris:

> Besides the joy of discovering untapped wells in ourselves, there is the joy of capturing another's vision--the sense of expansion and adventure inherent in viewing Nature through a large proportion of the total eyes of mankind. . . . Instead of being merely one person, we have become two persons--and as we assimilate more and more of art, we become, in effect, more and more people all in one; till at length we have the sensation of a sort of identification with our whole civilisation.[225]

Lovecraft's previous story, "The Colour Out of Space," is a fictive record of his self-recovery that records a gathering into a nexus of the energy in Lovecraft's personal memories. In "The Dunwich Horror," Lovecraft grows his oval of energy by "capturing another's vision." The Dunwich narrative is the logical step beyond "The Colour Out of Space," because Lovecraft's mind expands as he views nature "through a large proportion of the total eyes of mankind." The Dunwich oval with its many eyes is the physical emblem of Lovecraft's mind, with its "symbolic identification with the landscape and tradition-stream to which I belong."[226] The multiplication of personality leading to "a sort of identification with our whole civilisation" is realized in the physical growth of the Dunwich anomaly.

Lovecraft suggests the importance to himself of such a mental arrangement of energy as he writes on Febru-

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[225] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 300.

[226] Ibid., p. 288.

ary 25, 1929, to Woodburn Harris:

> Colour means nothing to a colour-blind man, nor art to a calloused, undernourished or insensitive spirit. In order to see, one must first possess eyes. . . . Let us see where [one] gets his art-pleasure--his pleasure at seeing the crystallised revelation of another man's purely personal vision. Well,--for one thing, the sight of the other man's vision, with its emphasis on the personally selective element, tends to bring out his own subconscious memories of kindred aspects of vision--that is, to drag up to consciousness impressions received and retained in the subconscious, but never before realised. This means the discovery of something new and unexpected in oneself--always a highly pleasurable phenomenon, and possessing a kind of dramatic vividness akin to that of some glimpse from an hypothetical previous incarnation. The new-found memory was always at the back of the mind, hence has the elusive charm of vague familiarity. Yet because it was never before consciously registered, it has all the striking fascination of absolute newness as well. The work of art has enlarged our supply of conscious memory-wealth--has shown us to be richer than we thought we were. It has, in truth, enriched and developed us. This enrichment is permanent, because the rising to consciousness of a new type of vision enables the spectator to exercise this new type in his subsequent contacts with Nature. We see and feel more in nature from having assimilated works of authentic art.[227]

The process of Lovecraft's artistic metamorphosis is outlined in his own words. The personal dimension of "his own subconscious memories" is realized as the material from the past floats to the surface of his mind as Lovecraft enters into "the joy of capturing another's vision." This process of amalgamation makes Lovecraft richer, as his personal memories are fused with the thought of the historical past in an ordered entity. The assimilation of history forms the maze of mental evolution, of which the Dunwich oval is the

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[227] Ibid., p. 299.

tightly wound embodiment and the Whateley diary the chronicle.

Lovecraft describes his aesthetic and intellectual needs in a letter of February 27, 1931, to Frank Belknap Long:

> What we want from life, beyond animal gratification, is a mixture of symbolic ego-expansion, beauty-rhythm, recapture of lost moods or experience, curiosity-gratification, & adventurous expectancy regarding wonders which the future may have in store. The ego-expansion demand usually includes subtle transcendings of the limitations of time, space, and natural law; things which only fantasy can supply. This fantasy may be either religious fakery or conscious art; and I certainly prefer the latter. Candidly, I think a Yog-Sothoth in whom one does not pretend to believe, is less puerile than a Yahovah or Jesus or Buddha in whom one does pretend to believe.[228]

The egg is the "ego-expansion" device Lovecraft uses to transcend time. The wish to control time corresponds to Wilbur's attempt to find the correct formula to clear the earth for the "Old Ones" who held the earth long before. Lovecraft's wish to clear away the established order appears in his letter of October 17, 1930, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> I think I have the actual cosmic feeling very strongly. In fact, I know that my most poignant emotional experiences are those which concern the lure of unplumbed space, the terror of the encroaching outer void, & the struggle of the ego to transcend the known & established order of time, (time, indeed, above all else, & nearly always in a backward direction) space, matter, force, geometry, & natural law in general.[229]

Lovecraft wants to wipe out all laws and processes that cur-

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[228] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 308.

[229] Ibid., p. 197.

tail the development of his own mental world, and his "cosmic feeling" is a wish to escape the world of reality. Lovecraft builds of his mental substance and assimilated energy a living fortress of gray matter, a circular battlement, the Dunwich horror.

He writes on November 21, 1930, to August Derleth:

> Some people--a very few, perhaps--are naturally cosmic in outlook, just as others are naturally "of and for" the earth. I am myself less exclusively cosmic than Klarkash-Ton and Wandrei; in that I recognize the impossibility of any correlation of the individual and the universal without the immediate visible world as a background--or a starting-place for a system of outward-extending points of reference. I cannot think of any individual as existing except as part of a pattern--and the pattern's most visible and tangible areas are of course the individual's immediate environment; the soil and culture-stream from which he springs, and the milieu of ideas, impressions, traditions, landscapes, and architecture through which he must necessarily peer in order to reach the "outside." This explains the difference between my Dunwich and Colour Out of Space and Smith's Satampra Zeiros or Wandrei's Red Brain. I begin with the individual and the soil and think outward--appreciating the sensation of spatial and temporal liberation only when I can scale it against the known terrestrial scene. . . . With me, the very quality of being cosmically sensitive breeds an exaggerated attachment to the familiar and the immediate--Old Providence, the woods and hills, the ancient ways and thoughts.[230]

The pattern of "outward-extending points of reference" which centers in Lovecraft's environment, "the soil and culture-stream from which he springs" forms the spherical coagulation of energy within the ordered realm of Lovecraft's microcosm.

The oval entity is an essentialization of Lovecraft's

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[230] Ibid., pp. 220-21.

mind and experience. Lovecraft writes of his identification with a "system of outward-extending points of reference" in his letter of November 9, 1929, to Woodburn Harris:

> When the humanistic man asks of life, "what do I get out of it?" he instinctively includes in that "I" whatever is, for him, associated with personality; & in more cases than not, his family & his race come into this larger associative ego somehow. He cannot feel personally placed without reference to the background which gives his thoughts & feelings the illusion of motivation & significance. We may say that every man's ego--the thing he fights to exalt & preserve, is a sphere with his body at the center, & with its density rapidly diminishing as it extends outward. He cares intensely for his individual self; a little less so for his immediate family; a little less so for his social group; a little less so for his nation or race-stock. . . . Of course, the individual ego is at the base of it all--altruism as a principle is a myth & a joke--but in the course of nature the ego cannot avoid having symbolic associations with its environment; associations less & less poignant as distance increases, but all very vivid & real & practically motivating to the man of highly evolved personality & sensitive imagination.[231]

The concentric circles wound within the spheroid are the absorptions by Lovecraft of the substance of his environment. Lovecraft molds a construct out of his history, both personal and cultural. He writes on October 19, 1929, to James F. Morton:

> I do like to have myself down on paper and know just where I stand in relation to the stone wall'd rolling meads and white farmhouse gables of the Arcadian realm of Western Rhode-Island. The visible beauty and dignity of a settled, aesthetically integrated region takes on a fresh degree of poignancy and motivating stimulation when one can feel one's own hereditary blood-stream coursing through the scene as though the veins of some vast and exquisite organism. One can say not only, "I love these waving

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[231] Ibid., pp. 83-84.

> grasses and towering elms and brook-threaded valleys and stone-wall'd farmsteads and white village steeples," but "these waving grasses and towering elms and brook-threaded valleys and stone-wall'd farmsteads and white village steeples ARE ME, MYSELF, I, THE CONSCIOUS EGO!" And what more can any guy ask than that? Isn't all art an effort of the artist to identify himself with the burning beauty and strangeness he depicts? Why, then, reject such identification as Nature provides?[232]

The Dunwich horror is Lovecraft's aesthetic emblem of himself, a symbolic portrait of his mystical union with his beloved Rhode Island countryside. Lovecraft uses "such identification as Nature provides" in his construction of the Dunwich horror, and his love of his environment appears in the movement of the horror about the countryside. He writes to James F. Morton on November 8, 1929, concerning his youth:

> In Quinsnicket I chiefly haunted a region quite newly opened up--a deep wooded ravine, on whose banks one may spy the picturesque ivy'd ruin of a forgotten mill. Ah, me! I well recall that mill when it was standing--but it hath gone the way of all simple, beauteous things.[233]

Lovecraft writes to Frank Belknap Long on February 27, 1931:

> Now--except for the mercifully spared park area which I still haunt as of old on drowsy summer afternoons, & which fortunately includes one of my beloved ravines--the old country-side is almost gone.[234]

Lovecraft's "beloved ravines" are counterparts for the Cold Spring Glen of his Dunwich narrative, into which the entity retreats before its ascent of Sentinel Hill.

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[232] Ibid., p. 31. [233] Ibid., p. 57.

[234] Ibid., p. 318.

August Derleth writes of the love of the past exhibited in Lovecraft's letters and fiction:

> Lovecraft lived very much in the past throughout all his life. . . . He abhorred change more than the average individual. . . . Perhaps the past, with its family ties--the sheltering mother, the maternal grandfather and uncle--represented a kind of security to him, a security that was shaken by the increased pace of the modern world and the great rapidity of change with its destruction of the old buildings and streets Lovecraft loved because of their association with his childhood and the past beyond that time.[235]

Lovecraft confirms Derleth's comment, and gives a hint in his letter of February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird of what he does to ameliorate his longing for the past:

> Always partial to antiquity, I allowed myself to originate a sort of one-man cult of retrospective suspiration. Realistic analysis, favoured by history and by diffusive scientific leanings which now embraced Darwin, Haeckel, Huxley, and various other pioneers, was checked by my aversion to realistic literature. In fiction I was devoted to the fantasy of Poe and his congeners.[236]

Lovecraft moves to protect his world, through the "one-man cult of retrospective suspiration," the coagulation of energy in which he stores his past. He protects his world from the ravages of rapid change. In his letter to Baird, Lovecraft writes concerning the Puritans:

> Although holding the pompous and theocratic philosophy of the Puritans in the most abysmal contempt, I believe in an honour and fastidiousness of conduct which makes me act like a Puritan and earn the name of Puritan from all who are not of that dull breed of cattle themselves. I am myself--alone--as the

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[235] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Some Notes on a Non-entity (London: Villiers Publications Ltd., 1963), p. 14.

[236] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 302.

> Bard makes crookback'd Richard say, All schools of thought I hold in equal contempt.[237]

In defense of his world, Lovecraft stands alone against the world of prosaic realism. He uses art as a weapon against the world that surrounds him. Lovecraft writes to the Gallomo on October 6, 1921:

> It is not improbable that all art is merely an unsatisfactory substitute for physical supremacy; the imaginative gratification of that will to power which is frustrated in the objective attainment of its objects. It may be that the finest work of the aesthetic fancy is but a poor makeshift for the victory of one vigorous tribe or individual over another.[238]

Through his art, Lovecraft seeks a "physical supremacy" over the inimical, modern world. As his letter to the Gallomo continues, Lovecraft writes of a wished-for military career--a career he carries out in his art, the "unsatisfactory substitute for physical supremacy:"

> Were I stronger, I might have gone to West Point, adopted a martial career, and found in war a supreme delight which scribbling can but faintly adumbrate. At heart I think I despise the aesthete and prefer the warrior.[239]

Lovecraft's need to control his environment is a factor in his love and veneration of the martial Teutonic races of northern Europe; the letter to the Gallomo continues:

> I am essentially a Teuton and barbarian; a Xanthochroic Nordic from the damp forests of Germany or Scandinavia, and kin to the giant chalk-white conquerors of the cursed effeminate Celts. I am a son of Odin and brother to Hengest and Horsa . . . Grrr . . .

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[237] Ibid., p. 298. [238] Ibid., p. 155.

[239] Ibid., pp. 155-56.

> Give me a drink of hot blood with a Celtic foe's skull as a beaker! Rule, Britannia . . . GOD SAVE THE KING![240]

Lovecraft's discussion of the Scandinavian branch of the Teutonic races affords a glimpse of his motivation for identifying with this warlike people. He writes on August 6, 1931, to Robert E. Howard:

> I have a great admiration for the Scandinavians, since the bulk of them kept to their ancient ways much later than any other Teutonic race. They are a link between our present and our past, whether we be one of themselves, or of a Teutonic tribe whose absorption and conversion came at an earlier date. Thor, Odin, Freyer, Asgard, and Valhalla are behind us all--even though our Saxon side broke away sooner than our Danish side. I can still get more of a kick out of the names and deeds of the old Northern gods than out of any other religion. As a Roman, I am a philosophic sceptic, just as in actual modern life. The religion of Greece and Rome, though a thing of exquisite beauty, grips only my aesthetic emotions, as indeed was the case with most Romans of mature cultivation in the late republican age. The frosty blond deities of the north, on the other hand, seem to my mind to be curiously woven into the elements of terrestrial and celestial Nature; so that the sound of thunder evokes images of a great blue-eyed being in Berserk fury, whilst a cold winter twilight calls up all sorts of images of shadowy shapes marching imperiously in some Northerly middle region just beyond the earth.[241]

Lovecraft's wish to preserve his past is echoed in his love of the Scandinavian peoples' will to cleave to their heritage. He sees their heritage as his own: "Thor, Odin, Freyer, Asgard, and Valhalla are behind us all."

Because "the frosty blond deities of the north . . . seem to my [Lovecraft's] mind to be curiously woven into the

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[240] Ibid., p. 156.

[241] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 394.

elements of terrestrial and celestial Nature," these old gods are personifications of energy: ". . . the sound of thunder evokes images of a great blue-eyes being in Berserk fury." The energy forming these gods in their "Beserk fury" is the energy at the base of the evolutionary spiral. With images of these old gods Lovecraft grasps the primal energy of Nature herself, and in "The Dunwich Horror" he seeks, like the mythic blacksmiths Vulcan and Wayland, to forge force into intelligibility. The evocation in the chill winter twilight scene of "images of shadowy shapes marching imperiously in some northerly middle region just beyond the earth" is like the gods of the Dunwich narrative, the Great Old Ones who want to reclaim the earth.

The power of energy in forming myth is echoed in a Lovecraft letter dated February, 1924, to Frank Belknap Long:

> Now it is natural to admire strength--to admire the concentrated displays of cosmick energy which produce variety and determine the course of events, and which therefore must be the original sources of all dramatick situations and potent magnificences. Such strength must be spontaneous and light-hearted, for reflection builds nothing, and it must be martial and ruthless if it is to live up to itself as a purging, cleansing, regenerating force. Where but in the Teuton will you find its grand apex? Who, but the Teuton has swept into every dying culture in Europe and revivified it with a verve and abandon which must evermore be beautiful because of what it implied and accomplished?[242]

Lovecraft's love of a martial career unites with his art to meet the adversary of primal energy. In Lovecraft's aesthetic, the role of the artist is to convert such "cos-

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[242] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 290.

mick energy . . . into dramatick situations and potent magnificences." Raw primordial energy is "a purging, cleansing, regenerating force," because only with such pure force can he build and integrate his potent entity perfectly. And only in the forthright martiality of the Teuton, Lovecraft feels, will he find the power for the completion of his task. Just as "the Teuton has swept into every dying culture in Europe and revivified it with a verve and abandon," so Lovecraft's acculturated composite ego sweeps forth on its path of purgation through the wretched Massachusetts countryside filled with degenerate inhabitants.

For Lovecraft the aesthetic impulse is a crusade for victory. He writes on December 11, 1923, to Frank Belknap Long:

> To my simple old mind, art is simply a more or less unsatisfactory substitute for real life; and when we consider life and action, deeds and conquests, governments and administrations, what race since the Romans can compete with us [the Teutons]? Did we not pour down out of our native forests and reclaim a degenerate Europe where civilisation, under effete Mediterranean dregs, was dying out? My God! The very name of France comes from our huge yellow-bearded Franks, and in Spain they call a gentleman an hidalgo--hijo del goda--son of the goth--the huge, blue-eyed, conquering Nordick! Fancy a world without its Clovis--or its Charlemagne--the Teuton Karlomann, and the Vikings and Norsemen--ho for the frozen seas and the epick of sleet and blood, strange lands and far wonders![243]

Just as major figures of the Teutonic peoples carved order out of the chaos of Europe in the Middle Ages, so Lovecraft carves an order out of the chaos of the modern world he

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[243] Ibid., p. 274.

fears and despises. For him, the aesthetic impulse is a warlike struggle against the principle of disorder. His letter to Long continues:

> Greenland, Iceland, Normandy, England, Sicily--the world was ours [i.e., controlled by the Nordic people], and the mountainous billows heaved with the Cyclopean rhythm of our barbarick chants and shouts of mastery! Art? By Woden, were not our deeds and battles, our victories and empires, all parts of a poem more wonderful than ought which Homer cou'd strike from a Grecian lyre?[244]

Lovecraft respects strength--the strength it takes to face "mountainous billows" of chaos in the maze of his mind. The facing of inner energies is Lovecraft's artistic equivalent for the battles the Teutons fought with their enemies and the elements. In his fiction, such "victories and empires [are] all parts of a poem" about a battle in Massachusetts.

Lovecraft credits the carving from chaos of the West to the Teutons. He writes concerning World War I on December 23, 1917, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> If all the allied nations were as thoroughly Teutonic as Prussia, the end would be nearer and happier. Nothing can withstand the might of the Teuton--he is the logical successor of the Roman in power. Teutonic blood snatched Britain from the Celt and made England the greatest force in all civilisation. Teutonic blood conquered the Western wilderness and gave America an instant place amongst the great nations of the globe.[245]

Part of the basis for Lovecraft's love of England is England's heritage of Teutonic might and courage. This same northern Germanic strength tamed the wilderness of America. Love-

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[244] Ibid. [245] Ibid., pp. 53-54.

craft sees the dilution of the Teuton bloodlines as the re-admission of chaos into the amphitheater of civilization, as his letter to Kleiner continues:

> But this blood has become so extensively and tragically diluted, that the non-German Teutons may well look with concern to their future. The grotesque fallacy of "The Great American Melting Pot" may yet be brought home to the people in one of the most tear-stained pages of their history.[246]

The antidote to chaos is the maintenance of bloodlines of energy, folkways, concepts, and traditions from the past. He writes on November 6, 1930, to James F. Morton:

> No one thinks or feels or appreciates or lives a mental-emotional-imaginative life at all, except in terms of the artificial reference-points supply'd him by the enveloping body of race-tradition and heritage into which he is born. We form an emotionally realisable picture of the external world, and an emotionally endurable set of illusions as to values and direction in existence, solely and exclusively through the arbitrary concepts and folkways bequeathed to us through our traditional culture-stream. Without this stream around us we are absolutely adrift in a meaningless and irrelevant chaos which has not the least capacity to give us any satisfaction apart from the trifling animal ones. . . . Without our nationality--that is, our culture-grouping--we are merely wretched nuclei of agony and bewilderment in the midst of alien and directionless emptiness.[247]

The Dunwich horror is Lovecraft's acculturated, collective ego, made "of the artificial reference-points supply'd him by the enveloping body of race-tradition and heritage into which he is born." The principal conflict of the story is Lovecraft's war against "the meaningless and irrelevant

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[246] Ibid., p. 54.

[247] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 207.

chaos" that surrounds his ordered cosmos.

The struggle against chaos occupies all of Lovecraft's life and energy, as he writes to James F. Morton on November 6, 1930:

> It is <u>because</u> the cosmos is meaningless that we must secure our individual illusions of values, direction, and interest by upholding the artificial streams which gave us such worlds of salutary illusion. That is, since nothing means anything in itself, we must preserve the proximate and arbitrary background which makes things around us seem as if they did mean something.[248]

Lovecraft grapples with meaninglessness itself, as he fights to uphold "the artificial streams which gave . . . [him his] worlds of salutary illusion." This world of "salutary illusion" centers about England, with its Teutonic heritage.

