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Brian J. Reis

National Coalition of Independent Scholars, brianjamesreis@gmail.com

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Structurally Cosmic Apostasy: The Atheist Occult World of H.P. Lovecraft

Brian J. Reis

National Coalition of Independent Scholars

Abstract

*The conflict between materialism and spiritualism has a long philosophical history. Both schools of thought attempted to address the problems of the unknown through varying methods. There are two figures, who in their own ways, rejected both means. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky sought to counter Spiritualist claims by venturing into her own occult philosophy—Theosophy—seeking to uncover spiritual truths, debunking religious traditions as well as seeking to undermine scientific materialism that had begun to sweep the intellectual life of the 19th century. To do so, she claimed to have translated an ancient book which, through occult means, revealed the origin of mankind though she never produced the full text. Howard Phillips Lovecraft, the science fiction author who proudly declared himself as an atheist and a supporter of Thomas Henry Huxley's materialism—a fervent foe of any sort of religious claim, nonetheless also produced a book of which the text was never revealed. Lovecraft, by using many of the same precepts of the Theosophists, that the current state of man is but one stage in a cosmic cycle, produced a work known as the *Necronomicon*. The difference, as the paper makes clear is that Lovecraft openly admitted his book was a fiction, of which an actual manuscript did not exist and were merely scattered parts found within his stories that he used to distill through myth the reality of the human condition as inconsequential in the totality of time and space, while all the while referring to concepts that Blavatsky outlined. Lovecraft controverts the Theosophist by using her same method, employing it more honestly, and creates his own mythology in order to show that it is invented and supposed supernatural forces are merely, as Richard Dawkins now puts it, “the natural yet unexplained.”*

In *An Outline of Occult Science*, Rudolf Steiner claims that there are three sorts of people with opinions of the hidden world. The first states that there is no hidden world, and that science will be able to explain all reality. The second person maintains that there may be a hidden world beyond the visible, but “the human powers of cognition are unable to penetrate into it.” Science cannot make any claims to prove or disprove it. The third person maintains that this penetration into knowledge is deleterious, even blasphemous. “Others,” as Steiner goes on to say, “maintain still other things.”¹ The science fiction author Howard Phillips Lovecraft had the interesting distinction of occupying all three positions while maintaining still another thing—a staunch atheism.

Lovecraft makes use of these hidden worlds in his work implying that if the real nature of the universe were revealed, man would be driven mad. Yet, he states that such forces are physical—albeit beyond the realm of usual human perception. Thus, he appears to belong to the second group of people mentioned by Steiner. Yet, in his private life and personal opinions, he was assuredly of Steiner's first group of people. Lovecraft also applies certain ideas of the Theosophist Helen Petrovna Blavatsky to his storytelling, including her theories on the origins of mankind. To achieve this, Lovecraft employs an

1 Steiner, Rudolf *An Outline of Occult Science*, Anthroposophic Press, 1972, pg.vii

artificial mythology utilizing occult terminology to describe the beings that inhabit his world.

Through his use of occult terminology which helps buttress an artificial mythology, crafted in a meta-narrative of an apocryphal occult “text”—the *Necronomicon*—Lovecraft sought to explain a world through “occult” means that verified his atheist and materialist conceptions of the world. The specter of an age old conflict arose once again through symbolism, mythology, and appeals to both the spiritual and scientific. Should supernatural explanations be permitted in a scientific setting, or should they be dismissed out of hand as hallucination? Lovecraft answered this question through his *Necronomicon* story device, employing what one author describes as an “anti-mythology.”²

Many of these occult forces in his mythology come to fruition by physical means, and are imbued by “supersensible” creatures that nonetheless have a quasi-physical explanation. The connection between occultism, Theosophy and literature is certainly a rich one, as many authors of the Romantic period were fascinated by strange spiritual adventures as well as explorations of Eastern religions. This fascination bled into the 20th Century, as poets like William Butler Yeats participated in Esoteric orders.³ However, these occult influences can be found in authors who did not share a belief in the strange explorations of the mystical sort. In fact, some of these authors used occult precepts to argue for a materialist, scientific worldview. In doing so, they appropriated an artificial mythology in order to explore the ideas of the precepts without extolling them as truth. In order to apply occult ideas without actually believing them, they had to invigorate knowledge of the visible world with what Steiner called “insight into the supersensible.”⁴

In this way, Lovecraft maintained an insight into the supersensible through fiction, creating a similar backstory as Blavatsky's through her supposed discovery of occult texts, which supposedly held ancient secrets. Lovecraft, an atheist who believed that materialism explained reality, engaged in a meta-narrative parodying the discovery of occult texts, declaring through his narratives that such a discovery of these supposed occult forces was to lead to insanity and death, provided the same means as those who would argue a designer or ancient beings foisted intelligence upon humanity--but rejected their metaphysics. In this way, he offered a remarkably effective mythology with its own supposed text, while all the while openly declaring its fictional quality.

