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**CTHULHU IS HERE:
THE MONSTER AS AN ALLEGORY OF HISTORY
IN HOWARD PHILLIPS LOVECRAFT'S CTHULHU MYTHOS**

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At this point only two more things are left yet to be said; first in the words of Winston Churchill "[w]riting a book is an adventure. To begin with, it is a toy and an amusement; then it becomes a mistress, and then it becomes a master, and then a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster, and fling him out to the public." And then in the words of The Bard "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine".

This is my beautiful monster, a reflection of a couple of very interesting years.

In order to change any society, you have to have a fairly general consciousness of what is wrong—or at least that *something* is wrong—among the members of the society; call it “consciousness-raising” if you like; and an examination of the effects of the situation on the heads of those in the society. Until you’ve done that, any efforts at change will be futile, because the society itself will not admit that anything’s wrong, that it *should* be changed. In other words: to fight the Monster, you have to know that there is a Monster, and what it is like (both in its external and internalized manifestations).

(Margaret Atwood, 1987)

ABSTRACT

The image of the monster has been part of many Western cultures throughout history. Taking the assumption that monsters encompass cultural traces of the relation between the societies who dream them and the way these societies understand the world, this research assumes that it is possible to link the moment the U.S. was going through in the first quarter of the twentieth century and the work of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. For that reason, the research relies on a historical context of this particular moment and on a theoretical framework based on the theorizations of Jeffrey Cohen, Sérgio Bellei, Stephen Asma, David Williams and Richard Kearney, who understand the monster as a vessel for cultural/social memory. After analyzing five short stories, taken from the *Cthulhu Mythos*, written/published from 1920 – 1927 (“Nyarlathotep”; “The Other Gods”; “Azathoth”; “The Call of Cthulhu”; and “The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath”), I will demonstrate how such reading is possible. Acting as a reversed mirror of the values of the U.S. society, Lovecraft’s monsters can be read as a literary register of the distresses experimented by this society during the in-between wars.

Keywords: Lovecraft, Monster, History, Mythmaking, Allegory, Literature.

RESUMO EXPANDIDO

INTRODUÇÃO

A figura do monstro tem feito parte das diferentes culturas ocidentais através da história. Assumindo que monstros carregam em si traços culturais da relação das sociedades que os sonham e a forma como estas entendem o mundo, essa pesquisa demonstra que é possível conectar o momento pelo o qual os Estados Unidos atravessou no primeiro quarto do século XX e o trabalho de Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Para isso, a pesquisa se baseia em um levantamento histórico sobre este momento em particular e nas teorias desenvolvidas por Jeffrey Cohen, Sérgio Bellei, Stephen Asma, David Williams e Richard Kearney, os quais entendem o monstro como um elemento retentor de traços sociais e culturais das sociedades que o concebeu. Após a análise de cinco contos, os quais fazem parte de *Cthulhu Mythos*, escritos/publicados de 1920 – 1927 (“Nyarlathotep”; “The Other Gods”; “Azathoth”; “The Call of Cthulhu”; e “The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath”), eu busco expor como tal leitura é possível. Atuando como um espelho reverso dos valores da sociedade dos Estados Unidos, os monstros de Lovecraft podem ser lidos como registros das dificuldades experimentadas por esta sociedade durante o período entre guerras.

OBJETIVOS

Esta pesquisa tem por objetivo principal estabelecer a possibilidade da leitura dos contos de Howard Phillips Lovecraft como uma reconstituição alegórica dos Estados Unidos do início do século XX. Para tanto a pesquisa também tratará o monstro como um acervo cultural, onde tal imagem será entendida como um espelho da sociedade a qual o criou, possibilitando desta forma uma leitura dos valores desta mesma e acessar a maneira pela qual ela entendia o mundo ao seu redor.

METODOLOGIA

Para a leitura do monstro como elemento cultural de uma sociedade, a pesquisa se baseia no trabalho desenvolvido pelos seguintes pesquisadores e críticos literários: Jeffrey Cohen, Sérgio Bellei, Stephen Asma, David Williams e Richard Kearney. Uma vez estabelecida a função cultural/social do monstro, esta será comparada ao momento histórico atravessado pelos Estados Unidos, discutido pelos historiadores Eric Hobsbawm, Edward M. Burns e Howard Zinn. Através do contraste entre literatura e história, a pesquisa defende a premissa de que é possível realizar uma leitura dos conflitos sociais vividos pelos Estados Unidos do período entre guerras através dos contos e monstros de Howard Phillips Lovecraft.

RESULTADOS

Após a análise sobre uma perspectiva histórica/literária dos contos de Lovecraft e do momento histórico e social vivido pelos Estados Unidos no período entre guerras, constatou-se que a leitura dos contos de Lovecraft enquanto alegoria histórica é possível. O corpus da pesquisa mostrou-se um elemento revelador dos conflitos vividos pela população norte-americana do período entre guerras. Os monstros de Lovecraft se mostraram elementos que carregam muitos aspectos e traumas deste mesmo período e, portanto, intimamente ligados aos conflitos vividos por aquela sociedade em particular e durante aquele mesmo momento histórico.

Palavras-chave: Lovecraft, Monstro, História, Mito, Alegoria, Literatura.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890 - 1937) was one of the most influential American writers in the twentieth century. His works on the horror and science fiction genre set the basis for the upcoming of many sci-fi/horror writers we know nowadays, such as Stephen King¹, and professionals from other fields, as the comic writer Alan Moore², film director Guillermo Del Toro³ and writer, film director, and visual artist Clive Barker⁴. The contribution of Lovecraft to American literature is not only restricted to his fictional work, he is also a theorist and literary critic. His most acknowledgeable work as a literary critic is the book *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, explored in this research.