His letter to Morton continues:

> In other words, we are either Englishmen or nothing whatever. Apart from our inherited network of English ideas, memories, emotions, beliefs, points of view, etc., we are simply bundles of nerve-centres without materials for coherent functioning. Unless there exists an English world for us to live in, our total equipment of interests, perspectiveness, standards, aspirations, memories, tastes, and so on--everything, in short, that we really live for--at once becomes utterly valueless and meaningless and uncorrelated; a nightmare jumble of unsatisfiable outreachings, without objective linkages or justification, and forming only a source of illimitable misery. Of supreme importance, then, is the secure preservation of an English world around us.[249]

Lovecraft enshrines himself within a world of English order by applying the entire force of his cultural ego in a move against the "Great American Melting Pot" which invades and,

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[248] Ibid., p. 208. [249] Ibid., pp. 208-09.

cancer-like, destroys Lovecraft's world of "salutary illusion," which forms "everything, in short, that we really live for."

Throughout history, encroaching chaos takes the form of the invading people who are the enemies of Lovecraft's Nordics. He writes on July 20, 1930, to Robert E. Howard:

> There may have been some of the squat Mongoloids now represented by the Lapps, for it is known that they once reached down extensively into Western Europe; being probably the stock amongst whom the witch cult (a fertility-religion arising in a pastoral and pre-agricultural age) and rite of the witches' sabbath took their source. . . . The inevitable probability is that all the Nordics met with this old Mongoloid stock at a very early date, when it shared the continent with the northward-spreading Mediterraneans and with the remnants of other paleolithic and neolithic races now lost to history, and that after the ensuing conquest the defeated Mongoloids took to deep woods and caves, and survived a long time as malignantly vindictive foes of their huge blond conquerors--carrying on a guerrilla harrassing and sinking so low in the anthropological scale that they became bywords of dread and repulsion.[250]

The Nordic conquest of these Mongoloid "bywords of dread and repulsion" is enacted in the Massachusetts countryside, as the oval aggregation makes war on the degenerate inhabitants of Dunwich, the animalistic destroyers of his New England country that symbolize chaos--the adversary facing Lovecraft at every turn. He writes to Robert E. Howard on October 4, 1930:

Scholars now recognize that all through history a

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[250] Ibid., pp. 161-62.

> secret cult of degenerate orgiastic nature-worshippers, furtively recruited from the peasantry and sometimes from decadent characters of a more select origin, has existed throughout northwestern Europe. . . . [It] is customarily called simply "the witch cult" by modern anthropologists. . . . Originally it seems almost conclusively to have been simply the normal religion of the prehistoric Mongoloids who preceded the Nordics and Mediterraneans in Northwestern Europe. It is based on the idea of fertility, as worshipped by a stock-raising race of pre-agricultural nomads, and its salient features from the very first were semi-annual ritualistic gatherings at the breeding seasons of the flocks and herds.[251]

In "The Dunwich Horror," Lovecraft evolves upward through the gamut of history by way of the personae of Wilbur Whateley and Henry Armitage. His story begins with the procuring of the cattle, which corresponds to the "semi-annual ritualistic gatherings at the breeding seasons of the flocks and herds." The growth of the semi-saurian, and his metamorphosis into the highly evolved Armitage, moves Lovecraft up the historical-evolutional continuum. As he evolves upward through the maze of history, Lovecraft stores historical experience within the ever-expanding oval. Only after Lovecraft has evolved past a certain point in history, marked by the death of Wilbur Whateley, is he able to turn around and face the unevolved invaders of his gradually created mental microcosm. He writes James F. Morton on January 18, 1931:

> The pressure of the rabble is both individual and collective. . . . The normal reaction on the part of the superior class is graduated opposition--mild and partial toward the individuals, who eventually

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[251] Ibid., p. 178.

> succeed in their climb (and without bad results to the culture) after a refining and probationary period, but very determined toward the massed herd.[252]

The "massed herd" is the chaos out of which Lovecraft evolves on his journey toward historical perfection. The necessary energy for this project is absorbed in the blood of the anemic "dull breed of cattle,"[253] the commoners on and around the Whateley homestead that Lovecraft's expanding ego feeds upon.

But the enemies of Lovecraft's English culture are doing their worst, as he writes to Morton on October 30, 1929:

> I don't forsee an instant age of anguish and barbarism--but neither do I forsee anything sufficiently favourable to Anglo-Saxon culture to justify any attitude but one of hostility in the real friends of high-potential human life and expression in our civilisation.[254]

He writes Woodburn Harris on November 9, 1929, that he believes New England is almost the last bastion of culture in the United States:

> The way it looks to me is that American civilisation is almost extinct, but genuine as far as it does survive--in certain groups of people all over the country, & in certain geographical areas, especially Eastern Virginia & parts of New England. What conservative people are deploring & fighting is not our ancestral culture at all, but a new & offensive parvenu-barbarism based on quantity, machinery, speed, commerce, industry, wealth, & luxurious ostentation,

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[252] Ibid., p. 270.

[253] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 298.

[254] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, pp. 53-54.

> which has sprung up among us like a noxious weed since the rise of the tasteless multitude in the 1830's. It has no more to do with our civilisation--the main stream of English & classic thought & feeling established in these colonies by over two centuries of continuous life, 1607-1820--than have the barbarians of Polynesia or the Sioux Indians. It is simply a plague to stamp out if we can, & to flee from if we can't.[255]

This new style of "offensive parvenu-barbarism" is a modern-day equivalent of the Mongoloid enemies of the Teutons, and it is two centuries of continuous deposits of English culture in the new world that Lovecraft is trying to protect from the cultural anarchy of barbarous industrialism. Such cultural anarchy, Lovecraft writes, "is simply a plague to stamp out if we can, & to flee from if we can't." This hit-and-run pattern of activity appears in "The Dunwich Horror." The "noxious weed" of the new plague is "stamp[ed] out" by the horror as it moves along its inexorable path. But since Lovecraft cannot complete his project of destroying the new barbarism, the plague is one "to flee from" in a grand exit at story's end.

Lovecraft attempts through his fictive "catharsis of aesthetic endeavour"[256] to cleanse the earth of the new industrial barbarism and to begin anew with the kind of calm, Anglicized culture that he would no doubt choose for the entire world. This cultural restoration and state of mind is suggested by Lovecraft's letter of February 27, 1931, to Frank Belknap Long:

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[255] Ibid., p. 58. [256] Ibid., p. 436.

> The thing I look for is harmony, sincerity, integrity, & inviolateness of personality. I look for the maximum results of an evolution which tends to emancipate man from animal caprice . . . and all those inherently unbeautiful & unintelligent excesses, distortions, . . . & futilities which spring from weakness, disease, underdevelopment, false training, or lack of proper discipline.[257]

The culture-qualities which Lovecraft seeks to foment and defend are harmony, integrity, and above all, "inviolateness of personality." Lovecraft seeks those qualities as he evolves up and away from the undisciplined excesses at the base of the continuum. The swirling chaos at the lower end of the evolutionary spectrum remains his dread enemy, as he writes in the letter of February 27, 1931, to Long:

> By strength I mean simply the power to escape from the sway of animal caprice & slavery to the most trifling vicissitudes of environment & illusion. Freedom, integrity of personality.[258]

Self control and the freedom that comes from inviolable personal integrity are Lovecraft's evolutionary goal. Lovecraft attributes the quality of personal integrity to his Teutonic forbears, as he writes in a letter of January 18, 1931, to James F. Morton:

> What we mean by Nordic "superiority" is simply conformity to those character-expectations which are natural and ineradicable among us. We are not so naive as to confuse this relative "superiority" (we ought to call it "conformity" or "suitability" instead) with . . . the absolute biological superiority which we recognize in the higher races as a whole as distinguished from . . . other primitive human and humanoid types both living and extinct.[259]

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[257] Ibid., p. 321 [258] Ibid., p. 322.

[259] Ibid., p. 277.

Lovecraft's purposeful Nordics, the blond giants who inhabit his mind, stand ready at the top of the evolutionary continuum to fend off any less-evolved specimens who assault Lovecraft's world of order. Lovecraft practiced in his daily life the philosophy of self-determination reflected in his letter to Morton, for he writes to Frank Belknap Long on October 17, 1930:

> Of course, my position is an unfortunate one, and I sincerely sympathise with all others similarly engulfed; but where does the blame come in? . . . Hell! We may be unfortunate, but why get maudlin or whiny? It isn't Nordic to get hysterical about fate. The blond-bearded warrior faces pain and the twilight of the Gods with a calm visage and a knowledge that Thor and Odin will themselves perish someday.[260]

Through catharsis, Lovecraft, in the personages of Armitage and the ovoid horror, faces the chaos of the modern world with a "calm visage." Lovecraft cannot wipe out the degenerate rabble and rebuild English civilization. Like Thor and the other Norse gods, he must perish with his work unfinished.

Chaos impressed Lovecraft's mind at an early age because he stood alone. He writes concerning his childhood to Maurice Moe on April 5, 1931:

> Some inner force set me at once singing "God Save the King" and taking the opposite side of everything I read in American-biased child books on the Revolution . . . Rule, Britannia! Nor can I say that any major change has taken place in my emotions. As I was then, so am I today. All my deep emotional loyalties are with the race and the empire rather than with the American branch.[261]

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[260] Ibid., p. 190. [261] Ibid., pp.362-63.

Lovecraft carried his love of English culture into the American enemy's camp. Alone as he was Lovecraft felt most at home clinging to his English culture. He writes on January 18, 1931, to James F. Morton:

> I recognize myself as one of a vast number of approximately similar organick entities on this planet, and realise that my mental contentment depends largely on my imaginative adjustment to the pattern form'd by the history and folkways of my group. Does that sound like eccentrick isolation? Rule, Britannia! God Save the King![262]

In his Dunwich narrative, Lovecraft secures himself within the bulwark of his culture-ego that does his bidding, because he understands that his "mental contentment depends largely on my imaginative adjustment to the pattern form'd by the history and folkways of my group," the pattern of the Dunwich oval. Behind England stretches the Teutonic heritage that Lovecraft identifies with. Lovecraft writes on May 13, 1923, to Frank Belknap Long:

> Nothing must disturb my undiluted Englishry--God save the King! I am naturally a Nordic--a chalk-white, bulky Teuton of the Scandinavian or North-German forests--a Viking--a berserk killer--a predatory rover of the blood of Hengest and Horsa--a conqueror of Celts and mongrels and founder of Empires--a son of the thunder and the Arctic winds, and brother to the frosts and auroras--a drinker of foemen's blood from new-picked skulls--a friend of the mountain buzzards and feeder of seacoast vultures--a blood beast of eternal snows and frozen oceans--a prayer to Thor and Woden and Alfadur, and raucous shouter of Niffleheim--a comrade of the wolves, and rider of nightmares--aye--I speak truly--for was I not born with yellow hair and blue eyes--the latter not turning dark till I was nearly two, and the former lasting till I was over five? Ho,

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[262] Ibid., p. 279.

for the hunting and fishing of Valhalla![263]

The vigor and oneness of purpose in the affirmation is like the power of the Dunwich horror as it wreaks havoc among the degenerates around Sentinel Hill. Lovecraft attempts to cleanse New England of its lower forms of humanity and reinstate the refined culture of England upon the Colonial shores of America. In his letter of April 1, 1927, to James F. Morton, Lovecraft writes:

> If I could create an ideal world, it would be an England with the fire of the Elizabethans, the correct taste of the Georgians, and the refinement and pure ideals of the Victorians.[264]

Lovecraft protects his "undiluted Englishry," the "ideal world," by containing it in his plasmic ego structure which crushes his enemies, the degenerates of Dunwich.

Lovecraft marks the lines of battle in his letter to Morton of October 17, 1930. He airs the conflict in "The Dunwich Horror":

> Obviously, we whose instinctive ideas of excellence centre in bravery, mastery, and unbrokenness, and whose ultimate fury of contempt is for the passive, non-resistant, sad-eyed cringer and schemer and haggler, are the least fitted of all races for the harbourage of a Judao-Syriac faith and standards--and so the whole course of history proved; with Christianity always a burden, handicap, misfit, and unfulfilled mockery upon our assertive, Thor-Squared, Woden-driven shoulders. We have mouthed lying tributes to meekness and brotherhood under Gothic roofs whose very pinnacled audacity bespeaks our detestation of lowliness and our love for power and strength and beauty and have spouted hogsheads full of hot air

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[263] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 227-28.

[264] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 123.

> about "principle" and ethics and restraint at the same time that our hobnailed boots have kicked around in utter loathing the broken Jews whose resistance is based upon these principles.[265]

Facing each other are the opposing principles of activity and passivity; oneness of purpose faces weak indirection. The single-mindedness of the Nordic advances to meet Lovecraft's enemies, the cringing adherents to Christianity. These "hobnailed boots" are worn by Lovecraft's Teutonic warriors from Valhalla, the heroes standing in a phalanx of "Thor-Squared, Woden-driven shoulders." Their boots form the Dunwich harrow from the Judaic mythology of the Old Testament Book of Job:

> Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the farrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee? 39:10[266]

For, Jewish as the Old Testament is, its mythology of a vengeful God smiting his people appealed strongly to Lovecraft's sense of vengeance in a chaotic world. Such a mythology combines with the fervor of the Teutons as Lovecraft writes on December 11, 1923, to Frank Belknap Long:

> Ho! Yaaah! We are men! We are big men! We are strong men, for we make men do what we want. Let no man balk us, for our gods are big gods, and our arms and our swords are tough! Hrrr! The stones of towns fall down when we come, and crows love us for the feast of dead men we give them. The lands shake with the thump of our feet, and hills grow flat when we stride up and down them. The floods are dry when we have drunk them, and no beasts are

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[265] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 45.

[266] Lovecraft, "Suggestions for a Reading Guide," p. 34.

left when we have killed and gorged.[267]

Yet another religion is compounded in the configuration of energy known as the Dunwich horror. When at the age of six, Lovecraft read Bulfinch's Age of Fable, he came upon Bulfinch's discussion of Juggernaut, the Hindu avatar of either Vishnu or Siva:

> Whether the worshippers of Juggernaut are to be reckoned among the followers of Vishnu or Siva, our authorities differ. The temple stands near the shore, about three hundred miles south-west of Calcutta. The idol is a carved block of wood, with a hideous face, painted black, and a distended, blood-red mouth. On festival days the throne of the image is placed on a tower sixty feet high, moving on wheels. Six long ropes are attached to the tower, by which the people draw it along. The priests and their attendants stand round the throne on the tower, and occasionally turn to the worshippers with songs and gestures. While the tower moves along numbers of the devout worshippers throw themselves on the ground, in order to be crushed by the wheels, and the multitude shout its approbation of the act, as a pleasing sacrifice to the idol.[268]

Lovecraft's early exposure to this image allows it to join the dark recesses of his mind, to later emerge as a component of the Dunwich horror. Several of the physical features are similar to those of the horror: the idol with the distended mouth coincides with the face atop the horror, while the ropes along the sides of the scaffold parallel those pushed close together at the sides of the monster. And the function of both contrivances is the same: the

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[267] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 274-75.

[268] Thomas Bulfinch, The Age of Fable (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc. n.d.), p. 339.

crushing of persons lower on the scale of being than the level of the priest or warrior in control.

A motive for this synergy of mythological influences in the alembic of Lovecraft's art appears in a letter of February, 1924, to Frank Belknap Long:

> That career is all which makes the monotony of life worth enduring--the divine thrill of conscious power, the power to move great things and control the destinies of nations. No puny imitation, no secondhand bookish thrill, has a millionth of the genuine thrill of the strong man moving multitudinous destinies and walking by the side of fate as brother and deputy.[269]

Lovecraft's aesthetic creation is as close as he can come to "the divine thrill of conscious power," for his phalanx of Nordic heroes walks "by the side of fate as brother and deputy." The prototype of these heroic blond-bearded giants is in the Fritz Lang "Siegfried" film made in 1923, which Lovecraft viewed in 1925 in New York City. He writes in a letter dated September 12, 1925:

> The great film of "Siegfried" . . . is a stupendous spectacle in which the scattered myths of the Niebelung ring from the early Volsung Saga to the Wagnerian tetralogy are fused into one concise and coherent whole, & shewn to the accompaniment of a mighty orchestral composite of Wagnerian musick. . . . As for the film--it was an ecstasy and a delight to be remembered forever! It was the very inmost soul of the immortal & unconquerable blond Nordic, embodied in the shining warrior of light, great Siegfried, slayer of monsters & enslaver of kings.[270]

Lovecraft sees the model for the heroic occupants of his earth-cleansing phalanx in Siegfried, the hero of this 1923

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[269] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 291.

[270] Thomas, p. 88.

Lang spectacular. The letter continues:

> The musick, too, was of ineffable inspiration. Insensible as I am to musick in general, I cannot escape the majesty of Wagner, whose genius caught the deepest spirit of those ancestral yellow-bearded gods of war & dominion before whom my own soul bows as before no others--Woden, Thor, Freyor, and the vast Alfadur--frosty blue-eyed giants worthy of the adoration of a conquering people![271]

Here are the yellow-bearded giants of Teutonic legend, the heroic defenders of Lovecraft's evolved mental world.

Lovecraft sees Teutonic strength as promoter and protector of Western civilization, much of which he believes came from Teutonic and ancient Greek influences. He writes to James F. Morton on October 30, 1929:

> As for the really important sources of our civilisation--I think we can spot most of 'em by including Teutonic and Celto-Druidic cultures for deep blood influences, and Greece and Rome, relayed by France, for intellectual and emotional surfaces. . . . Back of Greece and Rome the stream gets damn thin, and there isn't one whose absence would change us much. Greece got more from the Minoan or Cretan culture than from anywhere else, though fragments from Egypt, Assyria, and Phoenicia are not absent. . . . It is only as collected parts of our own English stream that the contributions of the earlier or alien streams have any meaning for us. We owe seven-eighths of our civilisation to Greece--yet for all that we'd be fishes out of water in Periclean Athens. What we cherish is not Hellenism but Anglo-Hellenism.[272]

Here is the evolutionary journey of Lovecraft. Through a literary absorption of history, he has absorbed and stored in his mind the main thrust of man's historical movement from Phoenician and Assyrian times to the present-day

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[271] Ibid.

[272] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 51.

dominance of Anglo-Hellenism. This evolved eclecticism of "collected parts" of history appears in the excerpt from the diary in "The Dunwich Horror" in which Wilbur writes that "I shall have to learn all the angles of the planes and all the formulas between the Yr and the Nhhngr." Here is the maze as history, for Lovecraft sees history as a gradual evolution upward out of the primordial ooze. The source of "Yr" is Ur of the Chaldees, and that of "the Nhhngr" is the Nibelungenlied, a literary high point of Teutonic heroism. The learning of the planes and angles refers to the absorption and storage of history and its traditions. This history-labyrinth is the substance and shape of Lovecraft's mind, the collective ego seen as the monstrous egg. The maze of angles and planes forms the metamorphosis from ancient or prehistoric times toward that higher plane of Teutonic culture paralleled by the flow of energy from the semi-saurian Wilbur Whateley to the older, evolved Henry Armitage.

