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The Weird And The Eerie

Published by Repeater Books
An imprint of Watkins Media Ltd

19-21 Cecil Court
London
WC2N 4EZ
UK

www.repeaterbooks.com
A Repeater Books paperback original 2016
4th edition

Distributed in the United States by Random House, Inc., New York.

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Cover design: Johnny Bull
Typography and typesetting: Jan Middendorp
Typefaces: Chaparral Pro and Absara Sans

ISBN: 978-1-910924-38-9
Ebook ISBN: 978-1-910924-39-6

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INTRODUCTION

The Weird and the Eerie (Beyond the Unheimlich)

It is odd that it has taken me so long to really reckon with the weird and the eerie. For although the immediate origins of this book lay in fairly recent events, I have been fascinated and haunted by examples of the weird and the eerie for as long as I can remember. Yet I had not really identified the two modes, still less specified their defining features. No doubt this is partly because the major cultural examples of the weird and the eerie are to be found at the edges of genres such as horror and science fiction, and these genre associations have obscured what is specific to the weird and the eerie.

The weird came into focus for me around a decade ago, as the result of two symposia on the work of H.P. Lovecraft at Goldsmiths, University of London; while the eerie became the major subject of *On Vanishing Land*, the 2013 audio-essay I produced in collaboration with Justin Barton. Appropriately, the eerie crept up on Justin and me; it had not been our original focus, but by the end of the project we found that much of the music, film and fiction that had always haunted us possessed the quality of the eerie.

What the weird and the eerie have in common is a preoccupation with the strange. The strange — not the horrific. The allure that the weird and the eerie possess is not captured by the idea that we "enjoy what scares us". It has, rather, to do with a fascination for the outside, for that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience. This fascination usually involves a certain apprehension, perhaps even dread — but it would be wrong to say that the weird and the

eerie are necessarily terrifying. I am not here claiming that the outside is always beneficent. There are more than enough terrors to be found there; but such terrors are not all there is to the outside.

Perhaps my delay in coming round to the weird and the eerie had to do with the spell cast by Freud's concept of the *unheimlich*. As is well known, the *unheimlich* has been inadequately translated into English as the uncanny; the word which better captures Freud's sense of the term is the "unhomely". The *unheimlich* is often equated with the weird and the eerie — Freud's own essay treats the terms as interchangeable. But the influence of Freud's great essay has meant that the *unheimlich* has crowded out the other two modes.

The essay on the *unheimlich* has been highly influential on the study of horror and science fiction — perhaps, in the end, more because of Freud's hesitations, conjectures and rejected theses than for the actual definition he provides. The examples of the *unheimlich* which Freud furnishes — doubles, mechanical entities that appear human, prostheses — call up a certain kind of disquiet. But Freud's ultimate settling of the enigma of the *unheimlich* — his claim that it can be reduced to castration anxiety — is as disappointing as any mediocre genre detective's rote solution to a mystery. What enduringly fascinates is the cluster of concepts that circulate in Freud's essay, and the way in which they often recursively instantiate the very processes to which they refer. *Repetition* and *doubling* — themselves an uncanny pair which double and repeat each other — seem to be at the heart of every "uncanny" phenomena which Freud identifies.

There is certainly something that the weird, the eerie and the *unheimlich* share. They are all affects, but they are also modes: modes of film and fiction, modes of perception, ultimately, you might even say, modes of being. Even so, they are not quite genres.

Perhaps the most important difference between the *unheimlich* on the one hand and the weird and the eerie on the other is their treatment of the strange. Freud's *unheimlich* is about the strange *within* the familiar, the strangely familiar, the familiar as strange – about the way in which the domestic world does not coincide with itself. All of the ambivalences of Freud's psychoanalysis are caught up in this concept. Is it about making the familiar – and the familial – strange? Or is it about returning the strange to the familiar, the familial? Here we can appreciate the double move inherent to Freudian psychoanalysis: first of all, there is estrangement of many of the common notions about the family; but this is accompanied by a compensatory move, whereby the outside becomes legible in terms of a modernist family drama. Psychoanalysis itself is an *unheimlich* genre; it is haunted by an outside which it circles around but can never fully acknowledge or affirm. Many commentators have recognised that the essay on the *unheimlich* itself resembles a tale, with Freud in the role of the Jamesian unreliable narrator. If Freud is an unreliable narrator, why should we accept that his own tale should be classified in terms of the category that his essay proposes? What if, instead, the whole drama of the essay consisted in Freud's attempts continually to contain the phenomena he explores within the remit of the *unheimlich*?