Research Methods

The goal as stipulated is to determine how Lovecraft maintained an occult sensibility while also undermining the very basis of occult thought. In order to see exactly how Lovecraft narratively appropriates supposed occult knowledge one must examine the specific occult terminology he also used. In establishing this, it is also necessary to glean the ways in which Lovecraft's narratives use occult “knowledge” while actively maintaining its “hidden nature.” Lovecraft's text is admittedly apocryphal, by elucidating the use of occult narrative as well as his attempt at pseudo-histories that place his *Necronomicon* in historical context. Lovecraft's fiction was as near to his worldview as could be with embellishment, and its parallels to early occult texts.

It is necessary to examine several key components of occult ideas, their supposedly hidden nature, their accounts of the origins of mankind, their musings on dreams and also to endeavor how in fact Lovecraft employs his apocryphal occult text in order to assert the very ideas in which occult texts explicitly or implicitly repudiate—materialism and atheism.

2 Evans, Tim, “A Last Defense against the Dark: Folklore, Horror, and the Uses of Tradition in the Works of H. P. Lovecraft” *Journal of Folklore Research*, Volume 42, Number 1, January-April 2005, pp. 99-135, pg.127

3 Melton, J. Gordon, editor, *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, v. 2, Gale Group, 2001, pg.1327

4 *Outline of Occult Science* pg. 49

By examining Lovecraft biographically relying on the established scholarly data as to his philosophical influences, one finds several instances where the materialist view is lauded in precisely the same way that they are criticized by Blavatsky. One is able to establish Lovecraft's undermining of occult themes through his narrative parody, by investigating specific passages from his works that are inspired by Blavatsky's theories of man's origins, Rudolf Steiner's interpretation of dreams, as well as examining his own attitude toward pseudo histories which mirror the supposed histories and investigations of the occultists in question. First, the structure of his own created occult text must be examined against the texts of those who claimed occult knowledge. Specifically, Madame Blavatsky must then be addressed using Rudolf Steiner as a barometer, as it is not out of the realm of possibility that she based her ideas on other supplied mystic and occult texts. It is necessary to examine the way in which Lovecraft employs the structure and basic ideas of Theosophy or occult thought.

Two Apocryphal Texts

In order to examine the way in which Lovecraft created his “artificial mythology,” a term usefully coined by religious scholar Robert M. Price, it is essential to look at Madame Blavatsky's method of divining the occult knowledge she supposedly happened upon. In her seminal works, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, Madame Blavatsky refers to an ancient book: the Book of Dzyan. According to Blavatsky, it is an “ancient manuscript—a collection of palm leaves made impermeable to water, fire, and air, by some specific unknown process[. . .]”⁵ How she was able to discern that the process was specific, yet also unknown remains unclear.

A polemic by William Emmette Coleman, a contemporary of Blavatsky's who sought to undermine her occult claims, noted that *The Secret Doctrine* was a compendium of several other religious texts, and is nothing but an invention by the author. If this is the case, Blavatsky and Lovecraft have something very much in common indeed. According to Coleman, *The Secret Doctrine* is based on stanzas supposedly translated by the author herself from “The Book of Dzyan.” It is declared as “the oldest book in the world, written in a language unknown to philology.”⁶ But he concludes that the Book of Dzyan was an apocryphal text, composed of multiple sources to create a justification for the doctrines in *The Secret Doctrine*. He wrote:

I find in this "oldest book in the world" statements copied from nineteenth-century books,[...] Letters and other writings of the adepts are found in *The Secret Doctrine*. In these Mahatmic productions I have traced various plagiarised passages from Wilson's Vishnu Purana and Winchell's World Life, - of like character to those in Madame Blavatsky's acknowledged writings. Detailed proofs of this will be given in my book. I have also traced the source whence she derived the word Dzyan.⁷

Coleman endeavored to offer a proof in an upcoming book. Unfortunately, such a proof went unwritten, due to a fire caused by the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.⁸ However, some scholars have vindicated his basic assertion, comparing Blavatsky's ideas to Jewish mysticism, and in fact claiming that Blavatsky also used this as the basis for her so called discovered text. As writes Gershon Scholem,

5 Blavatsky, Helena Pretovna, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, Theosophical University Press, 1972, pg. 1

6 Ibid, pg. I

7 William Emmette Coleman, "The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings", in Solov'ev Vsevolod Sergeevich, *A Modern Priestess of Isis*, Appendix C, pp. 353-366 (London: Longmans & Co., 1895)

8 Cranston, Sylvia H.P.B.: *The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1993), p. 384.

she “alludes to such a connection between the two “books” in the very first lines of *Isis Unveiled* (vol. 1 p. 1) where she still refrains from mentioning the Book Dzyan by name.” However, the “transcription used by her for the Aramaic title shows clearly what she had in mind.” The Book of Dzyan, to him is an “occultistic hypostasy of the Zoharic title,” and the “bibliographical” connection between the fundamental writings of modern and of Jewish Theosophy “seems remarkable enough.”⁹ Blavatsky writes in *Isis Unveiled* about The Book of Dzyan as such:

There exists somewhere in this wide world an old Book [...] It is the only original copy now in existence. The most ancient Hebrew document on occult learning — the *Siphra Dzeniouta* — was compiled from it, and that at a time when the former was already considered in the light of a literary relic.¹⁰

It is clear that Blavatsky did explicitly mention the *Siphra Deniouta*, which is the “Zoharic title” to which Scholem refers. Of course, Blavatsky claims that the book to which she refers is the basis for the Siphra, as was her wont to claim spiritual insight through occult means. H.P. Lovecraft detailed a similar history, but made it known that his creation was wholly fictional. Lovecraft's *Necronomicon* differs from Blavatsky's Book of Dzyan in many ways. The first is that Lovecraft never actually produced a supposed record of it, but let it acquire a “negative space” from which to tell other stories.

In his many letters, Lovecraft outlined what many of his fellow pulp writers wanted to know about this strange occult text he had supposedly stumbled upon. Writing to Robert E. Howard and Robert Bloch among others, he described his “*Necronomicon*” as a useful invention that nonetheless found its way into other authors' work due to his literary connections as well as its unparalleled fecundity.

Regarding the solemnly cited myth-cycle of Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, R'lyeh, Nyarlathotep, Nug, Yeb, Shub-Niggurath, etc., etc.—let me confess that this is all a synthetic concoction of my own, like the populous and varied pantheon of Lord Dunsany's Pegana!¹¹

Lovecraft's fellow writers also used various of passages of his “book,” while he used others like Robert E. Howard's “*Unaussprechlichen Kulten*” in order to create a supposed backstory for a book that does not in fact exist.¹² The multiple sources and supposed translations offered only in English, never to produce an original copy, bears more than a passing resemblance to Blavatsky's Book of Dzyan, which Scholem convincingly concludes is an apocryphal text combined from various other sources. Lovecraft's attitude to his own revealed, mythic text and its distribution to his fellow pulp writers was offered thus:

9 Scholem, Gershorn, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken Press, 1995 pg. 398-399

10 Blavatsky, Helena Pretovna, *Isis Unveiled: a Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* Theosophical University Press, 1972, pg. 420

11 Letter to To Robert E. Howard (August 14, 1930): *Selected Letters, Vol. IV*

12 He continued, “We never, however, try to put it across as an actual hoax; but always carefully explain to enquirers that it is 100% fiction. In order to avoid ambiguity in my references to the *Necronomicon* I have drawn up a brief synopsis of its ‘history’... All this gives it a sort of air of verisimilitude/” Letter to William Frederick Anger (August 14, 1934): *SL, Vol. V*

This pooling of resources tends to build up quite a pseudo-convincing background of dark mythology, legendry, & bibliography—though of course none of us has the least wish actually to mislead readers.¹³

Similarly, his tongue-in-cheek “History of the Necronomicon” provides a way of introducing the occult history of the text.¹⁴ This does so in much the same way that Blavatsky claimed she happened upon the Book of Dzyan, as illustrated by the way in which Lovecraft jovially asked his fellow authors if they had heard of such texts, playfully expounding upon the idea that they had a varied history:

You are fortunate in securing copies of the hellish and abhorred Necronomicon. Are they the Latin texts printed in Germany in the fifteenth century, or the Greek version printed in Italy in 1567, or the Spanish translation of 1623? Or do these copies represent different texts?¹⁵

Lovecraft plays on his invented occult text, and provides its history in secular terms, in that it was found and translated. Even with his occult text, he attributes no actual supernatural origins to it, but provides the reader with a supposedly traceable ancestry of a forbidden text, demystifying it even as he makes it sound mysterious. Blavatsky employed much different methods.

Occult Terminology

Much of Lovecraft's work directly utilizes specific terminology borrowed from Theosophical and occult thought. Therefore, it is necessary to examine these terms which relate to Theosophical elements. Lovecraft's Cthulhu, a creature which “waits dreaming”¹⁶ has varying linguistic ties to the term “chthonic.” In Hellenic Greece, the gods that were known as “chthonic” were always buried under the earth, with the supposition that they would return, bearing a close resemblance to the “beings” in the Book of Dzyan as well as the “Old Ones:” Chthonic gods, “were always regarded as the source of evils that men seek to avert,”¹⁷ and “gods of the realm beneath the earth.” that nonetheless await their return. In Lovecraft, the evils that men seek to avert are the ghastly revelation of this truth and the overbearing power of the thoughtless universe.