Once Lovecraft achieves this high degree of evolutionary development, he turns to defend his personal, evolved world from the invasion of his universe by the horde of degenerates. But these uncivilized degenerates are not his only enemies. Lovecraft writes to James F. Morton on November 6, 1930, of other enemies within the modern world:

> But we now have deteriorative agencies--mechanisation, foreigners, etc.--more hostile to continuity than anything which the disunited Hellenic world had to face; so that our ability to preserve a culture of satisfying significance depends greatly upon

> the exact degree of closeness of our linkage to ancestral sources. We need the added and positive factors of being consciously and symbolically so, in order to offer the tangible resistance (a vigorous back pull, and not mere inertia) necessary to check decadence. When we fight the ideal of quantity and wealth, we must have the positive English ideal of quality and refinement to pit against it. We must have a rallying point of our emotional life in order to prevent the disorganising influences around us from recrystallising our milieu into definitely hostile and repulsive shapes. It is useless to fight meaningless recrystallisation unless we have a strong hold on the meaningful order behind us, and a solid coordination with the other surviving parts--especially the recognised center and nucleus--of that order. What little of our past we merely passively harbour, we can lose with tragic ease. We must get a firm and virile grip on it--must recognise and cherish it, and seek solidarity with those parts of the world where it is most strongly entrenched.[273]

Lovecraft gets a "firm and virile grip" on his past by shaping it into the containing spheroid, the "recognised center and nucleus" of English refinement. He pits this oval nexus against the barbarism of "the ideal of quantity and wealth" so characteristic of the modern world he despises. Lovecraft only partially succeeds in preventing a certain recrystallisation of his energy into a fearfully repulsive form: the shapes in question are the saurian-like Wilbur Whateley and the oval of the past, the winding maze of Lovecraft's evolutionary alembic. Through these creations, Lovecraft links himself to the ancestral sources that give life to his intellectual, ordered world. He draws the battle lines for a fight to the finish with the invaders of his world in his letter of October 30, 1929, to James F.

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[273] Ibid., pp. 209-10.

Morton:

> I hate and oppose the encroaching machine-barbarism as much as I'd hate and oppose any other alien civilisation that tried to find a foothold on the English soil of Rhode Island or Massachusetts or Maryland or Virginia. I don't expect to keep it off--but at least I don't pretend to like it. I defy, abhor, and repudiate it.[274]

Although Lovecraft cannot "keep it off," he defies and repudiates the "encroaching machine-barbarism" with his synthesis of civilization, the Dunwich horror.

Lovecraft's life is curled within the Dunwich sphere, and the harrowing of Dunwich is an Armageddon or Ragnarok in which he makes a final stand against Minotaural chaos. Only a short time before he composes his Dunwich fiction, he writes to Bernard Dwyer:

> By this time I see pretty well what I'm driving at and how I'm doing it--that I'm a rather one-sided person whose only really burning interests are the past and the unknown or the strange, and whose aestheticism in general is more negative than positive--i.e., a hatred of ugliness rather than an active love of beauty.[275]

His "hatred of ugliness" appears as his motive for a lifelong war against the chaos pressing upon his world. Siegfried, the Germanic prototype of the blond hero-warrior, faces anew his destined deadly foe.

Lovecraft's encounter with chaos is based upon a number of events that occurred early in his life. The final scene of "The Dunwich Horror" opens with the "spectral

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[274] Ibid., p. 52.

[275] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 111.

deepening of the sky's blue" above Sentinel Hill. A Commonplace Book entry points the way to the past:

> Change comes over the sun--shows objects in strange form, perhaps restoring landscape of the past.[276]

As Armitage and the synergic oval stand together atop Sentinel Hill, Lovecraft's evolved bodily form synchronizes with his intellectual ego, the monstrous egg of energy. Lovecraft writes to Clark Ashton Smith on August 2, 1927: "There are really two distinct personalities in me--the cosmic & fantastic on the one hand, & the historical, domestic, & antiquarian on the other hand."[277] Armitage the antiquarian stands with the "cosmic & fantastic" agglutination of mythic heroes from Valhalla, and they join in one last aesthetic utterance, a cry of defiance that echoes through all the years of Lovecraft's existence.

This cry had its first articulation when Lovecraft was young, as he indicates in a letter dated October 4, 1930, to Robert E. Howard:

> When I was three years old, we spent a whole winter at the Guiney home in Auburndale, Mass., and I can still recall how the poetess used to teach me simple rhymes which I would recite standing on a table![278]

The half-musical chant from the top of Sentinel Hill derives some of its meaning from this source. The table-like rock at the summit is a replica of the table upon which the child

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[276] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 26.

[277] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 159.

[278] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 184.

stood to recite poems. This early activity was strong in Lovecraft's memory, because references to it are scattered through his letters. He writes on November 16, 1916, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> At the age of two I was a rapid talker, familiar with the alphabet from my blocks & picture-books, & (which will interest you) absolutely metre-mad! I could not read, but would repeat any poem of simple sort with unfaltering cadence. Mother Goose was my principal classic, & Miss Guiney would continually make me repeat parts of it; not that my rendition was necessarily notable, but because my age lent uniqueness to the performance.[279]

Here is an example of stricture applied to Lovecraft's behavior as a child; Miss Guiney's well-intentioned forcing of the child to enact the ritual of metric recitation amid groups of curious onlookers turned the young Lovecraft inward, away from the tension-filled atmosphere around him. Lovecraft as a child perhaps sensed approval (or its opposite) from Miss Guiney, and resolved on a course of obedience to the rules of order for the future. This simple but traumatic event emerges forty years later in the climax of Lovecraft's most powerful narrative. Lovecraft writes concerning himself in his autobiographical letter to Edwin Baird:

> At the time, indeed, young Lovecraft showed signs of considerable literary progress. Ever a nervous child, he began linguistic experiments at shortly after one, knew his Anglo-Roman alphabet at two, and at 2.5 was wont to astonish the suburban throng [in the Guiney home] . . . with poetic recitations

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[279] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 32-33.

from the dizzy eminence of a table's top.[280]

The "dizzy eminence of a table's top" recalls the scene atop Sentinel Hill, where the three men, led by Armitage, recite their chant. The citizenry of Dunwich perhaps reflect the "suburban throng" that surrounded the recitation table of Lovecraft's childhood.

In reply to the chants by the three men there come "deep, cracked, raucous vocal sounds" whose source is also "unmistakably the altar-stone on the peak." These sounds of "ghastly infra-bass timbre [which] spoke to dim seats of consciousness and terror far subtler than the ear" form a battle-cry, the sounds of Lovecraft's great history lesson: he is telling the mob of people in Massachusetts to be about "the casting off of the fictitious and insincere:"[281]

> America without England is absolutely meaningless to a civilised man of any generation yet grown to maturity. The breaking of the saving tie is leaving these colonies free to build up a repulsive new culture of money, speed, quantity, novelty, and industrial slavery, but that future culture is not ours, and has no meaning for us.[282]

This letter of November 6, 1930, to James F. Morton is Lovecraft's message to the masses, telling them to look to themselves before what is left of their empire crumbles to chaos.

Lovecraft's cry in the wilderness is a poignant but futile gesture. It is his last attempt to turn and fight

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[280] Ibid., p. 296.

[281] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 280.

[282] Ibid., p. 208.

off the chaotic rabble and enforce the order of his intellectuality upon discord. In this last grand act, Lovecraft faces the Minotaur in "dim seats of consciousness and terror." His cry against disorder is both benediction and valediction; in his monition the Minotaur is clearly contoured. The artist can do no more than point to the ineluctable foe and face "the Twilight of the Gods with a calm visage and a knowledge that Thor and Odin will themselves perish some day."[283] Two mighty mythologies blend in this confrontation. Siegfried and Theseus face as one the dragon-Minotaur of chaos.

Lovecraft writes on September 12, 1925, concerning the effect of Wagner's music which Fritz Lang employs in his film, "Siegfried":

> I am certain that Wagner is the supreme musical genius of the last hundred years, at least. . . . Nothing had so inspired me in weeks, & I believe a masterful daemon-tale could be founded upon the sinister bass musick from "Reingold" (played when Siegfried overpowers the King of the Niebelungs & seizes their treasure) alone.[284]

The Wagnerian "sinister bass musick" played as Siegfried slays the dragon guarding the gold is the "deep, cracked, raucous vocal sounds," the horror's utterances. Only the oval symphonic synergy can articulate such basal energy: "Not from any human throat were they born, for the organs of man can yield no such acoustic perversions." The voice begins with the "ghastly, infra-bass timbre" below the low-

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[283] Ibid., p. 190. [284] Thomas, p. 88.

est point on the musical scale. Such waves of energy can hardly be called sounds at all, because the forces speak "to the dim seats of consciousness and terror far subtler than the ear." The rise up the sonic scale to the level of human speech by the outcry of the "primal ovoid" parallels Lovecraft's fictive rise up the scale of evolution and history through Whateley and Armitage.

After the evolvement, Lovecraft, in the form of his collective ego, the phalanx-like oval at Armitage's side, stands at the pinnacle of evolution. From this eminence, he turns to face the chaotic rabble. The challenge Lovecraft issues to the rabble surrounding Sentinel Hill appears in a letter of November, 1929, to James F. Morton. Lovecraft's letter concerns some of the older structures in Providence, which he is hoping to save from demolition:

> To let this priceless heritage go, without the most extreme resistive measures, were almost as grave a vandalism as the active vandalism of the nameless barbarians responsible for the impending outrage; hence at last I am putting forth my final despairing wail, and calling upon the most potent of my allies. Succour, Great King! Fail not a kneeling vassal![285]

This request by Lovecraft to James F. Morton, curator of the Paterson, New Jersey museum, expresses the rage he felt toward "the active vandalism of the nameless barbarians responsible for the impending outrage."

After Lovecraft's monition falls on deaf ears, there remains only the retreat to the ordered world of the past:

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[285] Ibid., p. 56.

"I'm a rather one-sided person whose only really burning interests are the past and the unknown or the strange."[286] Lovecraft's oval psyche, the synthesis of his being, enters the inviolable world of his dreams, the Nordic heaven, Valhalla. The great bolt of lightning from the sky is Bifrost, the rainbow bridge into Asgard. Armitage appears as Heimdal, sentinel of the heavens, waving the returning gods onward to Valhalla at the conclusion of Wagner's "Das Rheingold."[287]

Lovecraft's search for peace has its beginning early in his life; he expresses this idea concerning his childhood in a letter on March 3, 1927, to Bernard Dwyer:

> I tried to express the fanciful Graecian beauty which altogether engrossed me. In the mythology of Greece I almost believed, and would actually look for fauns in certain oaken groves at twilight--for the city was not yet built up thickly beyond my home, and the woods and fields were as close and familiar to me as if I had been born in the heart of Arcadia.[288]

Lovecraft is "[re]born in the heart of Arcadia." Some of his fictive efforts are attempts to enter such a dreamworld of the past. Lovecraft writes about the influence of mythology on his early work in his February 3, 1924, letter to Edwin Baird:

> In 1897 my leading literary work was a "poem" entitled The Poem of Ulysses or, The New Odyssey. In 1899 it was a compendious treatise on chemistry in several pencil-scribbled volumes. But my theology

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[286] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 111.

[287] Thomas, p. 88.

[288] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 109.

> was by no means neglected. In this period I read much in Egyptian, Hindoo, and Teutonic mythology, and tried experiments in pretending to believe each one, to see which might contain the greatest amount of truth.[289]

From his earliest years, Lovecraft's mind is a matrix of mythology, with the mythical lore of the Teutonic and Grecian peoples represented. Lovecraft blends the active vigor of the Nordic Valhalla with the peaceful order of the Grecian Arcadia to form the alive inviolable world of his dreams.

Other Hindu mythological influences besides the Juggernaut myth appear in the Dunwich narrative. Lovecraft writes on December 10, 1931, to August Derleth:

> There now remains for consideration . . . things which never occurred in any form, but which have been created by imagination, tradition, or mendacity, and developed by plausible repetition. . . . That of the Hindoo fakir is the best case. For a century we have heard of yogis and mahatmas who throw a rope into the air so that it stands up straight and extends aloft out of sight--whereupon a boy climbs up and likewise vanishes in the distance.[290]

Because the battle is over Lovecraft's wish is to vanish into the distance and escape the world, a desire he expresses in his letter to Frank Belknap Long on January 8, 1924:

> I believe that the soundest course for a man of sense is to put away the complexity and sophistication of an unhappy Age, and to return into the seclusion and simplicity of a rural 'Squire; loving old, ancestral, and quaintly beautiful things, and thinking old, simple manly, heroick thoughts which--even when not true--are surely beautiful because

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[289] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 300-01.

[290] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 448.

they bear upon them so much of the ivy of tradition.[291]

With the conclusion of "The Dunwich Horror" comes the climax and completion of Lovecraft's active warfare against "the complexity and sophistication of an unhappy Age"; from this point on, Lovecraft retreats into his mental world. He writes in October, 1916:

> To the poet there is the ability and privilege to fashion a little Arcadia in his fancy, wherein he may withdraw from the sordid reality of mankind at large.[292]

Lovecraft accomplishes his spiritual ascent of the lightning bolt bridge to Valhalla-Arcadia with the Hindu rope trick he disparages in his letter to August Derleth. In his dramatization of the Hindu rope trick, Armitage portrays the fakir, while Lovecraft's ego-oval acts as the boy rope-climber, instantaneously rising up the vertical rope of lightning into the heavens. Lovecraft's goal appears in the name Yog-Sothoth, which contains the Sanskrit word yoga, meaning "union."[293] Lovecraft writes to J. Vernon Shea about his contemplation of suicide in 1904:

> Then the long, peaceful night of nonexistence . . . what I had enjoyed from the mythical start of eternity till the 20th of August, 1890. More and more I looked at the river on drowsy, sun-golden summer afternoons. I liked to think of the beauty of sun and blue river and green shore and distant white

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[291] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 284.

[292] Ibid., p. 27.

[293] Harold E. Whitehall, Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, ed. Joseph H. Friend and David B. Guralnik (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1960), p. 1695.

> steeple as enfolding me at the last--it would be as if the element of mystical cosmic beauty were dissolving me.[294]

Lovecraft is absorbed "at the last . . . [just] as if the element of mystical cosmic beauty were dissolving me." In the form of the oval, mental summation, he calls upon his omnipotent father who pervades the cosmos, seeking his help for his escape into his dream-land.

Lovecraft elaborates the physical, scientific aspect of his aesthetic ascension in his letter of January 18, 1931, to Maurice Moe:

> Life is a bore! And I don't know but that the frank expressers are about as damned a bore as the vacant-skull'd suppressors! That's why I light out for the fifth dimension and the galaxies beyond the rim of Einsteinian space-time--to escape the concentrated ennui to which all phases of objective life, flexor-minded or extensor-minded, Apollonan or Dionysiac, ultimately boil down. To hell with mammal primates![295]

In his letter of December 21, 1931, to William Lumley, Lovecraft describes his world "beyond the rim of Einsteinian space-time" in terms suggesting the imagination:

> It is always the unreal and the marvelous--the vague and expectancy-fraught world of dream wherein anything is possible--which has primarily fascinated me.[296]

The train engine motif in Lovecraft's mind comes back into focus as a method of conveyance to the world of his mind. He writes to Reinhardt Kleiner concerning this

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[294] St. Armand, p. 30.

[295] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 266.

[296] Ibid., p. 450.

dream in a letter of May 21, 1920:

> Did I tell you in my last letter about my dream . . . of the street car that went by night over a route that had been dismantled for six years, and that lost five hours in climbing College Hill, finally plunging off the earth into a star-strown abyss and ending up in the sand-heaped streets of a ruined city which had been under the sea?[297]

The "ruined city which had been under the sea" is the nameless city of Lovecraft's past, the Arcadia of mythic fauns and dryads among which he played as a boy. The streetcar-locomotive, climbing College Hill much as the Dunwich horror climbs Sentinel Hill, transports Lovecraft back to the magic realm of childhood. A Commonplace Book entry suggests such a turn of events: "Ghostly vehicle. Man boards it and is carried into unreal world."[298]

The overland movement by the engine-entity of Lovecraft's mind is suggested by the streetcar dream, and is a source that foreshadows vertical movement by the same apparatus in a letter of June, 1928, to James F. Morton:

> I certainly don't care for the process of walking per se. What I am out for is a series of visual impressions, and the more [sic] mechanicks of locomotion is a matter of the utmost indifference to me. So far as physical sensation goes, hiking gives me none, whilst climbing produces only fatigue, ennui, and occasional dizziness. I like a trip which leaves me free for imaginative activity, and which permits me to preserve my attire in a state of approximate neatness. But gordamighty, how I envy you that fly! How much did they soak you? I've never seen a chance for ascent less than five bucks, but have always been waiting for the

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[297] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 114.

[298] Lovecraft, Commonplace Book, p. 11.

> price to come down. When I can get a decent ride as low as $2.50 I shall certainly go to it. They charge ten fish at the nearest flying field to Providence; but then, it's worth twice as much to fly over gawd's country as it is to fly over N.Y. and vicinity. . . .
>
> Oh, yes--and I'm at work on the first new story I've written in a year and a half. It is to be called The Dunwich Horror, and is so fiendish that Wright may not dare to print it.[299]

The flight aloft by airplane is close to "The Dunwich Horror" in Lovecraft's mind. He would be pleased to fly over the "gawd's country" of his beloved Rhode Island. The flight to the mythic world of Lovecraft's imagination is a logical extension of this motif.

But Armitage, the physical form of Lovecraft, must come down from Sentinel Hill. Old Armitage is the clear-eyed, courageous, digit-reversed image of the author, for as Lovecraft writes "The Dunwich Horror," he is thirty-seven. A reversal of these digits yields Armitage's age of seventy-three. Lovecraft senses, a decade before the death of his frail body, that it is time to call retreat and to muster a holding action until the end comes. It would be fitting for Lovecraft to exit upon such a note as "The Dunwich Horror," but his wreck of a body, in the guise of old Armitage, must totter down the hill and give a desultory explanation to the rabble.

Although the persona of Lovecraft's living body must come down to meet the rabble, there is escape:

> To the poet there is the ability and privilege to

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[299] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 240.

> fashion a little Arcadia in his fancy, wherein he may withdraw from the sordid reality of mankind at large.[300]

"The sordid reality of mankind at large" is the swarm of scrofulous Dunwich natives surrounding Armitage during his ending explanation. Lovecraft writes on January 18, 1924, to Frank Belknap Long:

> I believe that the soundest course for a man of sense is to put away the complexity and sophistication of an unhappy Age, and to return into the seclusion and simplicity of a rural 'Squire; loving old, ancestral, and quaintly beautiful things, and thinking old, simple, manly heroic thoughts which--even when not true--are surely beautiful because they bear upon them so much of the ivy of tradition.[301]

The "ivy of tradition" stretches up from the depths, a living filament of Lovecraft's evolution. It is the vertical structure which holds Lovecraft away from the whirlpool of devolution made of the "vacant-skull'd"[302] members of modern society. As he writes Frank Belknap Long on February 27, 1931, Lovecraft's only recourse is to retreat into the inner sanctum of structured intellectuality. He is doomed to live his life as best he can, in a hell he cannot harrow:

> I live in such worlds of endurable memory & dream & cosmic expansion & escape as my feeble creative powers are able to devise for me.[303]

Such an admission is an honest statement by a failing artist who attempts for several years longer to hold his own in

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[300] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 27.

[301] Ibid., p. 284.

[302] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 266.

[303] Ibid., p. 321.

an alien world until mystic, cosmic beauty engulfs him and brings blessed release.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FINAL SYNTHESIS

The seven years between the completion of "The Dunwich Horror" and the writing of "In the Walls of Eryx" are prolific ones for Lovecraft. He completes no less than seven tales, most with New England as their setting. These stories, which include such titles as "The Whisperer in Darkness" (about some half-evolved toad-creatures who establish a base at Innsmouth, a New England seacoast town), and "The Dreams of the Witch-House" (about the voyages through hyperspace made by the mind of a deranged Miskatonic University professor of mathematics), all seem to record a diffusion and weakening of Lovecraft's artistic powers. Not until he composes "In the Walls of Eryx" in 1935 does Lovecraft bring together his remaining vital forces in the most powerful story of his later years.