Lovecraft believed that there is more to the horror genre than mundane situations of fear. For him only when immersed in a universe of unexplainable supernatural situations, the reader could fully explore the effect of horror. These situations of uncanny horror paired with a cosmologic and supernatural background were the basis for what he called cosmic horror. This research proposes that even though the cosmic horror genre was intended to be as far from reality as possible, it is still possible to read its monsters, plot, and scenarios as allegories for events taking place in the same historical reality Lovecraft was living in.

Being the creator of the cosmic horror genre, or weird, as he names it, H.P. Lovecraft wrote, among other pieces, a series of short stories later organized and entitled as *The Cthulhu Mythos*. In these short stories, Lovecraft managed to put together elements from old cultures, horror myths, ancient gods, and science fiction. In this scientific horror scenario, humankind was just a small piece of a much bigger chess game played by alien gods. Lovecraft's *Cthulhu Mythos* shows us a

¹ Stephen Edwin King, September 21, 1947: American author of contemporary horror. His books have sold more than 350 million copies. For further information please refer to *Danse Macabre*.

² Alan Moore, 18 November 1953: English writer frequently described as the greatest graphic novel writer in history. He has produced series including Watchmen, V for Vendetta, and From Hell. For further information please refer to *The Extraordinary Works of Alan Moore*.

³ Guillermo del Toro, October 9, 1964: Mexican film director, screenwriter, producer, and novelist. Considering monsters as symbols of power, his work is primarily marked by fantasy and horror. *Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) are some of his movies. For further information please refer to <http://deltorofilms.com/wp/gdt-bio>

⁴ Clive Barker came to prominence in the mid-1980s with a series of short stories known as "The Books of Blood". He has since written many novels and other works, and his fiction has been adapted into films, notably the *Hellraiser* and *Candyman* series. For further information please refer to <http://www.clivebarker.info/>

world filled with secret cults and conspiracies going on under people's eyes. By worshipping the dark god Cthulhu, and the Old Ones, cultists await for their masters' return, when the world as we know it will be plunged into chaos. As it will be discussed further on, the meaninglessness of the human kind vis-à-vis the power games played by ancient gods, madness, and horror could be read as symptom of a distressed population living under shadowy governments. A twisted portrait of the historical moment the U.S. faces in the Post First World War.

This investigation concerns the study of monsters in mythmaking and storytelling, in Howard Phillips Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. More specifically, this research presents an analysis of the use of monstrous figures in Howard Phillips Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos as a reconstruction of the moment the United States was going through in between wars. By crossing historic data from this specific period with aspects of the Cthulhu Mythos, I have observed that the horrific scenario portrayed by Lovecraft could have been influenced by several issues the U.S. people and government dealt with during the post First World War period. This reconstruction is made possible by exploring the Cthulhu Mythos through the monster's theories developed by researchers such as Jeffrey Cohen, Stephen T. Asma, and even H. P. Lovecraft, where the monster becomes the cultural embodiment of distresses and anxieties of a nation.

The socio-economic aspects of the U.S. society are another point discussed by this reading. Many social conflicts can be related to his literary metaphors, enabling a literary reconstruction of that time. Therefore, the historic social-economic aspects of the U.S. serve as a symbolic backdrop where Lovecraft's short stories are laid on. Such view of the text enables reading these stories as elements working along with their historic context rather than as standalone pieces. Therefore, this research aims at pointing the possible link between H.P.Lovecraft's writings and the conflicts and discoveries of his time.

Most of the short stories of *Cthulhu Mythos* are not directly linked to each other, but all of them revolve towards the same fictional universe created by Lovecraft. The number of short stories composing the *Cthulhu Mythos* keeps increasing up to this day, for many authors kept writing about Lovecraft's fictional universe after his death on March 15, 1937. The object of analysis of this research is five short stories, out of the many, which compose the *Cthulhu Mythos* series, namely, "Nyarlathotep" (1920); "The Other Gods" (1921); "Azathoth" (1922); "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926); and "The Dream-Quest of

Unknown Kadath” (1927). These short stories were selected in order to clarify the correlation between the historic moment, which is being analyzed, and the monsters of Lovecraft’s conception of “literature of the weird”. In addition, two out of the thirty-six sonnets from *Fungi from Yuggoth* were used to approach the discussed monsters – numbers XXI Nyarlathothep and XXII Azathoth⁵.

1.1. Mythmaking and Monsters

Since ancient times, people tell each other stories, mainly with the purpose of entertaining or informing one another. These stories, even though fictional, could have been inspired by real events, becoming then a different form of reporting situations that took place in real life, an allegory. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle proposed that “[t]he distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse [...], it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be” (11). Traditionally, history reports a sequence of facts, which describe the journey of something – e.g. a nation’s history is composed by the sequence of events, which describes its existence from its most ancient roots up to the present. This series of events is molded into a narrative with, in most of the times, a beginning, middle, and an ending. This “simpler” kind of narrative, however, does not have what is needed to be considered history. In order to make this narrative history, it has to be shaped by the way that some certain historical elements, e.g. agents, ideas, events, are linked to each other and play larger roles and also be framed by a set of ideologies. All history written under these conventions has no neutral voice. If history is written under someone’s point of view, therefore, every history is a meta-history, thus, no kind of narrative is more related to “truth” than any other. Under that light, a sequence of events can be narrated as a tragedy or romance or history. This makes possible to argue that a fictional narrative does not invalidate a historical one, and vice versa. The relation between history and literary narratives is as old as Western civilization itself, and as most of “human cultural baggage”, there must be a reason why both forms are still in use.