Lovecraft speaks generally about these “chthonic” evils. In “The Outsider,” a man who discovers that he himself is a half-formed and monstrous ghoul, who resigned to his fate, will play “amongst the catacombs of Nephren-Ka in the sealed and unknown valley of Hadoth by the Nile.” Lovecraft made it known that the “madness, antiquity, decay and dissolution” evoked by this creature was something at once associated with old and buried traditions and gods, and the awful baring of this “putrid dripping eidolon of unwholesome revelation” the “merciful earth” should always hide.¹⁸ The sheer horror of this revelation is that these creatures are real and that they have existed before and will supplant mankind, resulting in the “chthonic” impression that they are to be feared, and the propitiations to be made are simply not to blunder into such territory through “the piecing together of

13 Letter to Miss Margaret Sylvester (January 13, 1934): *SL*, Vol. V

14 Lovecraft, “The History of the Necronomicon,” Necronomicon Press, 1938 ed. S.T. Joshi

15 Letter to (to James Blish and William Miller, 1936) *SL*, Vol. V

16 “The Call of Cthulhu,” *The Necronomicon*, pg.430

17 Fairbanks, Arthur The Chthonic Gods of Greek Religion. *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1900), pg. 241-259

18 “The Outsider” in *The Necronomicon*, pg. 301

dissociated knowledge” of science of the occult.¹⁹

Similarly, it is also evident that the “chaos” that Lovecraft's referring to is the Chaos” that is vindicated by the use of H.P. Blavatsky's own Theosophical glossary points to another related term, which was Chthonia, “Chaotic earth in the Hellenic cosmogony.”²⁰ Blavatsky provides an even more extensive definition of Chaos in her glossary of Theosophical terms.

Chaos (Gr.) The Abyss, the “Great Deep”. It was personified in Egypt by the Goddess Neïth, anterior to all gods[...]An ancient stele declares her to be “Neut, the luminous, who has engendered the gods.”²¹

She quotes further from the source declaring it to be “merely the Chaos of Genesis[. . .]and perhaps also Môt, the primitive substance that was the mother of all the gods.” This “primitive substance” seems to permeate through many of Lovecraft's initial discoveries and ideas.²² It seems not a coincidence that the “crawling chaos”, referred to be Lovecraft in his story “Nyarlathotep,” is an amorphous being that shifts in and out of varying forms of manifestations. Of course, Nyarlathotep is not the god who engendered all of humanity—nor are other gods—but he is one who came from inner Egypt and is a sort of forbearer to a cosmology that is parallel to the cyclical nature of Blavatsky's cosmology. In the poem “Nyarlathotep,” in his sonnet cycle “Fungi From Yuggoth,” Lovecraft writes, after he introduces this “man from Inner Egypt:

“Soon from the sea a noxious birth began;□
 Forgotten lands with weedy spires of gold;□
 The ground was cleft, and mad auroras rolled□
 Down on the quaking citadels of man.
 Then, crushing what he chanced to mould in play,□
 The idiot Chaos blew Earth's dust away.”²³

The “idiot” Chaos becomes a force of destruction, born of a primitive substance, but the description is seemingly not too far from Blavatsky's own musings. Utilizing occult terminology in order to provide the foundations of his work with a basis in what seems to be spiritual terms, he nonetheless employs the definitions somewhat faithfully, and then places them in a context which serves undermine them.

Specific Instances of Theosophy in Lovecraft

It may seem a problem of equivocation to declare that Lovecraft's ideas were concomitant with Theosophy due to the similarity of these texts, but Lovecraft's specific citations of Theosophy as a means of inspiration vindicate their similarity. Of course, this source of inspiration he eventually ridicules. The most flagrant instance of Theosophy in Lovecraft comes from “The Call of Cthulhu,” his most famous story and the story most associated with the couplet “That is not dead which can eternal

19 “The Call of Cthulhu,” pg. 428

20 H.P. Blavatsky, *Theosophical Glossary*, London:1892, p. 140.

21 Although Blavatsky applies this to a comparative religious history of the Virgin Mary, and other maternal myth cycles, it is interesting that this cosmology begins with Chaos, a engenderer that is the mother of all things.

22 *Theosophical Glossary*, p. 140.

23 “Nyarlathotep” in “Fungi From Yuggoth” in *The Ancient Track: The Complete Poetical Works of H. P. Lovecraft*. Night Shade Books, 2001. Ed. S.T. Joshi.

lie/and with stranger eons even death may die.” The cyclical nature of death and life, which is expressed in the Book of Dzyan as well, is presented in a way that does not reflect human interest:

Theosophists have guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents. They have hinted at strange survivals in terms which would freeze the blood if not masked by a bland optimism.²⁴