"In the Walls of Eryx" is a narrative of something "singular, and so contrary to all past experience"[1] contained within the report of a man near the end of his strength. The narrator, a native of Earth, arrives on Venus and is given his acclimation training and equipment, which includes an

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[1] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Dagon and other Macabre Tales, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 269.

oxygen mask. He leaves Terra Nova, the main installation on the planet, and follows a route previously mapped from the air. The narrator is searching for energy crystals which provide power for use on earth.

He comments on the slow progress he is making through the leather-like vegetation of the rain-wet jungle:

> It must be the moisture that gives the tangled vines and creepers that leathery toughness; a toughness so great that a knife has to work ten minutes on some of them. By noon it was dryer--the vegetation getting soft and rubbery so that the knife went through it easily--but even then I could not make much speed.[2]

The explorer is further deterred by his own oxygen equipment:

> These Carter oxygen masks are too heavy--just carrying one half wears an ordinary man out. A Dubois mask with sponge-reservoir instead of tubes would give just as good air at half the weight.[3]

The narrator remarks on the demizens of Venus that inhibit the earthmen's search for the energy-spheres:

> There must be a great deposit of crystals within a thousand miles, though I suppose those damnable man-lizards always watch and guard it. Possibly they think we are just as foolish for coming to Venus to hunt the stuff as we think they are for grovelling in the mud whenever they see a piece of it, or for keeping that great mass on a pedestal in their temple. I wish they'd get a new religion, for they have no use for the crystals except to pray to. Barring theology, they would let us take all we want--and even if they learned to tap them for power there'd be more than enough for their planet and the earth besides.[4]

He urges the extermination of the manlike lizards:

> Sometime I'll urge the wiping out of these scaly beggars by a good stiff army from home. About twenty ships could bring enough troops across to

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[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid., p. 270.

> turn the trick. One can't call the damned things men for all their "cities" and towers. They haven't any skill except building--and using swords and poison darts--and I don't believe their so-called "cities" mean much more than ant-hills or beaver dams. I doubt if they even have a real language--all the talk about psychological communication through those tentacles down their chests strikes me as bunk. What misleads people is their upright posture; just an accidental physical resemblance to terrestrial man.[5]

As the explorer continues through the deadly, sticky Venusian jungle, the flora begins to look eerie and surrealistic:

> . . . I noticed a decided change in the landscape--the bright, poisonous-looking flowers shifting in colour and getting wraith-like. The outlines of everything shimmered rhythmically, and bright points of light appeared and danced in the same slow, steady tempo. After that the temperature seemed to fluctuate in unison with a peculiar rhythmic drumming.
>
> The whole universe seemed to be throbbing in deep, regular pulsations that filled every corner of space and flowed through my body and mind alike. I lost all sense of equilibrium and staggered dizzily, nor did it change things in the least when I shut my eyes and covered my ears with my hands.[6]

The nearly crazed narrator divines that he has wandered within the active radius of a "mirage-plant,"[7] and at first reacts hysterically:

> . . . I fell into a momentary panic, and began to dash and stagger about in the crazy, chaotic world which the plant's exhalations had woven around me. Then good sense came back, and I realized all I need do was retreat from the dangerous blossoms--heading away from the source of the pulsations, and cutting a path blindly--regardless of what might seem to swirl around me--until safely out of the plant's effective radius.[8]

The besieged explorer gradually hacks his way free of peril:

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[5] Ibid. [6] Ibid., p. 271. [7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., pp. 271-72.

"Gradually the dancing lights began to disappear, and the shimmering spectral scenery began to assume the aspect of solidity."[9]

The narrator proceeds in an indicated uphill direction. Soon the jungle thins, and he emerges on a broad plateau. He seems to be nearing one of the "egg-like spheroids"[10] of crystal. The terrain slopes upward to a definite crest. He views the raised area called "Eryx" or the "Erycinian Highland."[11] A small but vital detail appears at the plain's center:

> It was a single point of light, blazing through the mist and seeming to draw a piercing, concentrated luminescence from the yellowish, vapour-dulled sunbeams. This, without doubt, was the crystal I sought--a thing possibly no larger than a hen's egg, yet containing enough power to keep a city warm for a year.[12]

The exuberant explorer runs toward the glowing source of power.

He splashes onward as the ground becomes a particularly detestable species of mud: "Clearly, this was a crystal of the very finest quality, and my elation grew with every splattering step."[13] Suddenly there is the shock of collision:

> I was racing ahead with mounting eagerness, and had come within a hundred yards or so of the crystal--whose position on a sort of raised place in the omnipresent slime seemed very odd--when a sudden, overpowering force struck my chest and the knuckles of my clenched fists and knocked me over backward

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[9] Ibid., p. 272. [10] Ibid. [11] Ibid. [12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., p. 273.

in the mud.[14]

After reviving, the narrator begins to probe the peculiar circumstances. His extended knife comes in contact with "an apparently solid surface--a solid surface where my eyes saw nothing."[15] The investigator finds that the barrier extends to either side and is as smooth as glass and "of a curious coldness as contrasted with the air around."[16] Driven by a "burning curiosity,"[17] he begins to feel his way along the side of the structure: "After several steps I concluded that the wall was not straight, but that I was following part of some vast circle or ellipse."[18]

The narrator discerns the nature of the mound holding the crystal sphere above the omnipresent mud:

> It was the body of a man in one of the Crystal Company's leather suits, lying on his back, and with his oxygen mask half-buried in the mud a few inches away. In his right hand, crushed convulsively against his chest, was the crystal which had led me here--a spheroid of incredible size, so large that the dead fingers could scarcely close over it.[19]

He wonders about the identity of the dead man:

> Even at the given distance I could see that the body was a recent one. There was little visible decay, and I reflected that in this climate such a thing meant death not more than a day before. . . . I wondered who the man was. Surely no one I had seen on this trip. It must have been one of the old-timers absent on a long roving commission. . . .[20]

A note of longing creeps into the explorer's so-far straight-

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[14] Ibid. [15] Ibid., p. 274. [16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid. [18] Ibid. [19] Ibid., p. 275.

[20] Ibid.

forward narrative:

> There he lay, past all trouble, and with the rays of the great crystal streaming out from between his stiffened fingers.[21]

A sudden attack of revulsion sweeps over him: "A curious dread assailed me, and I had an unreasonable impulse to run away."[22] But knowing that he must go on, he surmounts his fear:

> I now began to regard the unseen barrier as something sinister, and recoiled from it with a shudder. Yet I knew I must probe the mystery all the more quickly and thoroughly because of this recent tragedy.[23]

By throwing mud aloft, the narrator estimates the wall's height at about twenty feet. As he searches for "some window or other small aperture,"[24] he wonders if the structure forms "a complete round or other closed figure":[25]

> I had not progressed far before I decided that the curvature indicated a circular enclosure of about a hundred yards' diameter--provided the outline was regular. This would mean that the dead man lay near the wall at a point almost opposite the region where I had started.[26]

As he moves along the barrier, the explorer is discomposed by the sight of the still body: "On closer view the features of the dead man seemed vaguely disturbing. I found something alarming in his expression, and in the way the glassy eyes stared."[27] The narrator recognized the dead man as Dwight, someone he knew only by reputation.

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[21] Ibid. [22] Ibid. [23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 276. [25] Ibid. [26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

Near the body the explorer feels a corner in the invisible surface, which proves to be the edge of an opening three feet across:

> Without a moment's hesitation I stepped through and advanced two paces to the prostrate body--which lay at right angles to the hallway I had entered, in what seemed to be an intersecting, doorless corridor. It gave me a fresh curiosity to find that the interior of this vast enclosure was divided by partitions.[28]

He reaches the corpse and discovers that it bears no visible wounds:

> Looking about for some possible cause of death, my eyes lit upon the oxygen mask lying close to the body's feet. Here, indeed, was something significant. Without this device no human being could breathe the air of Venus for more than thirty seconds, and Dwight--if it were he--had obviously lost his.[29]

The narrator extricates the sphere of living energy from the dead fingers:

> The spheroid was larger than a man's fist, and glowed as if alive in the reddish rays of the westering sun. As I touched the gleaming surface I shuddered involuntarily--as if by taking this precious object I had transferred to myself the doom which had overtaken its earlier bearer. However, my qualms soon passed, and I carefully buttoned the crystal into the pouch of my leather suit. Superstition has never been one of my failings.[30]

The narrator becomes more curious about the strange edifice and its origin: "That the hands of men had reared it I could not for a moment believe."[31] He adds: "Nor does

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[28] Ibid., pp. 276-77. [29] Ibid., p. 277.

[30] Ibid. [31] Ibid.

human knowledge include any perfectly transparent, non-refractive solid such as the substance of this building."[32] He ponders:

> Did a forgotten race of highly-evolved beings precede the man-lizards as masters of Venus? Despite their elaborately built cities, it seemed hard to credit the pseudo-reptiles with anything of this kind. There must have been another race aeons ago, of which this is perhaps the last relique.[33]

He debates the purpose of the enclosure, but comes to no definite conclusion: ". . . its strange and seemingly non-practical material suggests a religious use."[34]

The narrator decides to explore the invisible edifice:

> That various rooms and corridors extended over the seemingly unbroken plain of mud I felt convinced: and I believed that a knowledge of their plan might lead to something significant.[35]

He moves past the dead body and follows "the corridor toward those interior regions whence the dead man had presumably come."[36] Groping blindly, the narrator presses onward:

> Soon the corridor turned sharply and began to spiral in toward the centre in ever-diminishing curves. Now and then my touch would reveal a doorless intersecting passage, and I several times encountered junctions with two, three, and four diverging avenues. In these latter cases I always followed the inmost route, which seemed to form a continuation of the one I had been traversing.[37]

As he edges ever closer to the center of the structure, the

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[32] Ibid. [33] Ibid., pp. 277-78.

[34] Ibid., p. 278. [35] Ibid. [36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

wonderment of the explorer increases:

> I can scarcely describe the strangeness of the experience--threading the unseen ways of an invisible structure reared by forgotten hands on an alien planet![38]

All at once the explorer gropes his way into "a circular chamber about ten feet across,"[39] and decides that it must mark the center of the edifice. Five openings lead from the chamber. The narrator tests with mud for a roof and finds none:

> If there had ever been one, it must have fallen long ago, for not a trace of debris or scattered blocks ever halted my feet. As I reflected, it struck me as distinctly odd that this apparently primordial structure should be so devoid of tumbling masonry, gaps in the walls, and other common attributes of dilapidation.[40]

He continues to ruminate on the nature of the structure:

> What was it? What had it ever been? Of what was it made? Why was there no evidence of separate blocks in the glassy, bafflingly homogeneous walls? Why were there no traces of doors, either interior or exterior? I knew only that I was in a round, roofless, doorless edifice of some hard, smooth, perfectly transparent, non-refractive and non-reflective material, a hundred yards in diameter, with many corridors[41] and with a small circular room at the centre.[41]

By this time the sun is setting, and the explorer knows he must hurry if he is to get out before dark. He picks out the path he followed to the central chamber and follows its windings toward the outer circumference. As he nears the corpse, he notices a few "farnoth flies"[42]

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[38] Ibid. [39] Ibid. [40] Ibid., p. 279.

[41] Ibid. [42] Ibid.

buzzing around it: "I knew that decay was setting in."[43] Suddenly the maze-traverser is stopped by an invisible barrier:

> An invisible wall . . . told me that--notwithstanding my careful retracing of the way--I had not indeed returned to the corridor in which the body lay. Instead, I was in a parallel hallway, having no doubt taken some wrong turn or fork among the intricate passages behind.[44]

He looks to the ground for footprints, but the thin mud holds none. The explorer regains the center without much trouble and reflects again on the correct outward course. He decides to take a fork more to the left, but fails again to find his way: "Clearly, the plan of the building was even more complicated than I had thought."[45] He attempts to mark a trail, but his efforts are fruitless:

> Frustrated in all attempts to blaze a trail, I again sought the round central chamber through memory. It seemed easier to get back to this room than to steer a definite, pre-determined course from it, and I had little difficulty in finding it anew. This time I listed on my record scroll every turn I made--drawing a crude hypothetical diagram of my route, and marking all diverging corridors.[46]

Even though it is dusk, he attempts one more journey outward, but again meets with failure: "I now realized plainly that I was lost."[47] He returns again to the center and inspects the darkening sky:

> A heavy mist obscured most of the stars and planets, but the earth was plainly visible as a glowing, bluish-green point in the southeast. It was just past opposition, and would have been a glorious

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[43] Ibid. [44] Ibid., pp. 279-80. [45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., p. 281. [47] Ibid.

sight in a telescope.[48]

The narrator makes some notes by electric lamp:

> There is something almost humorous in my strange, unprecedented plight. Lost in a building without doors--a building which I cannot see![49]

The next day the trapped explorer wakes at noon and notices the corpse, which is being rapidly absorbed by various Venusian scavengers. He continues his efforts to extricate himself from the edifice, basing his attempts on trials of three of the five exits from the central chamber, making notes the while. By midafternoon, he finds himself in a strange set of corridors, while "jotting data on my scroll with decreasing confidence."[50] He berates himself for having entered the maze at all: "I cursed the stupidity and idle curiosity which had drawn me into this tangle of unseen walls. . . ."[51]

By nightfall there is still no success, and the corpse has become "simply a writhing mass of vermin."[52] In the dusk the narrator sees a dozen or so man-lizards advancing toward the invisible structure:

> When they drew nearer they seemed less truly reptilian--only the flat head and the green, slimy frog-like skin carrying out the idea. They walked erect on their odd, thick stumps, and their suction-discs made curious noises in the mud. These were average specimens, about seven feet in height, and with four long, ropy pectoral tentacles.[53]

The beings do not attack the explorer, but press close to

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[48] Ibid., p. 282. [49] Ibid. [50] Ibid., p. 284.
[51] Ibid. [52] Ibid., p. 285. [53] Ibid., p. 286.

the circular wall of the structure. They glance toward the corpse and gaze curiously at the entrapped explorer:

> Staring back at these grotesque and unexpected intruders, and wondering uneasily why they did not attack me at one [sic], I lost for the time being the will-power and nervous energy to continue my search for a way out. Instead I leaned limply against the invisible wall of the passage where I stood, letting my wonder merge gradually into a chain of the wildest speculations. A hundred mysteries which had previously baffled me seemed all at once to take on a new and sinister significance, and I trembled with an acute fear, unlike anything I had experienced before.[54]

The narrator begins to perceive the nature of the invisible enclosure: "a genuine maze--a labyrinth deliberately built by those hellish beings whose craft and mentality I had so badly underestimated."[55] He feels that these walls were built to entrap earthlings, as Dwight seems to have been entrapped before him. The horrible feelings of entrapment well up in the explorer's mind:

> And now I was trapped as he had been. Trapped, and with this circling herd of curious starers to mock at my predicament. The thought was maddening, and as it sank in I was seized with a sudden flash of panic which set me running aimlessly through the unseen hallways. For several moments I was essentially a maniac--stumbling, tripping, bruising myself on the invisible walls, and finally collapsing in the mud as a panting, lacerated heap of mindless, bleeding flesh.[56]

He comes to his senses after a bad fall and "could notice things and exercise . . . [his] reason."[57] He has renewed hope of an exit:

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[54] Ibid., p. 287. [55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., pp. 287-88. [57] Ibid., p. 288.

> After all, I was not as badly off as Dwight had been. Unlike him, I knew what the situation was--and forewarned is forearmed. I had proof that the exit was attainable in the end, and would not repeat his tragic act of impatient despair. The body--or skeleton, as it would soon be--was constantly before me as a guide to the sought-for aperture, and dogged patience would certainly take me to it if I worked long and intelligently enough.[58]

"Surrounded by these reptilian devils,"[59] the explorer of the maze has "recommenced the long quest."[60] He looks "from time to time at the silent circle of mocking stares"[61] and notices a gradual turnover in their ranks. This tactic of constant watching unnerves him:

> At any time these devils could have advanced and fought me, but they seemed to prefer watching my struggles to escape. I could not but infer that they enjoyed the spectacle--and this made me shrink with double force from the prospect of falling into their hands.[62]

Water and oxygen are running low, and he is forced to conserve energy:

> Tomorrow I will reduce physical exertion to the barest minimum until I meet the reptiles and have to deal with them. . . . My enemies are still on hand; I can see a circle of their feeble glow-torches around me. There is a horror about those lights which will keep me awake.[63]

Another day passes, and the explorer's water is almost gone, his oxygen supply is lower still, and he must cut his meager food ration in half: "When I reduce my food I suppose I shall feel still weaker."[64]

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[58] Ibid. [59] Ibid. [60] Ibid., p. 289.

[61] Ibid. [62] Ibid. [63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid., p. 290.

The narrator continues to contemplate his condition. He feels that a blind man might do better in escaping from the labyrinth:

> There is something damnable--something uncanny--about this labyrinth. I could swear that I had eliminated certain turns through charting, and yet each new trial belies some assumption I had thought established. Never before did I realise how lost we are without visual landmarks.[65]

The corpse is a skeleton by the explorer's third day out, and he is nervous and exhausted. He begins to think of a possible rescue from Terra Nova as his attention focuses fitfully on the hostile beings around him:

> I live in an endless nightmare--poised between waking and sleeping, yet neither truly awake nor truly asleep. My hand shakes, I can write no more for the time being. That circle of feeble glow-torches is hideous.[66]

The next day, continuing his explorations on all-fours, he notices substantial progress in his search:

> About 2 P.M. I thought I recognized some passages, and got substantially nearer to the corpse--or skeleton--than I had been since the first day's trials. I was sidetracked once in a blind alley, but recovered the main trail with the aid of my chart and notes. The trouble with these jottings is that there are so many of them. They must cover three feet of the record scroll, and I have to stop for long periods to untangle them.[67]

Later that afternoon the lonely explorer finds a new passage not recorded in his copious notes:

> There was a doorway which, according to my notes, I had not traversed before; and when I tried it I found I could crawl toward the weed-twined skeleton. The route was a sort of spiral, much like that by which I had first reached the central chamber. When-

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[65] Ibid. [66] Ibid. [67] Ibid., p. 291.

> ever I came to a lateral doorway or junction I would keep to the course which seemed best to repeat that original journey.[68]

Hope rises as he continues to progress through the maze:

> My advance was very slow, and the danger of straying into some blind alley very great, but none the less I seemed to curve steadily toward my osseous goal. The prospect gave me new strength, and for the nonce I ceased to worry about my pain, my thirst, and my scant supply of [oxygen] cubes.[69]

The lizard-beings gather around the entrance, and the crawling explorer prepares to meet them outside the maze.

Then the explorer encounters an intervening wall and cannot reach the skeleton: "This, then, was the end":[70]

> The ghoulish stare of those empty eye-sockets is worse than the staring of those lizard horrors. It lends a hideous meaning to that dead, white-toothed grin.[71]

He decides to finish his scroll-writings for the benefit of those who may come after him for more energy crystals:

> This record--which I hope may reach and warn those who come after me--will soon be done. After I stop writing I shall rest a long while. Then, when it is too dark for those frightful creatures to see, I shall muster up my last reserves of strength and try to toss the record scroll over the wall and the intervening corridor to the plain outside. I shall take care to send it toward the left, where it will not hit the leaping band of mocking beleaguers. Perhaps it will be lost forever in the thin mud--but perhaps it will land in some widespread clump of weeds and ultimately reach the hands of men.[72]

The narrator tries to warn earthmen to turn back from exploration of other worlds: ". . . I believe we have violated some obscure and mysterious law--some law buried deep

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[68] Ibid. [69] Ibid. [70] Ibid., p. 292.