The stories about historical events seem to have permeated Western culture for a long time. As an example of this fact and fiction relation, we can look at the Greek island of Mycenae. This island has fortifications built millennia ago; the builders, according to history:

⁵ Sonnets XXI, XXII and XXXI were extracted from an online copy of *Fungi from Yuggoth*, see references.

ancient engineers; according to the legend: Cyclopes. One explanation for this process of myth making comes in the words of Aristotle. In his inquiry towards the way art imitates reality, Aristotle argues that the poem, even the narrative poem, gives emphasis to the action, and for that it uses the actor, for theatrical means, or the character for the narrative purpose (7). This claim affects the core investigation proposed by this research, where the monster is the actor of mimetic deeds of history.

The concept behind Aristotle's mimesis revolves around the use of language as a tool for representing reality. It is possible to elaborate on this concept assuming that language could be used to describe events, objects, and people of the real world. These descriptions would never be the real event itself; they are a representation, or imitation of the real, natural world. By these standards, reports produced by a person through the use of language, fact, or fiction would be an imitation of reality. This process of imitation would produce a mimesis, a representation of the real world, depending on the purpose of the author, more or less imaginative, or alike the natural world, per se. Aristotle also argues that because humans tend to use this kind of resource, imitation, in order to pass on certain types of information, art has a special appeal to people. This happens because mimesis allows people to experience important real issues through fiction. If the written text is understood as a tool for that matter, it enables the reader to get acquainted with real subjects acknowledging, however, the fictional elements in the report.

The monster and the setting where it manifests itself will be read as literary reconstructions of the anxiety and social distresses, a representation of the real world. This idea is supported by Jeffrey Cohen, Sérgio Bellei, Stephen Asma, David Williams, and Richard Kearney. A plot where a monster tramples over a child allows someone to think about the matters towards this act in a less aggressive environment than by witnessing the real brutal act against a child. Conducted by the plot, mimetic fiction allows the mind to perceive patterns and links between elements of fiction and elements of reality, which enables the experimenter to access real distresses through the fictional experience. Assuming that the monster is a fictional element in an imitation of reality enables the reader to experience aspects too difficult for a person to experience in real life – for this research, the moment the US was going through during the post-World War One period.

Horror stories can put us in touch with deep feelings of existential fear, in a safe and controlled environment. Lovecraft

considered fear one of the deepest human emotions, therefore, worthy of particular attention and dedication, expressed in his horror tales. This relation between horror and reader is also discussed in Aristotle's *Poetics*, where he uses the term "catharsis" to refer to this kind of experimentation. Even though Aristotle never provided a clear cut definition for the term, it is possible to assume from his writings that it refers to the effect of the tragedy, for this matter, in the audience, or in this case, the reader. Aristotle argues: "[a] tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself [...]; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions (9). Therefore, the horror tale can provide a controlled experimentation of deep feelings of fear; while, on the other hand, it is much harder to escape from real life horror.

The plot of "The Call of Cthulhu" can be cited as an example of catharsis in Lovecraft's work. While going through the notes of his deceased great-uncle, the character Francis Wayland Thurston finds out that his great uncle has conducted an investigation about some strange happenings. He then decides to continue the investigation on his own. At some point Thurston starts to believe that the death of his uncle could be somehow related to the subject of his investigation: weird happenings and cults related to a strange creature. His quest in order to learn the truth took him into an underworld of cults and hidden knowledge. Eventually, his findings, including learning about the existence of Cthulhu, lead him to his own personal tragedy. His own actions, motives, and free choices ultimately drove him to complete personal ruin. Through the tale the reader can experiment with feelings of despair, fear and meaninglessness. The experience, however, ends in the moment the story is put down. This control over the catharsis, and the safety of the process, makes horror a popular genre.

From Aristotle, it is also possible to argue that the fiction of Lovecraft, as much as the realism of other authors of the time, could portray aspects of that time and place. More specifically, it could represent distresses in society, since the building of the monster is usually presented as different faces of an abstract fear. Aristotle also argues that poetry has special significance in the philosophical sense, "since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do" (11). It is possible then to assume that fiction can make usage of mimesis in order to reconstruct history at some level, keeping the action, but portraying the actor or situation in many different ways.

By no means has Aristotle stood alone in his investigation towards representations of reality. In the same line of inquiring, the insights of Robert Louis Stevenson are relevant for this thesis. An established writer of English Literature, Stevenson wrote, among many classics, *Treasure Island* and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In *Remonstrance* he argues:

[art] imitates not life but speech: not the facts of human destiny, but the emphasis and the suppressions with which the human actor tells of them. The real art that dealt with life directly was that of the first men who told their stories round the savage camp-fire. (2-3)

Stevenson raises the point that art, in its rudimental level, is a representation of reality, provided by somebody else's speech. Thus, no narrative, as a product of speech, could ever be a true experimentation of reality itself, and therefore all narratives, at some level, even if factual, would still be a representation. A factual narrative then is the narration of an action that took place in the real world, executed by real people, or force of nature, under real circumstances; it is shaped by one's point of view and likely to be accepted as true.

Fiction, however, is in a grayer area. It may narrate events that took place in unreal scenarios about unreal people. On the other hand, fiction does have the feature of exhibiting insights regarding the human mind that creates it. Within the slice of time when the story is written, the author's perspective of the action and cultural baggage affects its notions of reality and, therefore, his creation. Stevenson argues that the method humans use to narrate, fiction or nonfiction, is the same: "Man's one method, whether he reasons or creates, is to half-shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality" (2). Fiction may not have the very same elements of life, or history, but it might be true in Aristotle's sense of universal, and a mimesis of a real action, according to Stevenson. One way to understand fiction, then, is seeing it as "rephrasing" reality.