These “strange survivals” are indicated at length in Lovecraft's novella, *The Shadow Out of Time*, which takes the reader through all of the supposed cycles of man, which very closely resemble the shift of the ages of man as thought by Blavatsky. Blavatsky's supposed translation of the Book of Dzyan speaks of one form of existence, which is the supposed creator and imbuer of consciousness to mankind. There is one form of existence which is the basis of all life, but it is unknown and unrecognizable to the senses, for there are no human senses or even the faintest hint of them at the moment of creation. As described by Blavatsky, “Alone the one form of existence stretched boundless, infinite, causeless, in dreamless sleep; and life pulsed unconscious in universal space.”²⁵ The universe, according to the Book of Dzyan as outlined by Blavatsky, is not exactly described as a “black sea of infinity,” as Lovecraft would say, but it does have characteristics of what Lovecraft would later describe as “the formless, infinite, unchanging and unchangeable void.”²⁶ When this void is first introduced in The Book of Dzyan, it is clear that there had been the death of a previous cycle, the causes of existence having been “done away with; the visible that was, and the invisible that is, rested in eternal non-being — the one being.”²⁷ Blavatsky's rendering of this supposedly ancient myth clearly indicates a cyclical pattern, that which demonstrates and demarcates that all causes of existence will return anew to the previous state of non-existence. Similarly, Lovecraft imbues his alien gods with a sort of timelessness that is recounted in his occult text the Necronomicon. One passage, as recounted in “The Dunwich Horror” is now infamous:

Nor is it to be thought [...] 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.²⁸

While Blavatsky's “old book” appears to describe cosmic evolution and explain “the origin of everything on earth, including physical man,”²⁹ Lovecraft merely refers to a book that indicates the presence of creatures in this present state. The Book of Dzyan supposedly ends 4849 years ago, after what Blavatsky terms the cycle of Kali Yuga. The Necronomicon, in its fragmentary state is supposed to have been written in the period of time that can be discerned by humans. Nonetheless, the occult text is still referenced when relating to the panspermian birth of humankind. In his novella, *At the Mountains of Madness*, an expedition in Antarctica discovers creatures that predate all humanity, not unlike the formless strange figures which supposedly laid the foundations of humanity in the Book of Dzyan, the discovery referencing directly the occult text:

24 “The Call of Cthulhu” in *The Necronomicon*, pg. 428

25 *The Secret Doctrine*, pg. 27

26 “The Dunwich Horror,” in *The Necronomicon*, pg. 223

27 *The Secret Doctrine*, pg. 27

28 “The Dunwich Horror,” in *The Necronomicon*, pg. 250

29 *The Secret Doctrine*, p. xliii

The builders of the city were wise and old, and had left certain traces in rocks even then laid down well nigh a thousand million years - rocks laid down before the true life of earth had advanced beyond plastic groups of cells - rocks laid down before the true life of earth had existed at all. They were the makers and enslavers of that life, and above all doubt the originals of the fiendish elder myths which things like the Pnakotic Manuscripts and the Necronomicon affrightedly refer.³⁰

Still, Lovecraft's own ideas were that such creatures, those that had created all life forms, could be traced to a supposed history, albeit one of his own invention. With Lovecraft, there could be an actual place where the writing of the book can be divined, or at least placed within a valid historical context. Lovecraft applies this idea to another occult and Theosophical precept involving dreams. His application of occult thought and his own biographical data provide another unique way of applying occult ideas while undermining them, resulting in what can only be shown to be a biting parody.

Dream Realities

Dreams and the question of consciousness are another facet of occult ideas, and Lovecraft dealt with dreams in his fiction in a way diametrically opposed to his own actual ideas. He always desired to know whether something was real or whether was something of a dream of his own making. He recognized "a distinction between dream life and real life, between appearances and actualities." and confessed to "an over-powering desire to know" whether he was "asleep or awake," whether his "environment was permanent," or the "transitory products" of "his own brain."³¹ But in his fiction, especially in his Randolph Carter stories, Lovecraft employed a Blavatskian sensibility about his protagonist, a dream traveller, foisting the conflict of rational thinking and the ethereal dreamworld into the inner conflict of Carter's own cognitive dissonance:

Custom had dinned into his ears a superstitious reverence for that which tangibly and physically exists, and had made him secretly ashamed to dwell in visions. Wise men told him his simple fancies were inane and childish, and even more absurd because their actors persist in fancying them full of meaning and purpose as the blind cosmos grinds aimlessly on from nothing to something and from something back to nothing again[...]³²

But Lovecraft was clearly parodying the Theosophists assertions about the mystical world in this instance, as evidenced by his thoughts on the subject. He would agree with these wise men, where the disenchanted Carter would attempt to find his mystical experience not unlike those dreamt by the Theosophists and occultists. Lovecraft's presentation of sleep in other stories continues upon this parody and implementation of occult ideas, especially that of Rudolf Steiner. Rudolf Steiner's *An Outline of Occult Science* also describes the character of sleep as death and an unconscious form:

30 *At the Mountains of Madness*, in *The Necronomicon*, pg. 528

31 Letter to Maurice W. Moe (15 May 1918), in *Selected Letters I, 1911-1924* edited by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, p. 6

32 "The Silver Key," in *The Necronomicon*, pg. 230

It is not possible to penetrate into the nature of waking consciousness without observing the state through which the human being passes during sleep and it is impossible to solve the riddle of life without considering death.³³