The folding of the weird and the eerie into the *unheimlich* is symptomatic of a secular retreat from the outside. The wider predilection for the *unheimlich* is commensurate with a compulsion towards a certain kind of critique, which operates by always processing the outside through the gaps and impasses of the inside. The weird and the eerie make the opposite move: they allow us to see the inside from the perspective of the outside. As we shall see, the weird is that *which does not belong*. The weird brings to the familiar something which ordinarily lies beyond it, and which cannot be reconciled with the

"homely" (even as its negation). The form that is perhaps most appropriate to the weird is montage — the conjoining of *two or more things which do not belong together.* Hence the predilection within surrealism for the weird, which understood the unconscious as a montage-machine, a generator of weird juxtapositions. Hence also the reason that Jacques Lacan — rising to the challenge posed by surrealism and the rest of aesthetic modernism — could move towards a *weird psychoanalysis*, in which the death drive, dreams and the unconscious become untethered from any naturalisation or sense of homeliness.

At first glance, the eerie might seem to be closer to the *unheimlich* than to the weird. Yet, like the weird, the eerie is also fundamentally to do with the outside, and here we can understand the outside in a straightforwardly empirical as well as a more abstract transcendental sense. A sense of the eerie seldom clings to enclosed and inhabited domestic spaces; we find the eerie more readily in landscapes partially emptied of the human. What happened to produce these ruins, this disappearance? What kind of entity was involved? What kind of thing was it that emitted such an *eerie cry*? As we can see from these examples, the eerie is fundamentally tied up with questions of agency. What kind of agent is acting here? Is there an agent at all? These questions can be posed in a psychoanalytic register — if we are not who we think we are, what are we? — but they also apply to the forces governing capitalist society. Capital is at every level an eerie entity: conjured out of nothing, capital nevertheless exerts more influence than any allegedly substantial entity.

The metaphysical scandal of capital brings us to the broader question of the agency of the immaterial and the inanimate: the agency of minerals and landscape for authors like Nigel Kneale and Alan Garner, and the way that "we" "ourselves" are caught up in the rhythms, pulsions and patternings of non-human forces. There is no inside except as a folding of

the outside; the mirror cracks, I am an other, and I always was. The shudder here is the shudder of the eerie, not of the *unheimlich*.

One extraordinary example of the displacement of the *unheimlich* by the eerie is D.M. Thomas' novel *The White Hotel*. The novel first of all seems to be about a simulated case study of a fictional patient of Freud's, "Anna G". The poem by Anna G which begins the novel seems at first sight to be saturated with erotic hysteria, as Thomas' Freud proposes in the Case History which he writes. Freud's reading threatens to dissipate the oneiric atmosphere of Anna G's poem, and also establish to a direction of explanation: from the present to the past, from the outside to the inside. Yet it turns out that the seeming eroticism is itself an obfuscation and a deflection from the poem's most intense referent, which is to be found not in Anna G's past, but in her future — her death at the massacre at Babi Yar in 1941. The problems of foresight and fate here bring us to the eerie in a disturbing form. Yet fate might be said to belong to the weird as well as the eerie. The soothsaying witches in *Macbeth*, after all, are known as the Weird Sisters, and one of the archaic meanings of "weird" is "fate". The concept of fate is weird in that it implies twisted forms of time and causality that are alien to ordinary perception, but it is also eerie in that it raises questions about agency: who or what is the entity that has woven fate?

The eerie concerns the most fundamental metaphysical questions one could pose, questions to do with existence and non-existence: *Why is there something here when there should be nothing? Why is there nothing here when there should be something?* The unseeing eyes of the dead; the bewildered eyes of an amnesiac — these provoke a sense of the eerie, just as surely as an abandoned village or a stone circle do.