From Aristotle's and Stevenson's perspectives, fictional stories can then be used in parallel with the official history in order to visualize a bigger picture of what was happening to a given society during a certain period. The historian and literary critic Hayden White⁶, in his

⁶ In his book, Hayden White argues about the importance of taking into consideration other aspects of the written text besides the canonical historic document when analyzing a given

Tropics of Discourse, quotes the words of Paul Valéry, “History seems to be a burden not for what it brings into existence, but for what it erases from it” (36). Since History has the burden of authenticity, and official registry, whatever is left out the official register for some reason is erased from it. As a literary example of the corruption of the historical process we can cite George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s Ministry of Truth, one of the four ministries that govern the nation of Oceania. The Ministry of Truth sanctions all kinds of media and educational methods in order to rewrite history for fitting the purposes of the party doctrine. Under these perspectives, it becomes plausible, then, to assume that the use of non-official sources could be a valuable resource for getting a broader, more complete, picture of certain historic periods. Also, under this view, history and story are not concurrent; they complement rather than invalidate each other. By adopting the perspective proposed by Aristotle and Stevenson, Lovecraft's works complement the American historical records of the period in-between Wars. They provide a different interpretation or view of the same records, or at least, help to provide a broader view of the U.S. society's “spirit” during those times.

Based on the close relation of fact and fiction, would it be possible to consider and analyze history as literature? And, if so, could we do it the other way around? According to the historian Hayden White, and to the literary critic Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, the answer is affirmative. Cohen refers to history as “just another text in a procession of texts, and not a guarantor of any singular signification” (3). This affirmation may lead to the conclusion that history and literature are both different examples of discourse; therefore plausible subjects for the same line of inquiring. Complementary to Cohen's assumption, White argues that in most of the cases people are unable to precisely say what they want to say and mean what they say (1). This statement implies that it is hard to make sense out of some particularly abstract aspects of human beings, such as culture, nature, and history, for the reliability of such subjects could be compromised due to the difficulty to obtain precise information out of people about such matters. What is being pointed out is that there will always be difference and imprecision in what history and literature are, or how we should address them. The theorizations on imitation of reality thorough language and the use of fictional elements to illustrate real life experiences, presented so far, allow us to argue that literature and history are two different methods to

historic moment, discussing the ongoing problematic between science and literature versus history.

address the same action. The difference would then lay on the purpose of the discourse – e.g. informing or entertaining.

Discourse analysts also have stated that there is no text without context, so it is also possible to assume that the context is always working at some level of the literary text. By these standards, historic interpretation of literature lies in reading in-between the lines of the literary elements, and having enough information in order to visualize the core element, the action, which originated both the historic and literary discourse. When the action is visualized, it is possible to link the fiction to the fact it would reflect. History would then be represented through fiction, and a recreation of a historic moment could be lying in between the lines of a fictional literary text. The literary text becomes a complex form with many angles and views or “universal”, in an Aristotelian way. As in what concerns this investigation, the fictional monster would play the role of real actions being taken in our reality, brought to us encoded in its figure.

The code that has to be broken for the Lovecraftian monster to become a window to past times lies in the gathering of information of the time in which it was written and in the understanding how the monstrous body can reflect this information. This research understands that the monstrous world of Lovecraft could be read as a fictional representation, an allegory, of key issues happening in the US after the First World War, even if this link is not directly stated in the narratives.

1.2. Brief Historical Panorama

As many other American writers, Lovecraft’s works could have been influenced by the social moment the U.S. was going through in the first half of the twentieth century. The First World War marked the beginning of the twenty century. It lasted from 1914 to 1918, and even though it never reached American soil it affected many economic, social, and cultural aspects of the U.S. After the formal ending of the war, the U.S. started its economic, cultural and social stabilization. A series of actions were taken since the end of the war to assure Americans welfare and prosperity during the coming times. With the triumph of the allies came the signing of the Versailles Treaty by Germany and the Allies in order to restore peace in Europe. Following this action, came the uprising of the League of Nations, an international body formed by nations responsible for keeping a peaceful world and for preventing disasters like the First World War itself from happening again (Eric Hobsbawm, 38-39).

Although President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, in office from 1913 to 1921, wished to make the American nation part of the League, the U.S. was never a member of it. Partially because of his failure into getting the League Treaty passed by the Senate in March 1920 and because of Monroe's Doctrine: an act introduced on December 2, 1823, stating that America, the "New World", should not take part in European or, the "Old World", affairs and vice versa. Monroe's Doctrine accounts for the creation of Isolationism, a policy of remaining apart from the affairs or interests of other groups, especially the political affairs of other countries; this policy was rooted in the U.S. after the First World War (Burns, 785). This view, however, was not shared by all U.S. people, and as *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*⁷ points out, there were many people who felt that America was so intrinsically bound to Europe that U.S. participation in the War was inevitable (939).

Fueled by the government, Isolationism is responsible for the increasing of tariffs on imports, as an attempt to protect U.S. industry, which boomed during the war. Also, a restriction on immigration was sanctioned – attempting to protect U.S. job market for the returnee American soldiers who would need their jobs back. Such act affected the big number of European and Asian immigrants trying to rebuild their lives in the U.S. Immigration turned out to be one of the main concerns of the post-war government in the U.S. Not only did the massive number of immigrants flood a reduced job market, for the war industry was no longer needed, but they also brought their own ideas of how a country should be run and their own notion regarding the roles of the social layers. A series of actions was taken by the government in order to slow down immigration: 1917, oriental immigration was prohibited and a fee was charged from every new immigrant; 1921, the number of immigrants/year is settled at the maximum of 357,000; 1924, the maximum number of immigrants/year is reduced to 154,000 people. *The Federal Bureau of Nationalization* also puts courses of democracy and politics together for the immigrants, having as their main purpose to Americanize the foreign people. These courses were designed by the government in order to fit the immigrants into American cultural, social, economic, and political values.