[71] Ibid. [72] Ibid., p. 293.

in the arcana of the cosmos. . . ."[73]

As the exhausted explorer nears death, he meditates on the creatures outside the walls:

> As the end approaches I feel more kindly toward the things. In the scale of cosmic entity who can say which species stands higher, or more nearly approaches a space-wide organic norm--theirs or mine?[74]

He takes the crystal out of his protective pocket and gazes into its glowing radiance. The dying man's strength is fading rapidly:

> I am growing numb and cannot write much more. Things whirl around me, yet I do not lose consciousness. Can I throw this over the wall? That crystal glows so, yet the twilight is deepening.[75]

The last entry in the scroll heralds both an attempted rescue and the narrator's death:

> Are they [the creatures] going away? I dreamed I heard a sound . . . light in the sky. . . .[76]

The conclusion is a post-mortem report on the dead crystal company operative, who is identified as Kenton J. Stanfield of Richmond, Virginia. A party from Terra Nova lands on the Erycinian Highland and discovers the puzzling, invisible structure. The men feel their way into the walls to reach the skeleton and Stanfield's body. The leader of the expedition ships the crystal back to earth and determines to carry out Stanfield's earlier written suggestion that the man-lizards be destroyed:

Later, we shall adopt Stanfield's suggestion . . .

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[73] Ibid. [74] Ibid. [75] Ibid., p. 294.

[76] Ibid.

> and bring across enough troops to wipe out the natives altogether.[77]

They explore the invisible building and prepare a complete chart for their archives. The men dynamite the edifice: "Nothing will be left when we are done. The edifice forms a distinct menace to aerial and other possible traffic."[78]

The final entry in the report is an explanation of why Stanfield could not extricate himself from the maze:

> In considering the plan of the labyrinth one is impressed not only with the irony of Dwight's fate, but with that of Stanfield's as well. When trying to reach the second body from the skeleton, we could find no access on the right, but Markheim found a doorway from the first inner space some fifteen feet past Dwight and four or five past Stanfield. Beyond this was a long hall which we did not explore till later, but on the right-hand side of that hall was another doorway leading directly to the body. Stanfield could have reached the outside entrance by walking twenty-two or twenty-three feet if he had found the opening which lay directly behind him--an opening which he overlooked in his exhaustion and despair.[79]

The seeds of the interplanetary voyage to Venus in Lovecraft's story, "In the Walls of Eryx," which he completed in 1935, germinate for a great while, as he writes Clark Ashton Smith on May 25, 1923:

> It has always been my intention to write a set of tales involving other planets--both of this system & other stars--but I keep deferring the project because of its magnitude. I want the things to be the fruit of a mind stored with all the primordial, colourful, morbid, & grotesque lore of literature.[80]

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[77] Ibid., p. 295. [78] Ibid. [79] Ibid., p. 296.

[80] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1911-1924, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p. 214.

The idea of the voyage into space reposes for some years within Lovecraft's mind, and emerges near the end of his artistic career as "the fruit of a mind stored with all the primordial, colourful, morbid, & grotesque lore of literature."[81] Kenton J. Stanfield's expedition suggests the final phase of an arduous journey: "It must be the moisture that gives the tangled vines and creepers that leathery toughness; a toughness so great that a knife has to work ten minutes on some of them." This weakness on the part of Lovecraft's protagonist echoes a weakness in Lovecraft himself, even as he continues to forge outward into the unknown:

> I am still obsessed by the notion that one of the most extremely powerful of all tales would be an utterly realistic thing dealing with the sensations of a man deposited without a great amount of warning on another world. . . . To my mind, the stupendous wave of emotion--incredulity, lostness, wonder, stark terror--incident to this supreme dislocation from man's immemorially fixed background would be so colossal a thing as almost to dwarf any events which might happen to a celestial traveller. I yet mean to write a tale whose one supreme climax shall be the hero's discovery, after many torturing & ambiguous doubts, that he <u>is</u> on another world.[82]

In spite of his advancing age and deteriorating health, Lovecraft continues to explore other worlds.

The vehicle of his other-worldly exploration is Lovecraft's far-ranging imagination; he writes on February 27, 1931, to Clark Ashton Smith:

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, <u>H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1929-1931</u>, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1971), p. 238.

> Superadded to this simple curiosity [about the illimitable universe] is the galling sense of intolerable restraint which all sensitive people . . . feel as they survey their natural limitations in time & space as scaled against the freedoms & expansions & comprehensions & adventurous expectancies which the mind can formulate as abstract conceptions. Only a perfect clod can fail to discern these irritant feelings in the greater part of mankind.[83]

This "galling sense of intolerable restraint" began at an early time in Lovecraft's life, but Lovecraft's urge to explore has its limitations. He writes Alfred Galpin on August 21, 1918:

> . . . [at age twelve] I was thinking of virtually nothing but astronomy, yet my keenest interest did not lie outside the solar system. I think I really ignored the abysses of space in my interest in the habitability of the various planets of the solar system. My observations (for I purchased a telescope early in 1903) were confined mostly to the moon and the planet Venus. You will ask, why the latter, since its markings are doubtful even in the largest instruments? I answer--this very MYSTERY was what attracted me. In boyish egotism I fancied I might light upon something with my poor little 2-1/4 inch telescope which had eluded the users of the 40-inch Yerkes telescope![84]

Lovecraft's drive to know what lies around him goes beyond the earth but remains confined to the solar system. Within this relatively narrow compass is Venus, the planetary world explored by Kenton J. Stanfield, the protagonist of "In the Walls of Eryx." Lovecraft chose this visible world as his theater of interplanetary exploration because of its mystery. The planet is, of course, one of the inner members of the solar family, well back from the outer rim which

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[83] Ibid., p. 295.

[84] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 69.

touches the interstellar emptiness around the tiny region of space that circumscribes the sun. Lovecraft develops the wish to base his being within the bounds of the ordered concentricity of the solar system in his amateur press article "Time and Space":

> Turning to the consideration of infinite space, we are no less paralysed with "thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls." In our own solar system we discover the apparently boundless earth to be a comparatively small planet, and in the immediate universe we find the entire solar system but an inconsequential molecule. . . . And besides all this we must ever recall that space has no boundary; that the illimitable reaches of vacancy extend endlessly out beyond our sight or comprehension, perhaps beyond the apparently infinite region of the luminiferous ether and beyond control of the laws of motion and gravitation. What mind can venture to depict those remote realms where form, dimensions, matter, and energy may all be subject to undreamt of modifications and grotesque manifestations?[85]

Lovecraft uses as a base of operations the ordered concentricity of the solar system, visibly under the control "of the laws of motion and gravitation." Even though chaos awaits him, Lovecraft wishes to make vicarious voyages outward into "those remote realms where form, dimensions, matter, and energy may all be subject to undreamt of modifications." He writes on January 18, 1931, to Maurice Moe that "Life is a bore! . . . That's why I light out for the fifth dimension and the galaxies beyond the rim of Einsteinian space-time.[86]

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[85] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Time and Space," in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), p. 150.

[86] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 266.

These voyages into outer realms have their limitations; Lovecraft writes on November 7, 1930, to Clark Ashton Smith about the limits to the artist's own powers of adaptation:

> My wish for freedom is not so much a wish to put all terrestrial things behind me and plunge forever into abysses beyond light, matter, & energy. That, indeed, would mean annihilation as a personality rather than liberation. My wish is perhaps best defined as a wish for infinite vision & voyaging power, yet without loss of the familiar background which gives all things significance.[87]

Lovecraft needs a basis of rationality, "the familiar background which gives all things significance," as a springboard from which to explore the chaotic depths beyond rational order. Through these explorations, he matches the tiny, ordered entity of his ego against the swirling chaos beyond the laws of reason. He writes on October 17, 1930, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> I know that my most poignant emotional experiences are those which concern the lure of unplumbed space, the terror of the encroaching outer void, & the struggle of the ego to transcend the known & established order of time, . . . space, matter, force, geometry, & natural law in general.[88]

Lovecraft tries to "light out for the fifth dimension" because of his boredom with natural law. He writes on August 28, 1927, to Zealia Reed Bishop:

> Somehow I cannot become truly interested in anything which does not suggest incredible marvels just around the corner--glorious and ethereal cities of golden roofs and marble terraces beyond the sunset, or vague, dim cosmic presences clawing ominously at the thin rim where the known universe meets the outer

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[87] Ibid., p. 214. [88] Ibid., p. 197.

> and fathomless abyss. The world and all its inhabitants impress me as immeasurably insignificant, so that I always crave intimations of larger and subtler symmetries than these which concern mankind. All this, however, is purely aesthetic, and not at all intellectual.[89]

Lovecraft oscillates between the prosaism of "the world and all its inhabitants" and "the thin rim where the known universe meets the outer and fathomless abyss." A key to the nature of what Lovecraft thinks of as the known universe can be found in his autobiographical letter of February 3, 1924, to Edwin Baird:

> When I was six my philosophical evolution received its most aesthetically significant impulse--the dawn of Graeco-Roman thought. Always avid for faery lore, I had chanced on Hawthorne's Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales, and was enraptured by the Hellenic myths even in their Teutonised form. . . . As soon as possible I procured an illustrated edition of Bulfinch's Age of Fable, and gave all my time to the reading of the text, in which the true spirit of Hellenism is delightfully preserved.[90]

The circular labyrinth of Eryx may have its inception in Lovecraft's early discovery of the myth of Theseus as it is told by Hawthorne in Tanglewood Tales. The impression of the maze myth must have been strengthened in Lovecraft's mind by his later perusal of the story in The Age of Fable.

A germinating element which emerges as the invisible maze of Eryx is found in Bulfinch's treatment of the Greek

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[89] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, H. P. Lovecraft: Selected Letters 1925-1929, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1968), p. 160.

[90] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 299-300.

philosopher Pythagoras' theory of the cosmos:

> In the centre of the universe (he taught) there was a central fire, the principle of life. The central fire was surrounded by the earth, the moon, the sun, and the five planets. The distances of the various heavenly bodies from one another were conceived to correspond to the proportions of the musical scale. The heavenly bodies, with the gods who inhabited them, were supposed to perform a choral dance around the central fire, "not without song". . . .
>
> The spheres were conceived to be crystalline or glassy fabrics arranged over one another like a nest of bowls reversed. In the substance of each sphere one or more of the heavenly bodies was supposed to be fixed, so as to move with it. As the spheres are transparent we look through them and see the heavenly bodies which they contain and carry around with them.[91]

That most "aesthetically significant impulse--the dawn of Graeco-Roman thought" takes the specific form of Bulfinch's discussion of Pythagoras. Stanfield's goal within the walls of Eryx is the crystal sphere which glows so fiercely, which presumably has been removed by Dwight from the "interior regions," the center of the labyrinth. This glowing ball of energy, "a thing possibly no larger than a hen's egg, yet containing enough power to keep a city warm for a year," suggests Pythagoras' "central fire, the principle of life," the spirit of the universal order as Pythagoras saw it. Following the map of the universe drawn by "Graeco-Roman thought," Lovecraft's universe is a concentricity of circles around the central "single point of light" which Stanfield sees within the walls of Eryx. The walls are miniature replicas of Pythagoras' spheres, "crystalline or glassy

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[91] Thomas Bulfinch, The Age of Fable (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc. n.d.), p. 306.

fabrics arranged over one another like a nest of bowls reversed." Lovecraft modernizes Pythagoras somewhat, for he sees the spheres as synonymous with the orbits of the various planets of the solar system with the sun as center. Mathematical, perfected order is embodied in the idea of the music of the spheres: Pythagoras "conceived [the spheres] to correspond to the proportions of the musical scale." Because Lovecraft read Bulfinch at the age of six, Pythagoras' image of perfect order remained in Lovecraft's mind as the symmetry of the island-like solar system in the midst of chaotic infinity.

From his concentric island, Lovecraft can move off into the abyss, but with the constant option of returning to his island of symmetry. Lovecraft is simultaneously reaching beyond the world toward "intimations of larger and subtler symmetries than those which concern mankind."[92] The walls of Eryx form a larger symmetry with the "central fire, [Lovecraft's] principle of life" at its center.

From his island of order, Lovecraft finds the strength to confront the infinity around him. He writes on February 20, 1929, to Frank Belknap Long:

> Here are we--and yonder yawns the universe. If there be indeed a central governor, any set of standards, or any final goal, we can never hope to get even the faintest inkling of any of these things; since the ultimate reality of space is clearly a complex churning of energy of which the human mind can never form any even approximate picture, and which can touch us only through the veil of local

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[92] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 160.

> apparent manifestations which we call the visible and material universe. So far as analogy and probability go, there is a strong presumptive evidence on the negative side--evidence based upon the observation of small material systems like the electrons of an atom or the planets circling the sun. This evidence tells us that all small units of mass-energy are (that is, all humanly visible and conceivable presentations of such units are) rotating systems organised in a certain way and preserving a balance and dovetailing of functions, absolute regularity and the exclusion of change (and hence of volition or conscious action) and the infinite uniformity of this system of interlocking rotations and forms or regularity, seem to confront us whenever we delve beneath the surface, so that these circumstances actually form the sum total of all our knowledge of the composition and administration of infinity.[93]

The chaos beyond the concentric planetary circles "is clearly a complex churning of energy of which the human mind can never form any even approximate picture." Lovecraft looks out at these aggregations of infinity through the walls of Eryx, which surround him as "the veil of local apparent manifestations which we call the visible and material universe." The platform of order on which he stands is a coherent entity, "like the electrons of an atom or the planets circling the sun." The stasis Stanfield finds in the walls of Eryx is a tangible manifestation of "rotating systems organized in a certain way and preserving a balance and dovetailing of functions absolute regularity and the exclusion of chance (and hence of volition or conscious action). . . ." Lovecraft rolls himself into a circle of order that prevents his exposure to infinity.

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[93] Ibid., p. 262.

On November 6, 1930, Lovecraft writes concerning his need of a defense against infinite chaos in a letter to James F. Morton:

> It is because the cosmos is meaningless that we must secure our individual illusions of values, direction, and interest by upholding the artificial streams which gave us such worlds of salutary illusion. That is, since nothing means anything in itself, we must preserve the proximate and arbitrary background which makes things around us seem as if they did mean something.[94]

And in another letter to Morton, dated November 6, 1930, Lovecraft lays his grounds for the building of "such worlds of salutary illusion," as he mounts a defense against discord:

> No one thinks or feels or appreciates or lives a mental-emotional-imaginative life at all, except in terms of the artificial reference-points supply'd him by the enveloping body of race-tradition and heritage into which he is born. We form an emotionally realizable picture of the external world, and an emotionally endurable set of illusions as to values and direction in existence, solely and exclusively through the arbitrary concepts and folk-ways bequeathed to us through our traditional culture-stream. Without this stream around us we are absolutely adrift in a meaningless and irrelevant chaos which has not the least capacity to give us any satisfaction apart from the trifling animal ones.[95]

Lovecraft tries to preserve his mental grip on the principle of order "in a meaningless and irrelevant chaos" by enmeshing himself within a circular bastion of his "traditional culture-stream," the walls of glassy substance that surround Stanfield.

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[94] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 208.

[95] Ibid., p. 207.

Lovecraft describes the substance of this radius of "traditional culture-stream" as he writes to August Derleth on November 21, 1930:

> I cannot think of any individual as existing except as part of a pattern--and the pattern's most visible and tangible areas are of course the individual's immediate environment; the soil and culture-stream from which he springs, and the milieu of ideas, impressions, traditions, landscapes, and architecture through which he must necessarily peer in order to reach the "outside". . . . I begin with the individual and the soil and think outward--appreciating the sensation of spatial and temporal liberation only when I can scale it against the known terrestrial scene. . . . With me, the very quality of being cosmically sensative breeds an exaggerated attachment to the familiar and the immediate--Old Providence, the woods and hills, the ancient ways and thoughts of New England.[96]

He fends off the universe with the "familiar and the immediate": "It is <u>because</u> the cosmos is meaningless that we must secure our individual illusions. . . ."

Standing in a chaos of wilderness, Lovecraft holds aloft the light of English civilization. He writes of England in his letter of June 11, 1930, to James F. Morton:

> . . . We are either Englishmen or nothing whatever. Apart from our inherited network of English ideas, memories, emotions, beliefs, points of view, etc., we are simply bundles of nerve-centres without materials for coherent functioning. Unless there exists an English world for us to live in, our total equipment of interests, perspectiveness, standard, aspirations, memories, tastes, and so on--everything, in short, that we really live for--at once becomes utterly valueless and meaningless and uncorrelated; a nightmare jumble of unsatisfiable outreachings, without objective linkages or justification, and forming only a course of illimitable misery. Of supreme importance, then, is the preservation of an English world around us.[97]

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[96] Ibid., pp. 220-21. [97] Ibid., pp. 208-09.

The walls of Eryx are "the preservation of an English world around us": the shining egg of energy within invisible walls is the pinnacle of man's cultural evolution, the British Empire: "We are either Englishmen or nothing whatever." Lovecraft uses evolved tradition, his "objective linkages," to rise from the chaotic realm of "bundles of nerve-centres without materials for coherent functioning."

Having evolved his tradition-island of reasoned, radial symmetry, Lovecraft can turn his mental searchlight of scientific inquiry outward on the blackness around him: "I begin with the individual and the soil and think outward--appreciating the sensation of spatial and temporal liberation only when I can scale it against the known terrestrial scene." Once Lovecraft establishes his foundation of tradition-reason, he can launch himself outward into the universe. He writes on November 20, 1931, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> What absorb me are conditions, atmospheres, appearances, and intangible things of that kind. My perspective is too inherently cosmic and analytical to make me feel the importance of what the tri-dimensional world regards as changes in the relative setting of dust-grains as negligible as terrestrial men. The only things I can conceive as worthy protagonists of cosmic drama are basic natural forces and laws, and what spells interest for me is simply the convincing illusion of the thwarting, suspension, or disturbance of such forces and laws. To me a climax is simply an effective demonstration of a temporary defeat of the cosmic order. I use human puppets as symbols, but my interest is not with them. It is the situation of defeat itself--and the sense of liberation therein implicit--which provides me with the thrill and catharsis of aesthetic endeavour.[98]

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[98] Ibid., p. 436.

Stanfield stands between the light of civilization and the blind force of the cosmos. The leaping lizard-men around him are the "human puppets [that] as symbols" represent force released from the restraint of reason. The Eryx narrative is "the situation of defeat itself of the cosmic order and the sensation of liberation therein implicit--which provides [Lovecraft] with the thrill and catharsis of aesthetic endeavour." Stanfield-Lovecraft moves somewhere on the spiral of evolution between primal beginnings in the abyss and the light of evolved reason, the ball of fire in the isle of order.

Lovecraft hints at this between-position on the evolution-continuum as his letter of November 20, 1931, to Smith continues:

> If I am to write sincerely and with the possibility of art, it must always be, for the most part, of observers who float or glide through a field of cosmic abnormality little touched except mutually and emotionally. This is my one natural type of expression, because it is the only thing I really have to say. It is the only type of image which my rather isolated and uneventful career has fitted me to formulate or has urged me to utter and record.[99]

Lovecraft's character Stanfield can "float or glide through . . . [the] field of cosmic abnormality" represented by the winding walls of Eryx. Eryx is the superimposition of order upon chaotic energy; the ordering frame of the Pythagorean universe encloses the adjacent portion of "cosmic abnormality." The evolved order of English tradition becomes Love-

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[99] Ibid., p. 437.

craft's "one natural type of expression, because it is the only thing I really have to say."