So far, we are still left with the impression that the weird and the eerie have primarily to do with what is distressing or

terrifying. So let us end these preliminary remarks by pointing to examples of the weird and the eerie that produce a different set of affects. Modernist and experimental work often strikes us as weird when we first encounter it. The sense of *wrongness* associated with the weird — the conviction that *this does not belong* — is often a sign that we are in the presence of the new. The weird here is a signal that the concepts and frameworks which we have previously employed are now obsolete. If the encounter with the strange here is not straightforwardly pleasurable (the pleasurable would always refer to previous forms of satisfaction), it is not simply unpleasant either: there is an enjoyment in seeing the familiar and the conventional becoming outmoded — an enjoyment which, in its mixture of pleasure and pain, has something in common with what Lacan called *jouissance*.

The eerie also entails a disengagement from our current attachments. But, with the eerie, this disengagement does not usually have the quality of shock that is typically a feature of the weird. The serenity that is often associated with the eerie — think of the phrase *eerie calm* — has to do with detachment from the urgencies of the everyday. The perspective of the eerie can give us access to the forces which govern mundane reality but which are ordinarily obscured, just as it can give us access to spaces beyond mundane reality altogether. It is this release from the mundane, this escape from the confines of what is ordinarily taken for reality, which goes some way to account for the peculiar appeal that the eerie possesses.

THE WEIRD

The Out of Place and the Out of Time: Lovecraft and the Weird

What is the weird? When we say something is weird, what kind of feeling are we pointing to? I want to argue that the weird is a particular kind of perturbation. It involves a sensation of *wrongness:* a weird entity or object is so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist, or at least it should not exist here. Yet if the entity or object *is* here, then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid. The weird thing is not wrong, after all: it is our conceptions that must be inadequate.

Dictionary definitions are not always much help in defining the weird. Some refer immediately to the supernatural, but it is by no means clear that supernatural entities must be weird. In many ways, a natural phenomenon such as a black hole is more weird than a vampire. Certainly, when it comes to fiction, the very generic recognisability of creatures such as vampires and werewolves disqualifies them from provoking any sensation of weirdness. There is a pre-existing lore, a set of protocols for interpreting and placing the vampire and the werewolf. In any case, these creatures are merely empirically monstrous; their appearance recombines elements from the natural world as we already understand it. At the same time, the very fact that they are supernatural entities means that any strangeness they possess is now attributed to a realm beyond nature. Compare this to a black hole: the bizarre ways in which it bends space and time are completely outside our common experience, and yet a black hole belongs *to* the natural-material cosmos — a cosmos which must therefore be much stranger than our ordinary experience can comprehend.

It was this kind of intuition which inspired the weird fiction of H.P. Lovecraft. "Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large," Lovecraft wrote to the publisher of the magazine *Weird Tales* in 1927. "To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all." It is this quality of "real externality" that is crucial to the weird.

Any discussion of weird fiction must begin with Lovecraft. In stories that were published in pulp magazines, Lovecraft practically invented the weird tale, developing a formula which can be differentiated from both fantasy and horror fiction. Lovecraft's stories are obsessively fixated on the question of the outside: an outside that breaks through in encounters with anomalous entities from the deep past, in altered states of consciousness, in bizarre twists in the structure of time. The encounter with the outside often ends in breakdown and psychosis. Lovecraft's stories frequently involve a catastrophic integration of the outside into an interior that is retrospectively revealed to be a delusive envelope, a sham. Take "The Shadow over Innsmouth", in which it is ultimately revealed that the lead character is himself a Deep One, an aquatic alien entity. I am It — or better, I am They.

Although he is often classified as a writer of horror, Lovecraft's work seldom evokes a feeling of horror. When Lovecraft sets out his motives for writing in his short essay "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction", he does not immediately mention horror. He writes instead of "vague, elusive, fragmentary impressions of wonder, beauty, and adventurous expectancy." The emphasis on horror, Lovecraft goes on to say, is a consequence of the stories' encounter with the unknown.

Accordingly, it is not horror but *fascination* — albeit a fascination usually mixed with a certain trepidation — that is integral to Lovecraft's rendition of the weird. But I would say this is also integral to the concept of the weird itself — the weird cannot only repel, it must also compel our attention. So if the element of fascination were entirely absent from a story, and if the story were *merely* horrible, it would no longer be weird. Fascination is the affect shared by Lovecraft's characters and his readers. Fear or terror are not shared in the same way; Lovecraft's characters are often terrified, but his readers seldom are.