Similarly, Lovecraft uses dreams in order to reveal to the narrator what in his waking life will not come to pass. These strange beings exist simultaneously with man while existing out of the realm of perceptibility. In an ironic musing, Lovecraft's narrator states that his protagonist Randolph Carter has been faring too much in the realm of the intellectual, and forgets that "all life is only a set of pictures in the brain," that "there is no difference betwixt those born of real things and those born of inward dreamings, and no cause to value the one above the other."³⁴ Lovecraft, himself, of course, endeavored to know this difference but employed another of Steiner's ideas in other stories as well. Lovecraft's narrator in his story, "Ex Oblivione" declares something similar to Steiner's aforementioned statement, in which a being who finds himself in the last stages of his life plunges into a death dream:

When the last days were upon me, and the ugly trifles of existence began to drive me to madness like the small drops of water that torturers let fall ceaselessly upon one spot of their victims body, I loved the irradiate refuge of sleep.³⁵

Of course, the speaker must return from such a dream, but it is revealed that he had existed in a state of oblivion and that the dream was his actual state of living. Before he dissolves again into that "native infinity of crystal oblivion" from which the "daemon Life" had called him "for one brief and desolate hour," he reflects that his existence is only real insofar that it is imagined. Such a native state of crystal oblivion is very close to what the Book of Dzyan outlines. In dreams, the very measure of this original state may be traced. Blavatsky wrote of her view of time in such a way which is not at all dissimilar from the way Lovecraft's characters experience it:

Time is only an illusion produced by the succession of our states of consciousness as we travel through eternal duration, and it does not exist where no consciousness exists in which the illusion can be produced; but "lies asleep." The present is only a mathematical line which divides that part of eternal duration which we call the future, from that part which we call the past[...]Even so of persons and things, which, dropping out of the to-be into the has been, out of the future into the past—present momentarily to our senses a cross-section, as it were, of their total selves, as they pass through time and space on their way from one eternity to another.³⁶

Such a time-lapse and dream relation is clearly indicated in Lovecraft's *Shadow Out of Time*. The protagonist, Peaslee, is thrust forward through time, in which the planet has long since been destroyed, and views "entire chapters of human history" ostensibly the future of mankind, in the past tense. In doing so he is "snatched" from his age while another uses his body in that age. Eventually, he is treated to the fate of human race, when speaking to creatures living millions of years after the last humans have died.

33 *An Outline of Occult Science*, pg. ix

34 "The Silver Key," in *The Necronomicon*, pg. 233

35 Lovecraft, H.P. "Ex Oblivione," in *Miscellaneous Writings* Arkham House Publishers; 1995

36 *The Secret Doctrine* pg. 37

After man there would be the mighty beetle civilisation, the bodies of whose members the cream of the Great Race would seize when the monstrous doom overtook the elder world. Later, as the earth's span closed, the transferred minds would again migrate through time and space - to another stopping-place in the bodies of the bulbous vegetable entities of Mercury. But there would be races after them, clinging pathetically to the cold planet and burrowing to its horror-filled core, before the utter end.³⁷

The pessimism of Lovecraft's vision should be obvious. In this way, he most certainly undermined such occultistic ideas as Steiner's assertion that "an unbiased point of view can never entertain the thought that in sleep the astral body is destroyed." The astral body would not be destroyed, but it would witness a meaning entirely antithetical to mankind being in any way a beneficiary of this supposed spiritual revelation.. In eternity, when the "future becomes the past," as Blavatsky would have it, the planet itself and humankind evaporates. Whatever "total self" Blavatsky mentions appears to be a view of the universe without recourse to man's experience of himself. Blavatsky's time relations seem to be mimicked, but when shown in its truest expanse, the future makes Blavatsky's time relation, that of past and present assumed in a single human consciousness to be highly anthropocentric, and thus shortsighted.

Lovecraft's Huxleyan Materialism vs. Blavatsky's Intuition

Approaching Lovecraft biographically, it is clear that these occult ideas did not suit his personal views. When Lovecraft would analyze these occult ideas in his personal life, with regard to the actual nature of the universe, and the consequences of its unfeeling nature, his allegiance remained with the Materialists, as he was himself one. When the religious or the spiritualists would attempt to glean from ancient texts, as well as science some sort of godly apparatus, his response was typically as such:

it is amusing because of its contradictions, and because of the pompousness with which its possessors try to analyze dogmatically an utterly unknown and knowable cosmos in which all mankind forms but a transient, negligible atom.³⁸

Blavatsky made an inverse accusation after outlining her translation and commentary upon the occult text in the *Secret Doctrine*, makes such truth claims of the numinous based on religious revelation and perception. Lovecraft's far more realistic view of science—admittedly due to the time period in which he lived—takes this same method but applies it in a level of grander science outside of human perception.

Occult or spiritualist ideas do not lead to any more understanding, but merely a mystery that does not allow humans to understand reality any more than science supposedly cannot. If "occult" is defined by these intuitive senses, it is clear that Lovecraft does not employ an occult understanding, but rather shows an occult or hidden world through a verisimilar reality. Human intuition does not discover these, but science does.