Lovecraft points the way back down the winding path of evolution in his letter of June 10, 1929, to Elizabeth Toldridge:

> . . . There is only one anchor of fixity which we can seize upon as the working pseudo-standard of "values" which we need in order to feel settled & contented--& that anchor is tradition, the potent emotional legacy bequeathed to us by the massed experience of our ancestors, individual or national biological or cultural. Tradition means nothing cosmically, but it means everything locally & pragmatically, because we have nothing else to shield us from a devastating sense of "lostness" in endless time & space.[100]

Tradition, the "anchor of fixity," exists only after evolution has been accomplished. In his "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection," Lovecraft suggests the presence in man of undeveloped chaotic energies:

> Man, slowly coming into existence as an efflorescence of some simian stock, originally knew nothing beyond the concrete and the immediate. Formerly guided by reflex action or instinct, his evolving brain was an absolute blank regarding everything beyond those simple matters of defence, shelter, and food-procuring whose exegencies had brought it into being. As this primal brain developed along the path of the originally impelling force, its intrinsic strength and activity outstripped the material which it had to feed upon.[101]

Man in the mass has still not evolved far enough along "the path of the originally impelling force" to be sufficiently

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[100] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 357.

[101] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection," in The shuttered Room and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1959), p. 86.

under his own control. The essay continues:

> The human reason is weak in comparison to instinct and emotion, and up to the present, these latter forces, in the guise of theology, have proved the only effective restraint from the disorders of utter license and animalism. The percentage of men civilised and governed by reason is still relatively slight.[102]

Lovecraft, because he considers himself a member of "the percentage of men civilised and governed by reason," finds himself within walls of reason as he traverses the maze of evolution. The man-lizards leaping outside the borders of reason are "man, coming into existence as an efflorescence of some simian stock" near the lower end of the evolutionary spiral formed by the maze-like walls of Eryx.

In Lovecraft's estimation, most men are yet driven by their instincts and do not live beneath the pale of reason. He writes in "Merlinus Redivivus," his essay attack on superstition:

> Overpowered by a desire to believe in the supernatural, men are everywhere ignoring patent scientific principles and encroaching upon borderlands where evidence is highly coloured with illusion. Against common sense is arrayed a flimsy mass of dreamstuff which under ordinary conditions would be laughed out of court. . . .
>
> However general may be the relapse of the world into mediaeval credulity, it is to be hoped that Anglo-Saxon sense and conservatism may exempt our particular realm from so pitiable an intellectual debacle.[103]

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[102] Ibid., p. 90.

[103] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "Merlinus Redivivus," in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), pp. 151-52.

The mass of humanity are unreasonable and avoid the intellect of "patent scientific principles" so as to remain in "borderlands where evidence is highly coloured with illusion." Lovecraft feels that to evolve beyond this lowly point one must take hold of reasoned English heritage in the form of "Anglo-Saxon sense and conservatism."

From within the protection of his hallowed halls of tradition-evolved reason, Lovecraft turns to look back at the wretched rabble outside his continuum; he writes in "At the Root," an amateur press essay:

> We must recognise the essential underlying savagery in the animal called man, and return to older and sounder principles of national life and defence. We must realise that man's nature will remain the same so long as he remains man; that civilisation is but a slight coverlet beneath which the dominant beast sleeps lightly and ever ready to awake.[104]

Lovecraft believes that man's basic brutish nature will not change. But as the essay continues he leaves room for some slight degree of mental progress along the path of evolved reason:

> Man's respect for the imponderables varies according to his mental constitution and environment. Through certain modes of thought and training it can be elevated tremendously, yet there is always a limit. The man or nation of high culture may acknowledge to great lengths the restraints imposed by conventions and humour, but beyond a certain point primitive will or desire cannot be curbed.[105]

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[104] Howard Phillips Lovecraft, "At the Root," in Something about Cats and other Pieces, ed. August Derleth (Sauk City, Wisc.: Arkham House Publishers, 1949), pp. 153-54.

[105] Ibid., p. 154.

Lovecraft finds his evolved island of order threatened by chaotic forces in the form of "primitive will or desire." His need for order is so strong that he is in the position of Jonathan Swift's character of Lemuel Gulliver in the land of the Houyhnhnms. Like Gulliver, Lovecraft is caught between the bestiality of the Yahoos or "simian stock" and the reasonableness of the Houyhnhnms. Reflecting his love of the "Anglo-Saxon sense and conservatism" of the Anglican Eighteenth Century, Lovecraft writes concerning Swift in a letter to William Lumley of December 21, 1931:

> . . . Yes--I have frequently noticed the bestial and repulsive aspect of crowds, especially in such decadent cosmopolitan centres as New York City. Hogarth certainly reproduced the true substance of life, and it takes but a little imagination to modify these degraded types into the out and out monsters of phantasy. Another artist who went even farther than Hogarth in depicting human bestiality is the Spaniard, Goya. Swift surely had a sound basis for his account of the Yahoos--which indeed I found fascinating from childhood onward.[106]

Lovecraft uses "human puppets"[107] as symbols of the chaos he sees around him because it is easy for him "to modify these degraded types into the out and out monsters of phantasy," the universal, chaotic forces that surround Lovecraft's ordered microcosm.

The serene, ordered state of mind that has as its raison d'etre a hatred of chaos flows from Lovecraft's wish to preserve the elements of the English world, his mental

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[106] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 450.

[107] Ibid., p. 436.

milieu. Lovecraft writes on November 6, 1930, to James F. Morton:

> Without our nationality--that is, our culture-grouping--we are merely wretched nuclei of agony and bewilderment in the midst of alien and directionless emptiness. Apart from his race-stream, no human being exists, mentally, as such. He is only one of the hominidae--the raw material of a human being. Therefore a native culture-heritage is the most priceless and indispensable thing any person has--and he who weakens the grasp of a people upon their inheritance is most nefariously a traitor to the human species.[108]

In the guise of Stanfield, Lovecraft explores the labyrinth of his "race-stream." He searches for this "most priceless and indispensable thing any person has," the glowing crystal sphere of the British culture-heritage, shining in a world-wide wilderness. This cultural heritage is the slow accretion of centuries, and in Lovecraft's mind forms the windings of a protective shield or barrier against "alien and directionless emptiness." His letter to Morton continues:

> Of course, our heritage comes in layers of different intensity, each being more vital and potent as it comes closer to our immediate individuality. We have an Aryan heritage, a Western-European heritage, a Teuton-Celtic heritage, an Anglo-Saxon or English heritage, an Anglo-American heritage, and so on--but we can't detach one layer from another without serious loss--loss of a sense of significance and orientation in the world.[109]

The invisible layers of culture forming the walls of Eryx are "layers of different intensity, each being more vital and potent as it comes closer to . . . [Lovecraft's] immediate individuality." This "immediate individuality" is the

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[108] Ibid., p. 207. [109] Ibid., pp. 207-08.

pearl of great price, the pinnacle of Lovecraft's priceless cultural heritage.

Outside the walls of Eryx, in "alien and direction-less emptiness" are the man-lizards of an alien world, "the hominidae--the raw material of a human being." These leaping demizens, puppet-like embodiments of chaotic forces, are the hurry-scurry citizenry of a modern, mechanized America bereft of genuine cultural influences. Lovecraft writes in his letter of November 6, 1930, to Morton:

> . . . One may say that political separation (between England and the United States) is at least a very evil sort of symbolism, and that in practice it has worked hellish tragedy with the life and standards of the ill-fated, power-and-money-bloated, mongrelised United States. . . . Of course, vast sections are still English--Vermont, South Carolina, Virginia, the old hill in Providence, and so on.[110]

The hominidae outside the walls of culture are the modern-day victims of "the life and standards of the ill-fated, power-and-money-bloated, mongrelised United States." With its modern melting pot, America has completely lost its cultural identity and meaning as far as Lovecraft is concerned, as he writes in his letter to Morton:

> America without England is absolutely meaningless to a civilised man of any generation yet grown to maturity. The breaking of the saving tie is leaving these colonies free to build up a repulsive new culture of money, speed, quantity, novelty, and industrial slavery, but that future culture is not ours, and has no meaning for us. Its points of reference and illusions are not any points of reference and illusions which were transmitted to us, and do not form any system of direction and standards which can be emotionally realisable by us. It is as foreign to

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[110] Ibid., p. 210.

> us as the cultures of the Sumerians, Zimbleweans, and Mayans.[111]

The walls of Eryx are a buffer against the invading outsiders who populate the power-and-money corrupted America. Lovecraft's letter of November 6, 1930, to Morton continues:

> It is our interests to keep our own culture alive as long as we can--and if possible to preserve and defend certain areas against the onslaughts of the enemy. Any means will justify such an end.[112]

The composition of the walls of Eryx is suggested in Lovecraft's letter to Morton:

> When we fight the ideal of quantity and wealth, we must have the positive English ideal of quality and refinement to pit against it. We must have a rallying point of our emotional life in order to prevent the disorganising influences around us from recrystallising our milieu into definitely hostile and repulsive shapes. It is useless to fight meaningless recrystallisation unless we have a strong hold on the meaningful order behind us, and a solid coordination with the other surviving parts--especially the recognized centre and nucleus of that order.[113]

The invisible substance of the wall is the "recrystallising . . . [of Lovecraft's] milieu" into a "solid coordination with the other surviving parts [of English culture]--especially the recognised centre and nucleus of that order." Lovecraft's idea of order and culture is a nucleus with a "solid coordination" of concentric shells of milieu. The invisible skeleton of order suggested by Pythagoras' view of the universe shapes Lovecraft's winding culture-maze, the "heritage [which] comes in layers of different intensity,

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[111] Ibid., p. 208. [112] Ibid., p. 210.

[113] Ibid., p. 209.

each being more vital and potent as it comes closer to our immediate individuality."

The walls of Eryx which surround Lovecraft's "Immediate individuality" form Lovecraft's conception of his personality and its place in the universe. He writes on November 9, 1929, to Woodburn Harris:

> We may say that every man's ego--the thing he fights to exalt and preserve, is a sphere with his body at the centre, & with its density rapidly diminishing as it extends outward. He cares intensely for his individual self: a little less so for his immediate family; a little less so for his social group; a little less so for his nation or race-stock; a little less so for his major culture unit . . . a little less so for mankind as a whole; a little less so for animal life as a whole; a little less so for life (both animal & vegetable) as opposed to the organic; a little less so for the terrestrial as opposed to the non-terrestrial; a little less so for the solar-systemic as opposed to the universal. . . . Of course the individual ego is at the base of it all--altruism as a principle is a myth and a joke--but in the course of nature the ego cannot avoid having symbolic associations with its environment; associations less and less poignant as distance increases, but all very vivid & real & practically motivating to the man of highly evolved personality and sensitive imagination.[114]

Here, in concentric graduation, are the circles of substance. The most powerful of the "symbolic associations" are the aspects of English civilization. Lovecraft is clothed by things English, wherever he might go, as he writes on November 6, 1930, to James F. Morton:

> I am a part of any region where English people live in an English manner, . . . be it R.I., Charleston, Devonshire, Australia, Nova Scotia, or anywhere else. My own position in insisting on unpolluted Englishry is purely selfish and cynical.[115]

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[114] Ibid., p. 84. [115] Ibid., p. 210.

The bastion of Eryx is symbolic of Lovecraft's "insisting on unpolluted Englishry." The "hominidae" are barricaded out of Lovecraft's evolved island of order, the world of a "man of highly evolved personality and sensitive imagination."

The walls of Eryx are the crystallization of Lovecraft's milieu previously contained in the giant living egg of energy, the Dunwich horror. The maze of the past winds within them both. "In the Walls of Eryx" is Lovecraft's final summarization of his life within the limits of his miniature universe, whereas "The Dunwich Horror" from seven years earlier contains a mobile microcosm, alive with power and energy. Lovecraft writes on October 19, 1929, to James F. Morton:

> The visible beauty and dignity of a settled, aesthetically integrated region take on a fresh degree of poignancy and motivating stimulation when one can feel one's own hereditary blood-stream coursing through the scene as through the veins of some vast and exquisite organism. One can say . . . "These waving groves and towering elms and brook-threaded valleys and stone-wall'd farmsteads and white village steeples are Me, MYSELF, I, THE CONSCIOUS EGO!" And what more can any guy ask than that? Isn't all art an effort of the artist to identify himself with the burning beauty and strangeness he depicts? Why, then, reject such identification as Nature provides?[116]

The walls of Eryx form Lovecraft's invisible identification with the environment around him. The fluid between the walls represents the "brook-threaded valleys," while the invisible walls themselves are perhaps symbolic of the

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[116] Ibid., p. 31.

"stone-walled farmsteads" of Lovecraft's past. He explores the world of remembered youth alive in his mind. In the walls of Eryx, he finds the "burning beauty and strangeness" he craves. The "burning beauty" is the fiery crystal sphere, while the "strangeness" Lovecraft depicts appears in the title of his narrative. Changing the "x" to "e" and moving it to the beginning of the word "Eryx" yields a less arcane title: "In the Walls of Eery."

Lovecraft explores the maze of his past formed by the walls of Eryx, because the past is what means the most to him; he writes on November 17, 1926, to James F. Morton:

> The only thing in the cosmos approaching a value is pleasant traditional association. Association is the real test--the degree of a thing's absorption into the imaginative life of a given race-stock or culture stream.[117]

Lovecraft builds an island of ordered existence out of "pleasant traditional association." He writes in his letter of February 10, 1927, to Donald Wandrei: "I am more sensitive to places than to people."[118] His letter to Wandrei continues:

> It is beauty--the beauty of wonder, of antiquity, of landscape, of architecture, of horror, of light & shadow, line & contour, of mystic memory & hallowed tradition--that I worship. . . .[119]

And the place Lovecraft is most sensitive to is his beloved New England countryside. He writes on August 2, 1927, to Clark Ashton Smith:

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[117] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 91.

[118] Ibid., p. 102. [119] Ibid., pp. 102-03.

> . . . I doubt if any scenery could affect me quite as poignantly as the mild, rich, traditional topography of my native New England.[120]

In his letter of August 2, 1927, to Smith, Lovecraft writes of the close union of cosmic and local elements in his mind:

> There are really two distinct personalities in me--the cosmic and fantastic on the one hand, & the historical, domestic, & antiquarian on the other hand. In my contacts with written literature the fantastic is paramount, but in all contacts with real life or the visible world the old-fashioned, soil-loving, conservative Yankee has full sway. Few persons have ever been as closely knit to New England's rock-ribbed hills as I. Nothing else on earth has power to thrill me as poignantly as an old Rhode-Island upland at sunset, with straggling lines of stone wall, cool woods in the background, & dappled kine with tinkling bells strolling homeward through the green of the grass & the grey of the out-cropping granite ledges.[121]

The close tie between the local and the cosmic is a clue to the mystery of the nominally Venusian walls of Eryx. He writes on November 7, 1930, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> As for your idea of shifted senses in an interstellar voyager, & the painful strangeness of the earth on his return--really, it is a tremendous thing! . . . If I were you I would have the victim not recognise the earth at all until the very last. Let him think he had landed, through a miscalculation, on the wrong planet; & let the few approximations to familiarity be only of the vaguest, most grotesque, & most disquieting sort. What the victim most cherished in his original state is now merely a torturesome mass of strangeness--whose one, lingering trace of familiarity is only an intolerable mockery & tantalisation. He longs wistfully & desperately for some loved & remembered scene--when he is actually there. The moment of revelation could be made into a climax of the most cataclysmic sort. By all means develop this idea in the near future.[122]

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[120] Ibid., p. 159. [121] Ibid.

[122] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 216.

As he explores the Erycinian maze, Stanfield believes that he is on the planet Venus. The "few approximations to familiarity" are vague enough to remain hidden, because "what the victim [Lovecraft himself] most cherished in his original state is now merely a torturesome mass of strangeness," the invisible "eery" maze itself. Standing within the walls, Stanfield thinks he is mocked by the man-lizards because the "one, lingering trace of familiarity is only an intolerable mockery & tantalisation." The maze of Lovecraft's past is invisible, so that he "longs wistfully & desperately for some loved & remembered scene"--perhaps the scene of the New England countryside of his childhood. The greatest irony of the narrative is that the interplanetary explorer Stanfield is Lovecraft himself, "actually there" in old New England, exploring the dimmed domestic vistas of his childhood. Lovecraft carries out his own dictum to his friend Clark Ashton Smith to "develop this idea in the near future."

But Lovecraft is seeking his beloved countryside as a refuge from a hectic and tiresome modern world; he writes on January 8, 1924, to Frank Belknap Long:

> . . . I believe that the soundest course for a man of sense is to put away the complexity and sophistication of an unhappy Age, and to return into the seclusion and simplicity of a rural 'Squire, loving, old, ancestral, and quaintly beautiful things, and thinking old, simple, manly, heroick thoughts which--even when not true--are surely beautiful because they bear upon them so much of the ivy of tradition. That, then, is why your Grandpa is an antient country-squire, because he is weary of complexities and emotions and wisdoms and eruditions that are empty and meaningless; because he thinks that most beauty, most harmony, is to be found in a placid merging

> with dreams and illusions which the centuries have hallow'd; because he believes that perfect loveliness resides only in virtuous patterns which the world has rejected or forgotten.[123]

The "old, simple, manly, heroick thoughts" compose the invisible material of the walls of Eryx. The walls seem living embodiments of traditional values, for "they bear upon them so much of the ivy of tradition. Within these walls of hallowed past, Lovecraft can "put away the complexity and sophistication of an unhappy Age," and find perfect beauty in "virtuous patterns which the world has rejected or forgotten." He writes in June of 1927, to Bernard Dwyer:

> But there does still remain the possibility of a reminiscent individual art for those who voluntarily remain outside the theatre of change and decay and cling tenaciously to the land and ways of their ancestors. This clinging can be either material and spiritual both, as in the case of one who still lives bodily amidst the ancient hills and woods and farmsteads; or it can be spiritual alone, as in the case of an urban dweller who remains true to the lore and memories of the old, simple, rural things, and saturates himself with their spirit and images even when he cannot spend all his days among them. This individual art will not reflect its own age, but it will sometimes reflect former ages almost as well as the artist of those ages once reflected them--depending on the extent to which the artist is able to merge himself and his soul into the background of bygone life.[124]

"In the Walls of Eryx" is an example of Lovecraft's "reminiscent individual art"; he strives by entering the maze to "remain outside the theatre of change and decay." The walls

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[123] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 284-85.

[124] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, pp. 132-33.

themselves form an invisible instrument of escape which is "material and spiritual both" and comprised of "the ancient hills and woods and farmsteads" and "the lore and memories of the old, simple, rural things." Within the walls of Eryx, "the artist is able to merge himself and his soul into the background of bygone life."

Lovecraft reaches for the past of historical tradition, but he also seeks the particular past which is intimately connected with his existence. He writes on October 17, 1930, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> My most vivid experiences are efforts to recapture fleeting & tantalising mnemonic fragments expressed in unknown or half-known architectural or landscape vistas, especially in connexion with a sunset. Some instantaneous fragment of a picture will well up suddenly through some chain of subconscious association--the immediate excitant being usually half-irrelevant on the surface--& fill me with a sense of wistful memory & bafflement; with the impression that the scene in question represents something I have seen & visited before under circumstances of superhuman liberation & adventurous expectancy, yet which I have almost completely forgotten, & which is so bewilderingly unrelated & unoriented as to be forever inaccessible in the future.[125]

The eery structure in the Eryx narrative is an interlocked composition of "fleeting & tantalising mnemonic fragments expressed in unknown or half-known architectural or landscape vistas." These "mnemonic fragments" form the invisible, spiritual maze-like structure of Eryx, which, although "half-irrelevant on the surface," forms a composite symmetry made of Lovecraft's past. Lovecraft's letter to Smith de-

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[125] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 197.

velops the idea of the search for the past:

> The source of these images, as tested by repeated analysis & associative tracing, is always a composite of places I have visited, pictures I have seen, & things I have read--extending back in my experience to my very first memories at the age of 1 3/4, & having about 3/4 of its extent in that period of life antedating my 18th year, when I left the birthplace to which I was so utterly attached. The more recent an experience is--be it objective, pictorial, or verbal--the more sharply vivid it has to be in order to gain a place in the subconscious reservoir of vision-material. . . .[126]

The circular walls of Eryx form for Lovecraft a "subconscious reservoir of vision-material" that is "a composite of places I have visited, pictures I have seen, & things I have read," a maze "extending back in my experience to my very first memories at the age of 1 3/4."