Fascination in Lovecraft is a form of Lacanian *jouissance*: an enjoyment that entails the inextricability of pleasure and pain. Lovecraft's texts fairly froth with *jouissance*. "Frothing", "foaming" and "teeming" are words which Lovecraft frequently uses, but they could apply equally well to the "obscene jelly" of *jouissance*. This is not to make the absurd claim that there is no negativity in Lovecraft — the loathing and abomination are hardly concealed — only that negativity does not have the last word. An excessive preoccupation with objects that are "officially" negative always indicates the work of *jouissance* — a mode of enjoyment which does not in any sense "redeem" negativity: it sublimates it. That is to say, it transforms an ordinary object causing displeasure into a Thing which is both terrible *and* alluring, which can no longer be libidinally classified as either positive or negative. The Thing overwhelms, it cannot be contained, but it fascinates.

It is fascination, above all else, that is the engine of fatality in Lovecraft's fictions, fascination that draws his bookish characters towards the dissolution, disintegration or degeneration that we, the readers, always foresee. Once the reader has read one or two of Lovecraft's stories, they know perfectly well what to expect in the others. In fact, it is hard to believe that even when a reader encounters a Lovecraft story for the

first time that they will be very surprised by how the tale turns out. Therefore it follows that *suspense* — as much as horror — is not a defining feature of Lovecraft's fiction.

This means that Lovecraft's work does not fit the structuralist definition of fantasy offered by Tzvetan Todorov. According to that definition, the fantastic is constituted by a suspension between the uncanny (stories which ultimately resolve in a naturalistic way) and the marvellous (stories which resolve supernaturalistically). Although Lovecraft's stories involve what he characterised in "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction" as "the illusion of some strange suspension or violation of the galling limitations of time, space, and natural law which forever imprison us and frustrate our curiosity about the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis", there is never any suggestion of the involvement of supernatural beings. Human attempts to transform the alien entities into gods are clearly regarded by Lovecraft as vain acts of anthropomorphism, perhaps noble but ultimately absurd efforts to impose meaning and sense on to the "real externality" of a cosmos in which human concerns, perspectives and concepts have only a local reference.

In his book *Lovecraft: A Study in the Fantastic*, Maurice Lévy fitted Lovecraft into a "Fantastic tradition" which includes the Gothic novels, Poe, Hawthorne and Bierce. But Lovecraft's emphasis on the materiality of the anomalous entities in his stories means that he is very different from the Gothic novelists and Poe. Even though what we might call ordinary naturalism — the standard, empirical world of common sense and Euclidean geometries — will be shredded by the end of each tale, it is replaced by a hypernaturalism — an expanded sense of what the material cosmos contains.

Lovecraft's materialism is one reason that I think we should distinguish his fiction — and indeed the weird in general — from fantasy and the fantastic. (It should be noted

that Lovecraft himself happily equates the weird and the fantastic in "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction".) The fantastic is a rather capacious category, which can include much of science fiction and horror. It is not that this is inappropriate for Lovecraft's work, but it does not point to what is unique in his method. Fantasy, however, denotes a more specific set of generic properties. Lord Dunsany, Lovecraft's early inspiration, and Tolkien, are exemplary fantasy writers, and the contrast with them will allow us to grasp the difference from the weird. Fantasy is set in worlds that are entirely different from ours — Dunsany's Pegāna, or Tolkien's Middle Earth; or rather, these worlds are locationally and temporally distant from ours (too many fantasy worlds turn out to be all too similar, ontologically and politically, to ours). The weird, by contrast, is notable for the way in which it opens up an *egress* between this world and others. There are of course stories and series — such as C.S. Lewis' Narnia books, Baum's Oz, Stephen Donaldson's Thomas Covenant trilogy — in which there is an egress between this world and another, yet there is no discernible charge of the weird. That is because the "this world" sections of these fictions serve, more or less, as prologues and epilogues to standard fantasy tales. Characters from this world go into another world, but that other world has no impact upon this one, beyond the effect it has on the minds of the returning characters. With Lovecraft, there is an *interplay*, an exchange, a confrontation and indeed a conflict between this world and others.