The objective of the *The Federal Bureau of Nationalization* was mainly to promote the cultural concept of the melting pot, an

⁷ From now on referred only as NAAL.

assimilation of the immigrant culture into American society. A cultural metaphor for the homogenization of different heterogenic cultures sharing the same society, the melting stands for the harmonic fusion of cultures into a homogeneous one. The melting pot, however, struggles with a different cultural model called: salad bowl. The salad bowl stands for the juxtaposition of different cultures. As the elements of a salad in a bowl, different cultures would be combined into a society, but never really merging into a single homogeneous culture.

Even knowing that the actions taken by the *The Federal Bureau of Nationalization* are seen as an attempt of the government to assure the immigrant welfare, they reflect concerns of the American people. American people have witnessed Russian people plunge their own country into social chaos with the Russian revolution from 1917 to 1923, which culminated with the rising of Communism. European immigrants in America, especially the ones within the working class, became the heads of many worker unions and syndicates, and in their majority were socialists and/or communists. As a result of this sanctioned alien invasion, layers of American society started to breed prejudice against European immigrants. Also, the fear of a Communist coup took over the Capitalist society, which was reflected in the government massive investments in anti-Communist propaganda.

As if the post war social distresses were not enough, the Western world also had to deal with the dark side of a tremendous boom in scientific fields. The First World War was one of the most technological wars of the modern history. All the tactics, however, were developed during the 19th century with little modification from one century to another. The employment of old war tactics with new war machinery and equipment resulted in a carnage never before experienced by the world. The war ended in November of 1918, and, by that time, fifty thousand American soldiers had died. The account of European dead soldiers is far higher, as ten million died in the battlefield and another twenty million died of hunger and disease related to the war; yet, on the other side of the equation, the war had not brought any gain to humanity that would be worth one human life. “[T]he brutal actuality of the large scale modern war, so different from imaginary heroism” (NAAL, 939) was cause of a great bitterness and disillusion for U.S artists, thinkers, and the common people.

Even knowing that this research does not aim at comparing Lovecraft's literature to other realistic authors of the same period, nevertheless it is important to mention that many artists also portrayed all the horror of the war along with the turbulent changes in society. Ernest Hemingway wrote *A Farewell to Arms*, Irwin Shaw, *Bury the Dead*, Ford Madox Ford, *No More Parades* and Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun*. These are vivid examples of the bitterness of the post war society in the U.S. This investigation defends the idea that, in an allegorical approach, H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos could be a relevant portrait of this particular moment of the American history, and for that matter, as reliable as the previously cited pieces of more realistic narratives. For that, we must understand the figure of the monster as a cultural body that connects fact to fiction and the elements that have generated it.

1.3. On Howard Phillips Lovecraft's Literature

Understanding H.P. Lovecraft's notions of literature and the elements of horror is vital for understanding what he was doing with it. Lovecraft was not only a fictional writer, as stated previously, he was also an avid correspondent and a literary critic. To him we owe a meticulous study of the literary horror genre, entitled *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. In this book, Lovecraft exposes his views of the horror genre, and how it differs from regular terror or gothic. For Lovecraft, the perfected form of horror was reached by Edgar Allan Poe, for no one before him was able to grasp the human psyche as he did. What Lovecraft called fear literature would be composed of two distinguished parts. One part would encompass stories of murder and bones. The second part would be composed by Poe's tradition, which consisted of a dread atmosphere surrounded by uncanny presences and situations beyond human reason. This more fantastic portion he called weird literature, or literature of the weird. Fear and horror are different things in this literary universe. Fear is something you feel when a dog surprises you with a loud bark, horror is the inexplicable dread you feel while walking through a dark old chamber until you find a light switch hoping nothing is there when you turn the lights on. For Lovecraft, the weird literature could only be a product of unreal situations; once a situation becomes real or explainable it is no longer weird. There lies a possible explanation of perhaps why he felt he should write about fictional monsters instead of real ones.

In *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft states that fear is the oldest and strongest of human emotions. For Lovecraft, it

is only natural that a literary genre as horror exists. He argues that horror is a genre destined to forever endure (14-15), since we have and always will carry fear in us. Fear as fuel for stories and literature is an interesting idea to draw on, and was, and is, explored from old times until nowadays. Considering Lovecraft's enquiring and assuming that the horror genre is as natural for humans as the act of speaking, and it has been there since the beginning, it is possible to argue that such genre is able to carry cultural historic value. Since the monster, an element of horror, is a product of a cultural body, and culture changes through time, it is possible to access the culture that created it through the monster. This idea of horror, as an enduring genre, along with the understanding of the monster as a cultural body that carries meaning through time, allows understanding the horror genre as an allegory of reality. Taken these thoughts into consideration, this research assumes that both the monster and its milieu surface as packages of cultural information.

If we specifically focus our attention to the post-First World War moment within the U.S., it is possible to perceive it was a very agitated period, and its distresses can be reconstructed in monster figures or dreadful elements. The power struggles between the social communist ideals and the capitalist ideologies resulted into a clash of social classes in the U.S. where the oppressed rose against a dominant power. For the dominant, the rivalry is a monster, willing to destroy and defy order. For the oppressed, the dominant class is a monster that enslaves and feed on the people. Even Karl Marx in *Capital* describes the property-owning class as a vampire in its willingness to suck the blood out of the working class: "capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (342). Nevertheless, each side of the coin has its own monsters to slay; each side of the coin has the real action for the perpetuation of both fact and fiction.