The "subconscious reservoir of vision-material" is the nucleus of an island order that stretches outward toward the stars. Lovecraft writes on November 21, 1930, to August Derleth:

> I recognize the impossibility of any correlation of the individual and the universe without the immediate visible world as a background--or starting place for a system of outward--extending points of reference. I cannot think of any individual as existing except as part of a pattern--and the pattern's most visible and tangible areas are of course the individual's immediate environment; the soil and culture-stream from which he springs, and the milieu of ideas, impressions, traditions, landscapes, and architecture through which he must necessarily peer in order to reach the "outside". . . . I begin with the individual and the soil and think outward--appreciating the sensation of spatial and temporal liberation only when I can scale it against the known terrestrial scene.[127]

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[126] Ibid. [127] Ibid., pp. 220-21.

Lovecraft correlates himself with the cosmos by using the structure of the walls of Eryx as "a system of outward-extending points of reference." The center of his concentric island is his "immediate visible world" of New England countryside; together these two elements form "the soil and culture-stream from which . . . [Lovecraft] springs." The outwardly curving maze includes "the milieu of ideas, impressions, traditions, landscapes, and architecture through which . . . [Lovecraft] must necessarily peer in order to reach the 'outside.'" Within this ordered solitude Lovecraft can appreciate "the sensation of spatial and temporal liberation" which comes from grafting the graduated crystal sphere universe of Pythagoras to "the known terrestrial scene" in an extension of his island universe with its "system of outward-extending points of reference."

Lovecraft correlates himself with the universe because of an insatiable desire to explore and go beyond the vast unknown about him. He writes on November 7, 1930, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> I want to know what stretches Outside, and to be able to visit all the gulfs & dimensions beyond Space & Time. I want, too, to juggle the calendar at will; bringing things from the immemorial past down into the present, & making long journeys into the forgotten years. But I want the familiar Old Providence of my childhood as a perpetual base for these necromancies & excursions--& in a good part of these necromancies & excursions I want certain transmuted features of Old Providence to form parts of the alien voids I visit or conjure up.[128]

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[128] Ibid., p. 214.

Lovecraft launches himself on "long journeys into the forgotten years" with his trips into the outer void, because he wants "certain transmuted features of Old Providence to form parts of the alien voids I visit or conjure up." Perhaps the Venusian walls of Eryx are the "transmuted features" of "the familiar Old Providence of . . . [Lovecraft's] childhood." Lovecraft writes about his need to relive his youth in his letter of October 15, 1927, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> What I absolutely must have--& that is about the only thing really essential to me--is a general atmosphere exactly like that of my youth--the same scenes, the same kind of faces & voices & thoughts & opinions around me--the same type of sounds & impressions.[129]

The walls of Eryx preserve for Lovecraft "an atmosphere exactly like that of my youth." Because the atmosphere of his youth is so important to Lovecraft, it forms the center of the "system of outward-extending points of reference," his island of order.

Lovecraft's island universe is far removed from any chance of intrusion by other beings. The walls of Eryx perform their function of keeping out the lizard-men. His letter to Smith continues:

> Now all these environmental concernments have nothing to do with people--except as vague & distant decorative elements, to be classified according to what their dress, physiognomy, & voice contribute to the general geographic impression. Intellectual companionship I do not really require--except so far as correspondence is concerned--since my ideal is to be

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[129] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 176.

> an absolutely passive & non-participating spectator to the pageant of meaningless existence.[130]

Lovecraft views people as contributions "to the general geographic impression" from his protected position in the walls of Eryx, because his "ideal is to be an absolutely passive & non-participating spectator to the pageant of meaningless existence" of the leaping man-lizards outside.

The walls of Eryx are a blend of the "stone-wall'd farmsteads"[131] of Lovecraft's home environment and the skeletal symmetry of concentric spheres imposed upon the nearer cosmos by the ordered vision of Pythagoras. Lovecraft writes on October 15, 1927, to Clark Ashton Smith:

> . . . What I need is simply my own fabric as a matter of cosmic symmetry--be it worse or better than anybody else's fabric. That ethereal sense of identity with my own native & hereditary soil & institutions is the one essential condition of intellectual life--& even of a sense of complete existence & waking reality--which I cannot do without. Like Antaeus of old, my strength depends on repeated contact with the soil of the Mother Earth that bore me.[132]

The Erycinian maze forms Lovecraft's "own fabric as a matter of cosmic symmetry," and his "ethereal sense of identity with . . . [his] own native & hereditary soil & institutions" forms the center of his cosmically symmetrical island cosmos.

Lovecraft's "sense of complete existence & waking reality" has its source in his exploration of the maze of

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[130] Ibid.

[131] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 31.

[132] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 177.

past experience. His letter to August Derleth of December 25, 1930, shows that he explores this labyrinth frequently and thoroughly:

> The commonest form of my imaginative aspiration--that is, the commonest definable form--is a motion backward in time, or a discovery that time is merely an illusion and that the past is simply a lost mode of vision which I have a chance of recovering.[133]

Through his "motion backward in time" Lovecraft recovers a vision of memories which mold his way of viewing the world. Lovecraft writes on February 20, 1929, to Frank Belknap Long:

> All reason unites to prove that we can apprehend the cosmos only through our five senses as guided by our intellect and intellectually tinged imagination, not fancy and that there is nothing in any living being's head which he did not get through these channels, either directly, unifiedly, and consciously, or indirectly, subconsciously, and fragmentarily. The inner mind can rearrange, select, combine, dissociate and recombine, re-proportion, re-stress, and so on, till the "subjective" idea loses all resemblance to its unconscious sources; but it cannot create anything wholly new because the human mind is a blank apart from what sensory intake gives it.[134]

Lovecraft views the universe from within a structure built of his past experiences. Some particular early experiences are "indirectly, subconsciously, and fragmentarily" molded into a unified structure in Lovecraft's mind, as "the inner mind can rearrange, select, combine, dissociate and recombine, re-proportion, re-stress, and so on, till the 'subjective' idea loses all resemblance to its unconscious sources." The walls of Eryx are a recombination of Love-

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[133] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 243.

[134] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 273.

craft's subjective memories, and his "motion backward in time"[135] appears as Stanfield's exploration of the labyrinth, a "general atmosphere exactly like that of . . . [Lovecraft's] youth."[136]

"In the Walls of Eryx" is an attempt by Lovecraft to preserve his world. The urge to eternalize his vision appears in the story as Stanfield's superhuman attempt to throw his scroll beyond the reach of the man-lizards. Lovecraft writes on October 19, 1929, to James F. Morton:

> I do like to have myself down on paper and know just where I stand in relation to the stone-wall'd rolling meads and white farmhouse gables of the Arcadian realm of Western Rhode Island.[137]

Lovecraft's final drive is to put his "conscious ego," the "vast and exquisite organism," "down on paper." Stanfield's exploration of Eryx is Lovecraft's attempt to "know just where I stand in relation to the stone-wall'd rolling meads" of his beloved Rhode Island. Lovecraft's particular choice of the verb "stand" in the preceding quotation may be the source of the name of his narrator. Lovecraft explores the fields and walled meadows of the old New England of his dreams under the guise of Stanfield's apparent entrapment:

> As I reflected, it struck me as distinctly odd that this apparently primordial structure should be so devoid of tumbling masonry, gaps in the walls, and other common attributes of dilapidation.[138]

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[135] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 243.

[136] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 176.

[137] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 31.

[138] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 279.

Lovecraft has rebuilt the dilapidated stone walls of old New England into an eternally ordered "dream New England."[139] He writes in June of 1927 to Bernard Dwyer:

> . . . Yes--my New England is a dream New England--the familiar scene with certain lights and shadows heightened (or meant to be heightened) just enough to merge it with things beyond the world. That, I fancy, is the problem of everyone working in an artistic medium--to take a known setting and restore to it in vivid freshness all the accumulated wonder and beauty which it has produced in its long continuous history. All genuine art, I think, is local and rooted in the soil, for even when one sings of far incredible twilight lands he is merely singing of his homeland in some gorgeous and exotic mantle.[140]

"In the Walls of Eryx" is Lovecraft's attempt "to take a known setting and restore to it in vivid freshness all the accumulated wonder and beauty which it has produced in its long continuous history." His narrative, though nominally recorded on Venus, is "local and rooted in the soil" of his native New England. Lovecraft is "singing of his homeland in some gorgeous and exotic mantle."

Lovecraft escapes the real world by following his maze into the "Arcadian realm" of his dream-like past. He writes to Donald Wandrei:

> . . . There is somewhere, my fancy fabulises, a marvelous city of ancient streets & hills & gardens & marble terraces, wherein I once lived happy eternities, & to which I must return if ever I am to have content. Its name & place I know not--save as reason tells me it has neither name nor place nor existence at all--but every now & then there flashes out some intimation of it in the travelled paths of men. Of this cryptic & glorious city--this primal & archaic place of splendour in Atlantis or Cockaigne

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[139] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 130.

[140] Ibid., pp. 130-31.

> or the Hesperides--many towns of earth hold vague & elusive symbols that peep furtively out at certain moments, only to disappear again.[141]

Lovecraft goes in search of these "vague & elusive symbols" in his beloved fields, as his letter continues:

> Spring comes, & I resolve to go out & drench my soul in hyacinthine fields & waking woods & far incredible cities. I resolve--I call up those fields & woods & cities in my fancy--& lo! I have seen & experienced them![142]

Lovecraft develops the recall of mental images with his fiction:

> It is the same with writing in many instances--though of course the sway of insubstantial dream is by no means so absolute as to keep me from taking many actual trips & penning many actual tales. I know that these trips & tales will never take me to the marvelous city of pre-cosmic memory, & I am probably rather glad of that knowledge, in that it secures for me an eternity of never-tarnished vision & never-sated quest through all the years of my consciousness.[143]

Lovecraft feels that his mind "cannot create anything wholly new because the human mind is a blank apart from what sensory intake gives it."[144] The steady accretion of the past here implied is the walls of Eryx, "a known setting [with] all the accumulated wonder and beauty which it has produced in its long continuous history."[145]

"The marvelous city of ancient streets & hills & gardens & marble terraces, wherein I once lived happy eternities" is a residual structure, a layered, symbolic accretion of Lovecraft's early life. He writes on February 4,

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[141] Ibid., p. 126. [142] Ibid. [143] Ibid.

[144] Ibid., p. 273. [145] Ibid., p. 131.

1934, to J. Vernon Shea:

> My mother and I moved into a 5-room-and-attic flat, two squares further east (593 Angell St., where I dwelt till 1924), and for the first time I knew what a congested, servant-less home--with another family in the same house--was. There was a vacant lot next door (although even that was later built up--during my adulthood), which I promptly exploited as a landscape garden and adorned with a village of piano-box houses, but even that failed to assuage my nostalgia. I felt [because of the loss of the Phillips estate at 454 Angell Street] that I had lost my entire adjustment to the cosmos--for what was H.P.L. without the remembered rooms and hallways and hangings and paintings . . . and yard and walks and cherry-trees and fountain and ivy-grown arch and stable and gardens and all the rest?[146]

Lovecraft's forced removal from 454 Angell Street made him feel he had lost his "entire adjustment to the cosmos." Such a manifold loss of adjustment forced him to compensate for the destruction of his paradise. Lovecraft attempted to resurrect the old order at his new, unhappier address:

> There was a vacant lot next door . . . which I promptly exploited as a landscape garden and adorned with a village of piano-box houses, but even that failed to assuage my nostalgia.[147]

But the vacant-lot kingdom near 598 Angell Street is the facsimile of a prior paradise located at Lovecraft's birthplace, 454 Angell Street. He writes to the Gallomo sometime in 1920:

> When I was very small, my kingdom was the lot next my birthplace, 454 Angell St. Here were trees, shrubs, and grasses, and here when I was between

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[146] Barton Levi St. Armand, "H. P. Lovecraft: The Outsider in Legend and Myth: A Biographical and Critical Study," Thesis Brown University 1966, p. 29.

[147] Ibid.

> four and five the coachman built me an immense summer-house all mine own--a somewhat crude yet vastly pleasing affair, with a stair-case leading to a flat roof from which in later years I surveyed the skies with my telescope. The floor was Mother Earth herself, for at the time the edifice was constructed I had a definite purpose for it. I was then a railway man, with a vast system of express-carts, wheelbarrows, and the like; plus some immensely ingenious cars made out of packing-cases. I had also a splendid engine made by mounting a sort of queer boiler on a tiny express-wagon. The new building, therefore, must needs be my grand terminal and roundhouse combined; a mighty shed under which my puffing trains could run, even as the big trains of the outside world ran under the sheds at the old depots in Providence and Boston--depots long since razed to the ground to make way for the Union, Back Bay, and South stations of today! So the building became in familiar household parlance "The Engine House"--and how I loved it! From the gate of our yard to the Engine House I had a nice track--or path--made and levelled for me; a continuation of the great railway system formed by the concrete walks in the yard. And here, in supreme bliss, were idled away the days of my youth. As I grew older, I took the road and its buildings more and more under my personal management. I began to make repairs myself, and when I was six I constructed many branch lines.[148]

During Lovecraft's childhood, his "kingdom was the lot next my birthplace." Late in Lovecraft's fourth year, the family coachman built "an immense summer-house all mine own," whose "floor was Mother Earth herself." Because Lovecraft was "a railway man" with a large number of tracks, he decided that his playhouse "must needs be my grand terminal and roundhouse combined." This grand terminal-roundhouse with its earth floor appears in Lovecraft's Eryx narrative as the round central chamber of the invisible walls. The outer door of Eryx corresponds to "the gate of our yard," because

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[148] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 104.

"from the gate of our yard to the Engine House I had a nice track--or path--made and levelled for me; a continuation of the great railway system formed by the concrete walks in the yard." This childhood labyrinth lies within the walls of Eryx. What Lovecraft describes as his "Engine House" ("--and how I loved it!") is the central point that forms his "entire adjustment to the cosmos," for "Here in supreme bliss, were idled away the days of my youth." Lovecraft rediscovers these happy hours with his "crawl backward through the Halls of Time,"[149] and his explorer Stanfield does not stray from this oasis of order. The various dead-end passages in the Erycinian maze form the "many branch lines" of the childhood railroad system Lovecraft constructed.

Lovecraft develops another layer of "the accumulated wonder and beauty which . . . [the known setting of Eryx] has produced in its known continuous history."[150] His letter to the Gallomo continues:

> One day I decided to alter my scheme, and instead of a railway system, my domain became a pastoral country-side. I invited all the boys of the neighborhood to cooperate in building a little village under the lee of the high board fence, which was in due time accomplished. Many new roads and garden spots were made, and the whole was protected from the Indians (who dwelt somewhere to the north) by a large and impregnable fort with massive earthworks.[151]

Lovecraft protects the "pastoral countryside" of his childhood

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[149] Ibid., p. 27.

[150] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1925-1929, p. 273.

[151] Ibid., p. 105.

from Indian (or other alien) outsiders with "a large and impregnable fort with massive earthworks." These fortifications reassert themselves later as the walls of Eryx that stop the hideous man-lizards, the Indian outsiders of Lovecraft's childhood.

Within the fortified walls that shut out chaos, Lovecraft and his childhood friends made "many new roads and garden spots." Lovecraft further develops his memories of his ordered childhood domicile in his letter to the Gallomo:

> My new village was called "New Anvik," after the Alaskan village of "Anvik" which about that time became know [sic] to me through the boys' book Snow-Shoes and Sledges, by Kirk Munroe. As you see, I then read juvenile matter as well as the classics, and liked it! As the years stole on, my play became more and more dignified; but I could not give up New Anvik. When the grand disaster came, and we moved to this inferior abode, [598 Angell Street] I made a second & more ambitious New Anvik in the vacant lot here. This was my aesthetic masterpiece, for besides a little village of painted huts erected by myself and Chester and Harold Munroe, there was a landscape garden, all of my own handiwork. I chopped down certain trees and preserved others, laid out paths and gardens, and set at the proper points shrubbery and ornamental urns taken from the old home. My paths were of gravel, bordered with stones, and here and there a cairn of my own making added to the picture. Between two trees I made a rustic bench, later duplicating it betwixt two other trees. A large grassy space I leveled and transformed into a Georgian lawn, with a sundial in the centre. Other parts were uneven, and I sought to catch certain sylvan or bower-like effects. The whole was drained by a system of channels terminating in a cess-pool of my own excavation. Such was the paradise of my adolescent years. . . .[152]

The "curious coldness of the walls of Eryx as contrasted with the air around" emanates from Lovecraft's memories of

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[152] Ibid., p. 105.

his reproduction of Anvik, the Alaskan village he discovered in the book for boys Snow-Shoes and Sledges, by Kirk Munroe. This story of an isolated village in Alaska provided Lovecraft with the escape from the detested modern world. Lovecraft rebuilds New Anvik in outline in his Eryx narrative.

At the center of Lovecraft's universe is "a landscape garden, all of my own handiwork." The garden is the needed balance of vitality and order, for there is within the Erycinian circumferences a watering system like the one Lovecraft constructed for his garden. As he splashes along the water-floored maze of Eryx, Stanfield follows "a system of channels terminating in a cess-pool of . . . [Lovecraft's] own excavation." That the outline of the garden in New Anvik is of "a Georgian lawn, with a sundial in the centre" suggests the central chamber of the Erycinian maze which stands within "those interior regions whence the dead man had presumably come." The "interior regions" of the walls of Eryx contain Lovecraft's sundial, the crystal of ordered energy, the "single point of light blazing through the mist and seeming to draw a piercing, concentrated luminescence from the yellowish, vapour-dulled sunbeams." The sundial, reflecting the sun's rays, is a central symbol of control and coherence. The dead man is another image of Lovecraft himself, for only he could come from "those interior regions" of his childhood. Lovecraft's affinity for the happy days of his youth is one reason for Stanfield's failure to discover the way out of the maze. These memories of

childhood, given the symmetry of structure, form Lovecraft's "aesthetic masterpiece" of ordered harmony, his micro-cosmos.

Another garden of order may superimpose itself as another layer of Lovecraft's Erycinian structure. He writes on May 15, 1930, to James F. Morton:

> I have your last summer's travelogue so mixt with mine own experiences, that I recall not whether you spoke of visiting Maymont. If you did not, then drop all your rocks this moment and come right down here!! Zounds, sir, what a world of delirious, unpredictable loveliness and dream-like enchantment!! Poe's Domain of Arnheim and Island of the Fay all rolled into one . . . with mine own Gardens of Y'in added for good measure! No--I simply cannot be awake! And to cap all climaxes, it was an utter and unexpected surprise! ! ! I stumbled on it yesterday afternoon, not knowing what I was getting into. Boy! ! ! You can bet that today I've come out here to enjoy every minute from eleven a.m. to the closing hour of six! I have my revisory work with me.[153]

Lovecraft found in the Virginia gardens of Maymont the "world of delicious, unpredictable loveliness and dream-like enchantment" that lives within the walls of Eryx. Eryx, like the Virginia garden, "was an utter and unexpected surprise," for Stanfield is knocked backward into the mud by his first contact with the invisible walls. Lovecraft was so fascinated by the maze-like garden that he voluntarily spent all the time there that he could spare, even to the point of doing his "revisory work" on the premises. This voluntary confinement is a counterpart for Stanfield's imprisonment in the maze and his attempts to keep a record of his explorations.

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[153] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 150.