This accounts for the supreme significance of Lovecraft setting so many of his stories in New England. Lovecraft's New England, Maurice Lévy writes, is a world whose "*reality* — physical, topographical, historical — should be emphasised. It is well known that the truly fantastic exists only where the impossible can make an irruption, through time and space, into an objectively familiar locale." What I propose, then, is

that in his break from the tendency to invent worlds as Dunsany had done, Lovecraft *ceased* to be a fantasy writer and became a writer of the weird. A first characteristic of the weird, at least in Lovecraft's version of it, would be — to adapt Lévy's phrase — a fiction in which, not the impossible but the *outside* "can make an irruption, through time and space, into an objectively familiar locale". Worlds may be entirely foreign to ours, both in terms of location and even in terms of the physical laws which govern them, without being weird. It is the irruption into *this* world of something from outside which is the marker of the weird.

Here we can see why the weird entails a certain relationship to realism. Lovecraft himself often wrote disdainfully of realism. But if Lovecraft had entirely rejected realism, he would never have emerged from the fantasy realms of Dunsany and de la Mare. It would be closer to the mark to say that Lovecraft contained or localised realism. In the 1927 letter to the editor of *Weird Tales*, he makes this explicit:

> Only the human scenes and characters must have human qualities. *These* must be handled with unsparing *realism*, (not catch-penny *romanticism*) but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown — the shadow-haunted *Outside* — we must remember to leave our humanity and terrestrialism at the threshold.

Lovecraft's tales depend for their power on the *difference* between the terrestrial-empirical and the outside. That is one reason why they are so often written in the first person: if the outside gradually encroaches upon a human subject, its alien contours can be appreciated; whereas to attempt to capture "the boundless and hideous unknown" without any reference to the human world at all is to risk banality. Lovecraft needs the human world, for much the same reason that a painter of

a vast edifice might insert a standard human figure standing before it: to provide a sense of scale.

A provisional definition of the weird might therefore take its cue from the slightly odd and ambiguous phrase "out of" that Lovecraft uses in the titles of two of his stories, "The Colour Out of Space" and "The Shadow Out of Time". On the simplest level, "out of" evidently means "from". Yet it is not possible – especially in the case of "The Shadow Out of Time" – to avoid the second meaning, the suggestion of something removed, cut out. The shadow is something *cut out* of time. This notion of things "cut out" of their proper place is one way in which Lovecraft has an affinity with modernist techniques of collage. Yet there is also a third meaning of "out of": the beyond. The shadow *out of* time is, in part, a shadow of that which is beyond time as we ordinarily understand and experience it.

To possess a flavour of the beyond, to invoke the outside, Lovecraft's work cannot rely on already-existing figures or lore. It depends crucially on the production of the new. As China Miéville put it in his introduction to *At the Mountains of Madness*: "Lovecraft resides radically outside any folk tradition: this is not the modernising of the familiar vampire or werewolf (or garuda or rusalka or any other such traditional bugbear). Lovecraft's pantheon and bestiary are absolutely sui generis." There is another, important, dimension of the newness of Lovecraft's creations however: it is disclaimed and disguised by the author. As Miéville continues: "There is [...] a paradox to be found in Lovecraft's narrative. Though his concept of the monstrous and his approach to the fantastic are utterly new, he *pretends* that it is not." When they confront the weird entities, Lovecraft's characters find parallels in mythologies and lore which he had himself invented. Lovecraft's retrospective projection of a newly minted mythos into the deep past gave rise to what Jason Colavito calls the "cult of

alien gods" in writers such as Erich von Däniken and Graham Hancock. Lovecraft's "retro-interring" of the new is also what places his weird fictions "out of" time – much as in the story "The Shadow Out of Time", in which the main character Peaslee encounters texts written in his own hand amongst architectural relics.

China Miéville argues that it was the impact of the First World War which gave rise to Lovecraft's new: the traumatic break from the past allowed the new to emerge. But it is perhaps also useful to think of Lovecraft's work as being about trauma, in the sense that it concerns ruptures in the very fabric of experience itself. Remarks that Freud makes in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" ("as a result of certain psychoanalytic discoveries, we are today in a position to embark on a discussion of the Kantian theorem that time and space are 'necessary forms of thought'") indicated that he believed that the unconscious operated beyond what Kant called the "transcendental" structures of time, space and causality which govern the perceptual-conscious system. One way of grasping the functions of the unconscious, and its break from the dominant models of time, space and causality, was through studying the mental lives of those suffering from trauma. Trauma can therefore be thought of as a kind of transcendental shock – a suggestive phrase in relation to Lovecraft's work. The outside is not "empirically" exterior; it is transcendentally exterior, i.e. it is not just a matter of something being distant in space and time, but of something which is beyond our ordinary experience and conception of space and time itself. Throughout his work, Freud repeatedly stressed that the unconscious knows neither negation nor time. Hence the Escheresque image in *Civilisation and its Discontents* of the unconscious as a Rome "in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest

ones". Freud's weird geometries have clear parallels in Lovecraft's fictions, with their repeated invocations of non-Euclidean spaces. Witness the description of "the geometry of the dream-place" in "Call of Cthulhu": "abnormal, non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours".