When taking a closer look in to the fictional world created by Lovecraft, it is possible to notice that some features in his *Cthulhu Mythos* short stories, such as hopelessness, horror, insanity, and chaos are more recurrent than others. There are many conspiracies going unnoticed by most people; there are always big players moving pawns in a chess game, where humankind is just another piece and usually not part of a happy ending. For Lovecraft, humankind is just a grain of sand in the beaches of the universe, and holder of no particular significance. In this scenario, his monsters, referred to as the old ones, great ones, ancient ones, elder Gods, and

so on, are the puppeteers of a horrific puppet show. The ancient ones are alien beings belonging not only to other planets, but also to other universes. They are so far apart from humankind that the ones who have a physical body are not even made by the same atoms humankind is. Human concepts of time, place, life or death do not apply to these beings. They have always been here and always will be. For this matter, these beings are more like an idea, a thought, a bit of information that remains unnoticed for a long time; but, once rediscovered, they are able to shake the pillars of existence.

In order to bring this introduction to a closing, it is appropriate to return to Stevenson's words regarding the creation of fictional narratives. In his *A Humble Remonstrance*, Stevenson pertinently states:

Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant; a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate. Life imposes by brute energy, like inarticulate thunder; art catches the ear, among the far louder noises of experience, like an air artificially made by a discreet musician.
(3)

Ironically enough, if we put together Stevenson's opinions of art and life, it seems to describe the monster's discourse in its whole: monstrous, infinite, illogical, however neat, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate. At the same time it may seem imposed by brute energy: it catches the ear, among the far louder noises of experience, like an air artificially made by a discreet musician. Could monstrous art, monster-oriented fiction, perhaps, then, be a recreation of actions as close to life than the fact itself, a well-crafted mimesis?

The two next chapters will approach the figure of the monster, its relation to society and how it was explored by Howard Phillips Lovecraft literature. Chapter II contains a contextualization of the United States during the period in which Lovecraft was publishing his weird tales. It also encompasses general concepts of the figure of the monster: how it works as a cultural vessel and how it embodies many abstract distresses of a given society. Chapter III explores Lovecraft's notions of horror as a literary genre and its many explicabilities, even in social contexts. Also, it contains an

analysis of the three monsters studied by this research: Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep e Azathoth. This analysis is based on the short stories previously presented, as a literary reconstruction of the period in-between the first and second World Wars in the U.S. These two chapters then are followed by the last chapter, the Conclusion, wherein I argue that the image of the monster could really portray, in an allegorical way, historic events, and that such reading is possible in short stories from H.P. Lovecraft's *Cthulhu Mythos*.

CHAPTER II LOVECRAFT'S UNITED STATES

Historian Howard Zinn wrote in his *A People's History of the United States* that “[t]he war ended in 1918 [...], it did not take long, even in the case of patriots, for bitterness and disillusionment to spread through the country; this was reflected in the literature of the post-war decade” (365). My selection of Lovecraft's tales from *Cthulhu Mythos* includes short stories written from 1917 up to 1936. During this period, the U.S. was recovering economically, culturally and socially from the First World War and its echoes. This chapter will discuss a series of actions taken by the U.S. government during and after the Great War envisioning U.S.'s welfare and prosperity on the times to come and how its implications could have been represented in Lovecraft's work. It will also address a theoretical discussion of the monster figure and how it can spring from the human perception and its relation with the world.

Not all the measures taken by the government, and even by the people itself, ended up assuring the general population's welfare. Some of them actually motivated a great deal of social and cultural segregation. The attempts of the government and other social groups had a deep impact both in the national economic/social panorama and in the “national spirit”. The social and economic aspects presented in this chapter are of particular relevance for this investigation. The following panorama is composed by some of the many faces of the United States in which Lovecraft was inserted while conceiving the world of insanity and terror of his literary writing.

The monster which was created by deep social disturbances, on the individual level as much as on the collective level, will also be approached in this chapter. The following concepts brought into light by the monstrous discourse are also of great importance. As a fossil for the archeologists, the monster and its literature have the feature of being a revealing element of past cultures. It becomes an open window to past times and to the way people understand the world. By embodying the fears and distresses of an individual, or society, it brings cultural information encoded into itself, just like it was understood at the moment of its conception. As suggested by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in his *Monster Theory*, “[t]ogether we will explore what will happen when monstrousness is taken seriously as a mode of cultural discourse” (viii) where the construction of the monster deals with the pushing of temporal, geographic, bodily and technological boundaries that

constitute culture. The monster is a problem for cultural studies; it is a code, pattern, presence or absence, “an extreme version of marginalization, an abjecting epistemological device basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and identity formation” (ix). Thus, the monster figure, as an allegorical literary element, deserves a serious investigation.

2.1. Understanding the Real Monster – The Immigrant Issue

The turmoil following the First World War in the US has proven to be an excellent spawning ground for monsters – real and fictional ones. Unhealthy nations can become monsters themselves, or become the ambient fear necessary to turn citizens into monsters. As discussed in the introduction, historians Edward M. Burns and Eric Hobsbawm⁸ highlight that, as an attempt to protect U.S. industry, which boomed during the war, the government institutionalized an act named Isolationism. Along with the increasing of tariffs on imports, Isolationism was responsible for immigration sanctions. The sanctions put in practice aimed at preventing the job market from being flooded by immigrants, where the U.S. people would need employment since the war was over and their soldiers were returning home. This assumption is also supported by data supplied by the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy⁹. The war was responsible for a boom in the U.S. industry, and since its ending, most of the industry production was not needed in such scale anymore. The absence of war reduced the need of larger production and, thus, reduced the need for workers.

In order to deal with the massive number of immigrants already living in the U.S, the government, along with sanctions on the immigration, put together courses of democracy and politics for the immigrants through The Federal Bureau of Nationalization. These courses had as a main purpose to Americanize¹⁰ foreign people¹¹. The social/political education offered by the government

⁸ Edward M. Burns’s *Western Civilization* and Eric Hobsbawm’s *Age of extremes: the short twentieth century* were available only in Brazilian Portuguese for this research, so all direct quotations from these books are my translations.