Blavatsky's claims about the supposed eternal being of man or at least the possibility of human existence beyond the material employed similar claim in order to discredit one of Lovecraft's personal heroes and icons, the paleontologist Professor Thomas Henry Huxley. Blavatsky used a strange form of

37 *The Shadow Out of Time*, pg.576

38 Lovecraft, "Idealism and Materialism: A Reflection" in *Against Religion: The Atheist Writings of H.P. Lovecraft*. Sporting Gentleman Press, 2010, pg. 44

logic to admonish him for not having an open mind to other facets of the brain which reach beyond the material:

Is the law of evolution, so imperative in its application to the method of nature, from the time when cosmic molecules are floating, to the time when they form a human brain, to be cut short at that point, and not allowed to develop more perfect entities out of this "preexistent law of form?"³⁹

Huxley writes clearly about his discoveries in "The Progress of Paleontology", and is indeed closer to Blavatsky's manner of thinking than she would have liked to believe, the coiner of the term "agnostic,"⁴⁰ in its common usage. He considered it not impossible that the production of all plants and animals "should have been independently originated by an endless succession of miraculous creative acts" or through "spontaneous generation." But he found these hypotheses "so astoundingly improbable, so devoid of a shred of either scientific or traditional support, that even if there were no other evidence than that of palaeontology in its favour," he "should feel compelled to adopt the hypothesis of evolution." He added that this science should be independent of all hypothetical considerations.⁴¹ Lovecraft echoed Huxley's Materialist view more strongly, thinking it "damned unlikely that anything like a central cosmic will, a spirit world, or an eternal survival of personality exist." Like his forbear, he would not adopt such a worldview pending "the appearance of radical evidence."⁴² Blavatsky, predictably had an answer to these views that is nothing if not indicative of precisely the view that Lovecraft had characterized as begging the question of an existence beyond the material:

So long as science will confess that her domain lies within the limits of these changes of matter; and that chemistry will certify that matter, by changing its form "from the solid or liquid, to the gaseous condition," only changes from the visible to the invisible; and that, amid all these changes, the same quantity of matter remains, she has no right to dogmatize. She is incompetent to say either yea or nay, and must abandon the ground to persons more intuitional than her representatives.⁴³

This is the point where Lovecraft takes issue with Blavatsky and other occultists. Because something is invisible and is a discernible state of matter, it somehow retains a mystical quality. The designation of the invisible afterward is to Blavatsky a matter for other concerns of the supersensible bent, by intuition. Such proofs of existence rely on a fundamentally tautological understanding of reality, via these intuitions. However, Lovecraft's view of intuition is entirely subject to human perception, and in his mind, is something that cannot be construed as a real or discernible statement of fact. By contrast, Blavatsky's attempts to revitalize the connections to the past through her study of multifarious religious traditions. Some scholars have therefore suggested that Blavatsky's modern occult movement was couched as an attempt at "revising the notion that secularization is a break with religion, "but was constructed as a "self-serving version of a secular society, less opposed to religion

39 *Isis Unveiled*, pg. 420

40 Huxley, Thomas. *Collected Essays, Vol. V: Science and Christian Tradition*. Macmillan and Co 1893. pp. 237–239.

41 Thomas Henry Huxley, "The Rise and Progress of Paleontology" D. Appleton and company, 1897 , pg. 45

42 Letter to Robert E. Howard (16 August 1932), in *Selected Letters 1932-1934* edited by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei

43 *The Secret Doctrine*, pg. 421

than to a present-minded, ahistorical view of life.”⁴⁴

This in turn, points the reader to another way of explaining Lovecraft in terms of the way of creating a self-serving secular point of view. The difference is generally that Lovecraft's narrowing of the chasm is between legend and actual scientific discovery, with the unearthing of prehistoric creations. Lovecraft is the actual device between rational secularism and mythology that finds itself bridging the gap because his fiction makes no claim for itself and out of whole cloth invents simulacra of historical mythological claims. Lovecraft is also less opposed to mythology or religion than to people than an ahistorical view of life—one that does not take into account prehistory and the underlying nature of man's place in the universe. H.P. Lovecraft's attempt to form a pseudo-history of his occult text need to be examined by this standard.