In the continuation of his letter to James F. Morton, Lovecraft outlines the mental essentials that make up the concentric maze of the Erycinian structure:

> You are no doubt sensible, from many observations of mine, that to me the quality of utter, perfect beauty assumes two supreme incarnations or adumbrations: one, the sight of mystical city towers and roofs outlined against a sunset and glimps'd from a fairly distant balustraded terrace; and the other, the experience of walking (or, as in most of my dreams, aerially floating) thro' aethereal and enchanted gardens of exotick delicacy and opulence, with carved stone bridges, labyrinthine walks, marble fountains, terraces and staircases, strange pagodas, hillside grottos, curious statues, termini, sundials, benches, basins, and lanthorns, lily'd pools of swans and streams with tiers of waterfalls, spreading gingko-trees and drooping, feathery willows. . . .
>
> Well, by god, sir, call me an aged liar or not--I vow I have actually found the garden of my earliest dreams--and in no other city than Richmond, home of my beloved Poe! Maymont! I shall dream of little else all the few remaining days of my long life!!--[154]

The ethereal beauty of the sunset on the Erycinian highland is noted more than once by Stanfield, too, as "the experience of walking . . . thro' aethereal and enchanted gardens of exotick delicacy and opulence, with carved stone bridges, labyrinthine walks, marble fountains, . . . sundials, benches, basins, and lanthorns." The sundials, benches, and basins appear in Lovecraft's description of his beloved New Anvik, and these varied images form the concentric perfection of the walls of Eryx, with its "quality of utter, perfect beauty." Stanfield, the explorer of this wonderland, is from Richmond, Virginia, the city of Maymont, "the garden

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[154] Ibid., pp. 150-51.

of . . . [Lovecraft's] earliest dreams."

The urge for order ultimately emanates from Lovecraft's memories. He writes on August 8, 1933, to Robert H. Barlow:

> It takes no effort at all--especially when I am out in certain woods and fields which have not changed a bit since my boyhood--for me to imagine that all the years since 1902 or 1903 are a dream . . . that I am still 12 years old, and that when I go home it will be through the quieter, more village-like streets of those days--with horses and wagons, and little vari-colored street cars with open platforms, and with my old home at 454 Angell Street still waiting at the end of the vista--with my mother, grandfather, black cat, and other departed companions alive and unchanged. . . . What is it, that has created a 1933 H.P.L. differing from the 1903 H.P.L.--and can the 1903 H.P.L. be <u>really</u> annihilated when all his moods and memories can be recalled by the 1933 edition?[155]

Lovecraft's access to his childhood is clear. Lovecraft asks himself how his identity may have changed from his youth to adulthood: ". . . What is it, that has created a 1933 H.P.L. differing from the 1903 H.P.L. . . . ?" He wonders whether his youth-identity may not still be alive somewhere within him: ". . . can the 1903 H.P.L. be really annihilated when all his moods and memories can be recalled by the 1933 edition?" The walls of Eryx enclose the world of Lovecraft's childhood, "recalled by the 1933 edition."

The "interior regions" of the childhood recalled by Lovecraft come from a memory of Lovecraft's youth. There are at least three epistolary references to a childhood edifice created by Lovecraft and his friends. Lovecraft writes

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[155] St. Armand, p. 8.

on August 11, 1921, to Reinhardt Kleiner:

> Last Monday I had a pleasing and unusual experience--a trip of some fifteen years backward along the corridors of time; revisiting some scenes of youth, and recalling for the nonce the atmosphere of buoyant boyhood. I happened to be up in the morning--O condition most rare!--when the telephone brought to me the dulcet tones of my best childhood friend, Harold Bateman Munroe, who told me of his recent acquisition of a new camouflaged flivver and of his present desire to make an excursion to Taunton and Rehoboth, covering the territory through which we used carelessly and gaily to disport in those blessed days when the daemon Time had not brought us to a prosaic maturity.[156]

Stanfield's journey through the walls of Eryx, the "crawl backward through the Halls of Time to that age which is nearest my own fancy,"[157] is made by "the 1933 edition" of Lovecraft as he travels "backward along the corridors of time" to "the atmosphere of buoyant boyhood."

A metamorphosis occurs in Lovecraft's mind as he journeys back with Harold Bateman Munroe, his boyhood chum, to the region of the long-lost days of their youth:

> As we reentered these realms of our 'teens, the years imperceptibly dropt away from us; so that we were soon boys of 16 or 17 once more. Much had changed--saplings had grown to trees, red houses had been painted white, an old mill had tumbled down, and many verdant meads had become defaced by the sties and shovels of Italians and Portuguese--yet more was still unchanged; so that our quest of our lost youth was by no means without reward or realisation. The climax came when we sought the ruins of our old "country clubhouse" on Great Meadow Hill, and to our delighted amazement found the whole lowly and tar-papered edifice intact!!! The locality was changed in aspect--a second growth of tim-

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[156] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 143-44.

[157] Ibid., p. 27.

> ber had sprung up, ensconcing the cabin in a cozy maple grove--but all the change was for the better, and the old place seemed as a gem in a fairer setting. Nothing was gone--not a stone displaced in the massive chamney which a good old Civil War Veteran (now dead) helped us build with rock filched from neighbouring stone walls. Once more we stood at childhood's shrine, hardly realising that our locks were besprinkled with grey.[158]

Lovecraft and his friend move backward in time and become "boys of 16 or 17 once more." Degeneration of the environment has occurred because of "the sties and shovels of Italians and Portuguese." These foreign invaders appear as the leaping man-lizards of the Eryx narrative. But even such ravages as these cannot destroy all of the world of Lovecraft's past, "so that our quest of our lost youth was by no means without reward or realisation." The central chamber of the structure atop the Erycinian Highland corresponds to the "old 'country clubhouse' on Great Meadow Hill," for the two men find "the whole lowly and tar-papered edifice intact." The clubhouse, which, like the walls of Eryx, is not built "by the hands of men," is surrounded by a protective barrier: ". . . a second growth of timber had sprung up, ensconcing the cabin in a cozy maple grove. . . ." Even the glowing crystal within the walls is foreshadowed, for Lovecraft writes that "the old place seemed as a gem in a fairer setting." The reason Stanfield does not find any fallen pieces of masonry within the walls is that none has in fact fallen: "Nothing was gone--not a stone displaced

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[158] Ibid., p. 144.

in the massive chimney . . . [that was built] with rock filched from neighbouring stone walls." Stanfield, in his place within the protecting walls, corresponds to Lovecraft's return to "childhood's shrine," surrounded by its maple grove on Great Meadow Hill.

Lovecraft describes his venture into the past in a letter of August 19, 1921, to his aunt, Annie Phillips Gamwell. He begins the letter by describing again his trip with his boyhood friend Munroe into the countryside of their youth:

> But finally we left trade & Taunton behind, & rattled along the pike toward the greatest adventure of all--a pious pilgrimage to the tomb of our dead youth--Great Meadow Hill & the old clubhouse! As we undulated over the hilly macadam ribbon between the meadows we speculated upon how much we would find of the crude tar-papered edifice which we deserted eight years ago. Harold thought that only the "chimbly"--built of great stones by honest old James Kay, now dead--would be standing. I, however, believed that we would still find the walls of the newer part--the addition we built to the original woodman's hut, which was larger than the hut itself. Thus did we speculate as we turned from the pike into the narrow rutted road at Wheeler's Corners, jogging over the indescribable washouts & hummocks that used to force us to dismount in the old cycling days. The new-cut forest of 1909, which gave us a vast horizon & panorama when we discovered the spot, had now grown up again; & tall young mapletrees & tangles of underbrush now enshrouded the site of the clubhouse. Through the foliage we saw the antique "chimbly" (that was James Kay's pronunciation!) & thrilled at the thought that at least one memorial of the old times remained--a sort of monument or headstone to our buried youth & hopes.[159]

Lovecraft's adventure is a journey back into time, "a pious

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[159] Ibid., p. 146.

pilgrimage to the tomb of our dead youth." The walls of Eryx are a sepulcher for Lovecraft's dead hopes and buried childhood, symbolized by the decaying corpse with the crystal in its dead hands. The inner walls of Eryx are invisible replicas of "the walls of the newer part--the addition we built to the original woodman's hut. . . ." Lovecraft writes that "the tomb of our dead youth" is surrounded by walls of protective vegetation: "tall young mapletrees & tangles of underbrush now enshrouded the site of the clubhouse." The copious trees and underbrush emerge later as "the tangled vines and creepers" of the planet Venus. The walls of Eryx within the vegetation are "a sort of monument or headstone to our buried youth & hopes."

Lovecraft describes more fully the inner sanctum of his youth as his letter to his aunt continues:

> Then through an opening in the new-grown trees we beheld the long-deserted spot in full--and lo! upon our eyes dawned the one sight that neither of us had dared expect--the old Great Meadow Country Clubhouse intact, in all the solid perfection of the old days! We drew near, looked long, & tried the door. Aside from a broken lock, all was as ever, for in drowsy Rehoboth even relentless Time sometimes nods & lets a few years slip away undevastatingly. There had been no decay, nor even vandalism. Tables stood about as of yore, pictures we knew still adorned the walls with unbroken glass. Not an inch of tar paper was ripped off, & in the cement hearth we found still embedded the small pebbles we stamped in when it was new & wet--pebbles arranged to form the initials G.M.C.C. Nothing was lacking--save the fire, the ambition, the ebulliency of youth in ourselves; & that can never be replaced. Thus two stolid middle-aged men caught for a moment a vision of the aureate & iridescent past--caught it, & sighed for days that are no more.[160]

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[160] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, pp. 146-47.

Returning as a middle-aged adult to the edifice of his youth, Lovecraft finds the near-perfect relics of his sacred past, positioned as of old: "Tables stood about as of yore, pictures we knew still adorned the walls with unbroken glass." The unbroken glassy surfaces of the pictures suggest the glassy material of the Erycinian structure. The life-like array within the old clubhouse gives Lovecraft the perfect resting place for his dead hopes.

Lovecraft knows his energy is swiftly ebbing, and "In the Walls of Eryx" is about a search for energy. In 1921, the year of his pilgrimage to the shrine of his lost youth, Lovecraft senses his need to recapture this energy through memories to recycle the power of youth into his declining years. But the joyously vital instant of remembrance cannot be prolonged. "Nothing was lacking--save the fire, the ambition, the ebulliency of youth in ourselves; & that can never be replaced." Lovecraft finds a remnant of energy in the Eryx crystal, but the vital principle can only burn momentarily: "Thus two stolid middle-aged men caught for a moment a vision of the aureate & iridescent past--caught it, & sighed for days that are no more."

A third letter about Lovecraft's rediscovery of the relics of his past is dated August 31, 1921, and is addressed to the Gallomo. By this time twenty-three days have passed since Lovecraft's visit, and he writes in a less particularized, more poetic vein:

Our youth came again upon us a flame. For there

> amidst the growing trees in awkward grace stood the symbol of our old days in wonted wholeness--the boyhood clubhouse, erect in its tar-papered grotesqueness, and intact in every part through all the years!! There was neither vandalism nor decay--the lock was gone, but that was all. Even the old pictures hung on the walls of this haunted place; this little world of the past, where even Time had eased his scourging in the absence of any human audience. What shadowy companies, moreover, could we picture about the gray cement hearth where the pebbled initials G.M.C.C. still lay fixed as we had stamped them when it was new and wet! We seemed to see the old gang as it was--Ron, and Ken, and Stuart, with the fresh faces and clear eyes of youth. They are not dead, but the boy in them is dead, so that their ghosts appear only in this silent and forgotten place. And as we gazed about, Harold conceived the idea of re-gaining for brief snatches the youth that we have lost. If all goes well, we shall refit this house of miraculous preservation, and bring back to it the men who were once the old gang; and perhaps on some nights in the golden autumn when the logs burn red in the stone fireplace the ghosts may pass back into the aging bodies to which they be-longed of old, and the gang will live once again.[161]

The ball of Erycinian fire, the "gem in a fairer setting,"[162] is the refinement of youthful fantasy. As Stanfield lifts the crystal away from Dwight's dead fingers, Lovecraft is touching the eery, gem-like energy from his past: "As I touched the gleaming surface I shuddered involuntarily--as if by taking this precious object I had transferred to myself the doom which had overtaken its earlier bearer." Lovecraft's connection with his past is realized in the completed circuit. Lovecraft's persona Stanfield shudders because of this completion, for by accepting the gem-like crystal ball of his youth ("Our youth came again on us a

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[161] Ibid., p. 150. [162] Ibid., p. 144.

flame") Lovecraft spends the last of his energy in a frank glance along the time-line maze leading to his past. By means of his protagonist Stanfield, Lovecraft gazes into a crystal ball that shows him a perfect vision of his past. In this act Lovecraft becomes free to die: "I have just taken the great crystal out of my pouch to look at it in my last moments. It shines fiercely and menacingly in the red rays of the dying day."

The story of Eryx is "the idea of regaining for brief snatches the youth that we have lost," the finished dream of re-creation that Lovecraft visualized as early as 1921:

> If all goes well, we shall refit this house of miraculous preservation, and bring back to it the men who were once the old gang; and perhaps on some nights in the golden autumn when the logs burn red in the stone fireplace the ghosts may pass back into the aging bodies to which they belonged of old, and the gang will live once again.[163]

But the dream is stilborn. The corpse of Dwight, the man who has come from the inner regions of Lovecraft's childhood, is a composite of Lovecraft's remembered boyhood friends: "They are not dead, but the boy in them is dead."

Lovecraft moves within his walls of Eryx through the complete cycle of a voyage both to and from this "little world of the past" which seems to lie within the mysterious "interior regions" of the walls of Eryx. He writes to Clark Ashton Smith on November 18, 1930:

> I'm glad my suggestions about a time-voyager seemed good, & think your own suggestion about the mechanism

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[163] Ibid., p. 150.

> is quite masterly! I shall be glad to see this idea worked out. It would really, in view of the different conditions reachable by voyages of different length, in opposite directions, be material for a novel rather than a short story. You might have the hero disappear in the end by losing control of the time mechanism, & thus being precipitated into abysses of ultimate entity of which it is better not to speak. Or if you envisage a curved time corresponding to Einsteinian curved space, you might have the voyager make a complete circuit of the chronological dimension--reaching the ultimate future by going beyond the ultimate past, or vice versa. . . .[164]

Lovecraft's 1930 statement that he "shall be glad to see this idea [of a time voyager] worked out," has its fruition in his "In the Walls of Eryx." Lovecraft may "envisage a curved time corresponding to Einsteinian curved space," so that within the walls of Eryx he can "make a complete circuit of the chronological dimension." Through his Erycinian narrative, Lovecraft reaches within the past of his own life-experience by going toward the ultimate future. He writes on October 30, 1929, to James F. Morton:

> This, then, is the only real value of the past beyond what a few remembered experiences have taught--that it forms a set of emotional sugar-plums and landmarks for us, by choosing a few special things out of infinity's conflicting chaos and setting them up for our immediate attention and preference. But heaven knows that's value enough and to spare--since without this subtle and unconscious guidance out emotional dilemma amidst the rival claims of an ungraspable bedlam of crowding, unrelated, and opposite sense-impressions, perception-foci, emotional thrills, and lines of logic would be desperate beyond description. In the blurred field of aimless ideas, images, and feelings offered by the external world past and present, there is no way of getting any kind of clear image save by applying the clarifying diaphragm of traditional feeling--the es-

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[164] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 218.

> pecially selected and coloured view of the past given us as a legacy by those who have gone before us. . . .[165]

For Lovecraft the viable past is composed of "what a few remembered experiences have taught," and the gem among these experiences is probably the "little world of the past" in the Erycinian concentricity. The glowing crystal within the maze is one of the "emotional sugar-plums" from the past. Lovecraft uses his Eryx narrative to coalesce his past experience into the coherence of an ordered maze of evolved development formed by "a set of emotional sugar-plums and landmarks." Lovecraft creates this maze of landmarks by "choosing a few special things out of infinity's conflicting chaos and setting them up for our immediate attention and preference." He follows his life-maze into the future that lies before him by building an order of the relics of his past and reaches "the ultimate future by going beyond the ultimate past."

Lovecraft finds the greatest order and freedom from chaos in his "little world of the past," the microcosmic island formed of his remembered childhood, "that age which is nearest my own fancy.[166] Without the order which his remembered past brings, the maze-traverser is open to the attack of Minotaural chaos. Lovecraft sees the Minotaur as both an internal and external force, because for him the

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[165] Ibid., p. 48.

[166] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 27.

monster is "our [own] emotional dilemma amidst the rival claims of an ungraspable bedlam of crowding, unrelated, and opposite sense-impressions, perception-foci, emotional thrills, and lines of logic. . . ."[167] Lovecraft escapes this terrible discordant existence by twining his maze into an Erycinian island of order.

Within his paradisal paradigm, Lovecraft as Stanfield holds his treasured memories in his hands. As he holds his pearl of great price, he looks aside to the lizard-like man-things, the embodiments of chaos around the limit of his microcosm. As Lovecraft stares into the blazing ball of iridescence to see his beautiful and pure child-dreams for a last time, he perhaps sees the place in the maze-like "Halls of Time"[168] where the labyrinth has its beginning.

"In the Walls of Eryx," forms a journey back to an ordered world of Lovecraft's childhood and youth, and may touch the action of "The Tomb," his first adult story. "The Tomb" is the fictive record of Lovecraft's early exploration of the maze, the "Halls of Time." Lovecraft's character Jervas Dudley enters the portion of the past which is marked by revelry and disorder, a disorder which culminates in a conflagration. The end of the story is marked by Jervas Dudley's burial within the tomb: the door of the maze is opened, and the myth of the Minotaur has begun.

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[167] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1929-1931, p. 48.

[168] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 27.

Lovecraft writes in "The Tomb" of Jervas Dudley's reading the life of Theseus as recorded by Plutarch: "I was much impressed by that passage telling of the great stone beneath which the boyish hero was to find his tokens of destiny whenever he should become old enough to lift its enormous weight."[169] As coal under intense pressure becomes diamond, so Lovecraft's evolutionary mechanism of maze-traversal served as the exercise of energy necessary to create a "gem in a fairer setting."[170] This evolutionary alembic is seen in action near the high point of Lovecraft's artistry in "The Colour Out of Space," as the stone from the sky is refined into the pure iridescent energy of the fireball that rises up the ladder of evolved existence. With "In the Walls of Eryx," Lovecraft completes his journey. From the center of his finished island of order formed of the wound maze evolved from the matter of his past (as exemplified by Dudley's revelry and the unlifted stone of Theseus), the older, evolved Lovecraft looks back to his beginnings through his polished ball of crystallized perfection. The crystal sphere is the evolved quintessence of the stone lifted in one of Lovecraft's earliest stories, and the internal, Minotaural chaos of "The Tomb" has been exorcised and forced to retreat to its position outside the walls of Eryx. With the retreat of the principle of disorder beyond the outer limit of Eryx,

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[169] Lovecraft, Dagon, p. 12.

[170] Lovecraft, Selected Letters 1911-1924, p. 144.

Lovecraft's mystical island of remembered childhood order and stability is complete. Lovecraft has created through his art a structured world of serenity, and at its center rests that world's life-principle--a perfect spirit-sphere of Promethean fire.

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Ivory Tower," by Robert Bloch; "Three Hours with H. P. Lovecraft," by Dorothy C. Walter; "Memories of a Friendship," by Alfred Galpin; "H.P.L." by Clark Ashton Smith; "H. P. Lovecraft: The Books," by Lin Carter; "H. P. Lovecraft: The Gods," by Lin Carter; "Addendum: Some Observations on the Carter Glossary," by T. G. L. Cockroft; and "Notes on the Cthulhu Mythos," by George T. Wetzel.

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Date of Examination:

April 18, 1975