⁹ Data supplied by the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy. The University of Arizona, see references.

¹⁰Term used to refer to the governmental effort to make the immigrants part of American society, by raising their awareness on the government viewing of U.S.’s political, social, and economic issues.

¹¹ Data supplied by the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy. The University of Arizona, see references.

was an attempt to “domesticate” the immigrant. The courses offered by the bureau would educate the immigrant on the U.S. government’s ideologies and political and social views.

The sanction on immigration affected the big number of European and Asian immigrants who were trying to rebuild their lives in the U.S. The industrial and economic boom experienced by the U.S. during war times was appealing to Asian and Europeans, who were going through a critical situation in their own countries. This boom, however, was unsustainable and had consequences once the War was finished. Burns writes:

Rather than remediate certain illnesses, such as nationalism and militarism, it intensified, and made them more malignant than ever. Moreover, the war distressed the economic balance of industrialized nations, fueled inflation and excessive expansion, and paved the way for crises and depressions.¹²

Burns points out that the U.S. achieved good, but unsustainable, levels of economic and social welfare. The massive immigration, because of the War, triggered social movements and governmental efforts attempting to domesticate the new threat: the immigrant – an alien, with alien views, culture, and intentions, infiltrating into many levels of the U.S. society, off to be tamed or ostracized. The cultural U.S. system of values could not, and would not, deal with an incoming change in its already established way of life, and the immigrant felt a growing hostilization from part of U.S. population.

The governmental effort, however, ended by leading the country into social and economic crisis. The economic growth, which took place thanks to the industry developed in order to support the war, collapsed. The lowering in the number of immigrants allowed in the country is a consequence of these measures. The measures taken by the government in order to protect these unsustainable levels of wealth had actually opened the doors for crisis and led the country to the big crash of 1929. The monster here

¹² “Ao invés de minorar certos males como o nacionalismo e o militarismo, intensificou-se e fez com que ulcerassem e se tornassem mais malignos que nunca. Além disso, a guerra transtornou o equilíbrio econômico das nações industrializadas, alimentou a inflação e a expansão exagerada e abriu caminho para crises e depressões.” (827)

springs from the conflict of social/economic interests; the actions taken by the government and U.S. population in order to deal with the alien culture/ideal ended up ruining what these actions were meant to preserve in the first place, social wealth. The monster had won, and as the Leviathan, or even Cthulhu for that matter, it devoured its own servants.

The Great Crash itself was the single most devastating economical event in U.S. history, whose aftermaths were felt by the U.S. people during near a decade. According to Hobsbawm, around 29% of the labor force of the U.S. was unemployed (97). The years following the crash also witnessed the upraising of the organized crime in the U.S. The Prohibition, which lasted from 1920 to 1933, forbade the commercialization, production, and consumption of alcohol within the U.S. The Prohibition however, did not inhibit all people from consuming alcohol and many criminal organizations were formed in order to supply its demand. Due to the lack of employment during the years of the crash, many people of the U.S. turned to gangsterism as a way for making easy money. As this kind of illegal activity developed, so did the parallel power of such organizations – which ran their own shadowy government, under the U.S. government’s nose.

Other events were also taking place in the social sphere. According to the NAAL, more traditionalist Americans attempted to impose on society “a model of white, protestant, small-town virtues” (940). This attempt resulted in many insurrections by articulated groups of minorities, immigrants, youth, women, and artists, under the banner of the “diversity of lifestyles” (940). Again, unhealthy societies make the monster surface out from the common people, bringing into life tendencies that could be connected to the chaos preceding the coming of a great devourer of society.

Based on information provided by the NAAL, it is possible to assume that the courses offered by the Bureau of Nationalization were a symptom of a bigger social issue regarding groups of immigrants. The NAAL refers to this phenomenon taking place in the US society at the time as the “red scare”. The “red scare” was named after the fear of some native-born Americans of “immigrants who criticized American policies” (939) and “American agitators of foreign birth” (393) – mostly communists. Ultimately, the government attempted to repress alien ideologies and in this way protect the social environment from ideas the U.S. fought against during the war, such as communism and socialism. Propaganda,

education, and, in some cases, deportation of “agitators”, were resources used by the government, which ended up creating great “antagonism between white collar, management-class American and people of the working class” (NAAL, 939).

2.2. Understanding the Real Monster – The Red Scare

Even before the Great War was finished the U.S. was already dealing with a great amount of immigrants. Many of these immigrants had their own notions of what it was to live in society and what it was to be a worker. Many were Russian, responsible for many waves of massive immigration to the US, because of either the Great War, or the Russian Revolution. This alien infiltration from a country plunged into civil war and revolution was responsible for the phenomenon described by the NAAL as the “red scare”.

The “red scare” pierced deep into US society, and the measures taken in order to deal with it were responsible for a considerable share of the distresses suffered by the US society in the first half of the twentieth century. Reading the “red scare” as a phenomenon for monster creation, being as an abstract atmosphere of fear or even the monster itself, is of particular interest for this research. The actions taken by – or because of – it revolve towards power struggles, xenophobia, discrimination, insurrection, class struggle and violence. All known real ingredients for the allegorical representation in the monster.

The first and second waves¹³ of Russian immigration brought a large amount of Russian workers to the U.S. The immigrants brought not only their workforce to U.S. soil, but also different ideas about society as a whole. Most of them were not declared communists, but the Russians were known by their capability of organization, and for knowing about their social role, duties and rights. As a large amount of Russians immigrated to the U.S., it is possible to argue that the Russian ideals also started to play a substantial role in society, especially for the working class. The government was dealing not only with a possible overflow of workers, but also with the infiltration of an ideology which would question the power of hegemony, and which was responsible for the Russian revolution.