Lovecraft's Secularization of Occult Ideas

Lovecraft's “secularization” of his occult text places his legends in a mock history. He includes in his mock history a translation to Greek by Theodorus Philetas, the original Arabic text burned by the church patriarch Michael, and the original Greek translated to Latin, until its suppression by Pope Gregory IX, and reprinted in “the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries but few copies are extant.”⁴⁵

It seems that this shocking blasphemy was produced by a native of Sanaá, in Yemen, who flourished about 700 A.D. & made many mysterious pilgrimages to Babylon's ruins, Memphis's catacombs, & the devil-haunted & untrodden wastes of the great southern deserts of Arabia -- the Roba el Khaliyeh, where he claimed to have found records of things older than mankind, & to have learnt the worship of Yog-Sothoth & Cthulhu.⁴⁶

The mock history of the Bible, with the Greek and Latin references, and the suppression of versions of the story not in accordance with authorities, is but one facet of this strange method in which Lovecraft attempted to not only give it a sense of verisimilitude, but an air of comparative reality with his actual world, through an analysis of its author and where it was discovered, in stark contrast to Blavatsky, who despite scholars findings to the contrary, claimed to have found and translated the nonexistent book herself. He goes so far as to cite its “original title,” Al Azif, “being the name applied to those strange night noises (of insects) which the Arabs attribute to the howling of daemons.”⁴⁷ Even for his narrative device, Lovecraft did not in the slightest give any indication that there could be demons, but the Arabs merely attributed the sounds to them.

Lovecraft's attitude to the old and to the arcane is one of terror and distaste, and at least his gentleman narrators who discover the true horrors offer a real threat to the provinciality of their concerns, as it is alien “to all art and literature which sane and balanced readers know.”⁴⁸ This occult text is not some wonderfully bestowed gift upon mankind that gives him a greater understanding, but is so alien to him that it can only be looked at with terror and disgust. “Wherever existing, it is carefully guarded for the sake of the world's welfare & sanity.”⁴⁹

44 Viswanathan, Gauri “The Ordinary Business of Occultism,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Autumn, 2000), pp. 1-20
The University of Chicago Press

45 “The History of the Necronomicon,” pg. 7

46 Letter written to Clark Ashton Smith. *SL*, vol. III

47 “The History of the Necronomicon,” pg. 12

48 “The Hound,” in *The Necronomicon*, pg. 225

49 Letter written to Clark Ashton Smith on November 27, 1927, *Selected Letters*, vol. III

The Necronomicon, and how it seems to illustrate its own “secret doctrine,” through the handed down by a crazed madman and distributed among museums and libraries, usually denied access but to elite academics, is illustrated in “The Dunwich Horror” in the context of strange areas and locations that are hidden from view, or rather only accessed through secret or “occult” means. A glaring similarity seems to emerge from Blavatsky's Book of Dzyan as well as her commentary.

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.

In the novella *At the Mountains of Madness*, in which it is finally revealed that such a supposed race of gods are actually ancient extraterrestrials, it is clear that the text, in the context among learned men of science is actually the best way to describe their scientific findings in such a way that makes their truth more cohesive, if infinitely unpalatable. That narrator remarks that his companions Dyer and Pabodie “have read Necronomicon[...]and will understand when I speak of Elder Things supposed to have created all earth-life as jest or mistake.”⁵⁰

More specifics are engendered once the discoverers happen upon more frozen creatures in the Antarctic waste. These “viscous masses,” without shape or form are “what Abdul Alhazred whispered about as the “shoggoths” in his frightful Necronomicon.” However, even he “had not hinted that any existed except in the dreams of those who had chewed a certain alkaloidal herb.”⁵¹ Scientific discovery seems to prove the existence of creatures that could only be accessed through occult means.

In “Dreams in the Witch House,” Lovecraft explicitly correlates the dreaded occult texts such as the Necronomicon, and some others for good measure—with the study of quantum physics, as a graduate student gleans some “terrible hints” from Alhazred's text, “the fragmentary Book of Eibon,” and “the suppressed Unaussprechlichen Kulten of von Junzt” to “correlate with his abstract formulae on the properties of space and the linkage of dimensions known and unknown.”⁵²

Conclusion

It appears that the little learning of the Theosophists was a dangerous thing to Lovecraft in his presentation. Their ideas, so rife with a vague mysticism was sublimated into the text of his Necronomicon. This invention, which has no source material, provides an interesting parallel to the supposed Book of Dzyan. Lovecraft was more honest about his apocrypha's veracity, however, declaring it as pure invention of which the source material did not actually exist. As with all of the Theosophical ideas and anthroposophical ideas incorporated in Lovecraft's storytelling, its inclusion was merely to provide more fodder to his particular brand of scientific determinism, creating mythologies of gods only to kill them by providing scientific explanations or by showing how the conclusions of theosophy lead to a horror of existence so masked by a “bland optimism.”

Perhaps the greatest reason for Lovecraft's utilization of Theosophical or occult precepts, his implementations of unseen or hidden forces—as I have outlined henceforth—despite his ardently defended atheist, scientifically deterministic world views, was simply his love for exploring the

50 *At the Mountains of Madness*, pg. 437

51 *At the Mountains of Madness*, pg. 469

52 Lovecraft “The Dreams in the Witch House,” in *The Necronomicon*, pg. 263

unknown. In dabbling in notions which he considered to be ridiculous and inane, he was able to create a world in which the supposed illusion of time could coalesce, and yet he could walk confidently knowing that there was no actual intelligence behind humanity that was the essence of this illusion, as the occultists claimed. As he wrote candidly:

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.⁵³

⁵³ *Ibid*, pg. 50

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