It is important not to surrender Lovecraft too quickly to a notion of the unrepresentable. Lovecraft is too often taken at his word when he calls his own entities "unnameable" or "indescribable". As China Miéville points out, typically Lovecraft no sooner calls an entity "indescribable" than he begins to describe it, in very precise technical detail. (Nor, despite his predilection for using the term "unnameable" — mocked but also defended by Lovecraft himself in his own story "The Unnameable" — is Lovecraft shy of giving names to Things.) But this sequence has a third moment. After (1) the declaration of indescribability, and (2) the description, comes (3) the unvisualisable. For all their detail, or perhaps because of it, Lovecraft's descriptions do not allow the reader to synthesise the logorrheic schizophony of adjectives into a mental image, prompting Graham Harman to compare the effect of such passages with Cubism, a parallel reinforced by the invocation of "clusters of cubes and planes" in "Dreams in the Witch House". Cubist and futurist techniques and motifs feature in a number of Lovecraft's stories, usually as (ostensible) objects of loathing. Even if he was hostile to it, Lovecraft recognised that modernist visual art could be repurposed as a resource for invoking the outside.

So far, my discussion of Lovecraft has concentrated on what happens *within* the stories themselves, but one of the most important weird effects Lovecraft produces happens *between* his texts. The systematisation of Lovecraft's texts into a "mythos" might have been the work of his follower August Derleth, but the inter-relationship of the stories, the way in

which they generate a consistent reality, is crucial to understanding what is singular about Lovecraft's work. It might appear that the way that Lovecraft produces such consistency is not very different to the way in which Tolkien achieved a similar effect, but, once again, the relationship to this world is crucial. By setting his stories in New England rather than in some inviolate, far-distant realm, Lovecraft is able to tangle the hierarchical relationship between fiction and reality.

The interpolation into the stories of simulated scholarship alongside authentic history produces ontological anomalies similar to those created in the "postmodernist" fictions of Robbe-Grillet, Pynchon and Borges. By treating really existing phenomenon as if they had the same ontological status as his own inventions, Lovecraft de-realises the factual and real-ises the fictional. Graham Harman looks forward to a day when Lovecraft will have displaced Holderlin from his throne as philosophers' most exalted object of literary study. Perhaps we can also anticipate a time when the pulp modernist Lovecraft displaces the postmodernist Borges as the pre-eminent fictional explorer of ontological conundra. Lovecraft instantiates what Borges only "fabulates"; no one would ever believe that Pierre Menard's version of *Don Quixote* exists outside Borges' story, whereas more than a few readers have contacted the British Library asking for a copy of the *Necronomicon*, the book of ancient lore which is frequently referred to in many of Lovecraft's stories. Lovecraft generates a "reality-effect" by only ever showing us tiny fragments of the *Necronomicon*. It is the very fragmentary quality of his references to the abominable text that induce the belief in readers that it must be a real object. Imagine if Lovecraft had actually produced a full text of the *Necronomicon*; the book would seem far less real than it does when we only see citations. Lovecraft seemed to have understood the power of the citation, the way in which a text seems more real if it is cited than if it is encountered in the raw.

One effect of such ontological displacements is that Lovecraft ceases to have ultimate authority over his own texts. If the texts have achieved a certain autonomy from their author, then Lovecraft's role as their ostensible creator becomes incidental. He becomes instead the inventor of entities, characters and formulae. What matters is the consistency of his fictional system — a consistency which invites collective participation by both readers and other authors alike. As is well known, not only Derleth but also Clark Ashton Smith, Robert E. Howard, Brian Lumley, Ramsey Campbell and many others have written tales of the Cthulhu mythos. By webbing his tales together, Lovecraft loses control of his creations to the emerging system, which has its own rules that acolytes can determine just as easily as he can.