In another front, the American Socialist writer John Reed was back from Russia, where he was covering the Bolshevik Revolution. His book, *Ten Days that Shook the World*, published in 1919, is received by

¹³ The first wave of Russian Immigration took place in the late 19th century. The second wave ranged from 1917 to 1922.

the American audience with a great deal of controversy. Even knowing that Reed's point of view leans towards Bolshevism, which somehow could affect the way he reported the revolution, his journalistic reports are to be taken into consideration. His book brings firsthand accounts of witnessed events of the Russian revolution. Also, the book contains a great deal of Socialist ideology in it. The fact that the book was written by an American makes it an issue for those working against the proliferation of Socialism and Communism within the U.S. The 1922 edition of Reed's book had an introduction written by Vladimir Ilitch Lenin himself.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 is of particular importance for this research. The U.S. government observed Russian people starting a revolution in February of 1917, which culminated in the abdication of the Tsar Nicholas II. The revolutionaries formed a temporary government, which was deposed in October of the same year. The Bolsheviks rose to power and Russia plunged into civil war from 1917 to 1923, which culminated in the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922. John Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World* provides us with a working definition for the Bolsheviks:

Russian Social Democratic Labour Party: Originally Marxian Socialists. At a party congress held in 1903, the party split [...]. From this sprang the names "Bolsheviki" and "Mensheviki" – "members of the majority" and "members of the minority" [...]. *Bolsheviki* now call themselves the *Communist Party*, in order to emphasise their complete separation from the tradition of "moderate" or "parliamentary" Socialism. (23)

Still according to Reed, the Russian Bolshevik party stands for radical measures such as proletarian insurrection, and seizure of the reins of Government, in order to hasten the coming of Socialism by forcibly taking over industry, land, natural resources and financial institutions (23).

Such radical view was not seen with good eyes by the U.S government. Burns writes that "[t]he period that goes from 1830 to 1914 marks the pinnacle of scientific progress" (792)¹⁴. As a consequence of the scientific progress on the turn of the 20th century, the U.S. rejoices the blooming of its own industrialization, which, in many aspects, had

¹⁴ "o período que vai de 1830 a 1914 assinala o apogeu do progresso científico." (792)

superseded many European countries. The industrialization was responsible for a large slice of the American employment during and after the War. A proletarian insurrection and/or Socialism were in general not part of the U.S. agenda.

Even knowing U.S. industry had a significant growth during the war, and was responsible for much of the employment during wartime, the real profit of the industry was on the hands of the company owners. The labor force, on the other hand, was working oppressive hours and not getting significant wages, in most of the cases. In other words, the economic boom of the U.S. was due to the exploitation of a working class, that in war times was constituted mostly by immigrants and women, who would have to fight to defend their position once the war was over.

In this social environment, socialist/communist thinking was gaining ground among the working class over the capitalist model. Mainly, the socialist/communist appeal to the working classes lies in the claims of working class rights: focusing on the ending of abusive profits and social equality; whereas the Capitalist system aims at maximizing profit and minimizing expenses, such as hand labor. With immigration pumping the population of the U.S., it was not difficult to find inexpensive labor force; however, this situation would not sustain itself, since the war would be over and American workers would ask for better conditions. In this way, the socialist/communist thinking was slowly infiltrating the working class mentality and Socialism could slowly give way to Communism, a system that was responsible for a social revolution in Russia, where the dominant classes of society were overthrown. The dissemination of Socialist thinking might have spread within American society due to the large amounts of Russian immigrants getting in American soil from 1917 to around 1948, because of the October Revolution and the Russian civil war. Even knowing that many of the Russian immigrants were not self-declared socialists and most of them were Jewish Russian fleeing from religious persecution, the Russian labor organization mentality was a strong mark in the immigrants. Reed writes:

The Russian workman is revolutionary, but he is neither violent, dogmatic, nor unintelligent. He is ready for barricades, but he has studied them, and alone of the workers of the world he has learned about them from actual experience. He is ready and willing to fight his oppressor, the capitalist

class, to a finish. But he does not ignore the existence of other classes. (18)

The American socialist parties had been a problem to the government from the moment the U.S. government had decided to send troops overseas and join the First World War in order to protect its commercial interests. Formed in 1901, the Socialist Party of America was known for supporting many different worker unions and social revolutionaries; one of their major interventions was the opposition to the mandatory drafts and the First World War itself. Howard Zinn affirms “[t]he day after the Congress declared war the Socialist party met in emergency convention in St. Louis and called the declaration ‘a crime against the United States’” (355). The American Socialist party was responsible for great resistance against drafting Americans for serving overseas and against the war itself.

In June, 1917, the Espionage Act was approved by the congress. The act, among many things, stated that any person who would attempt to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, or refusal to duty in military or naval forces in the U.S. was subject to penalties. In addition, penalties were provided to those who interfered in the recruitment or enlistment services (Zinn, 356). Many of the American Socialists were arrested under the Espionage Act. Overall, the American Socialist party felt like the First World War was a capitalist war, since, even though the war generated more production and more employment, the real profit was shared among bankers, railroad builders/owners, and industrialists – not the workers themselves.

The dissatisfaction of the working class with the drafts and the reducing of democratic freedom were also expressed by the Industrial Workers of the World¹⁵. The socialist party and the IWW organized a large array of demonstrations, ranging from marches to sabotage of railroads and telegraph wires (Zinn, 361). Eventually, the Government used the Act of Espionage to shut down the IWW. Many of its leaders were arrested under the charges of rebellion, conspiracy and disloyalty and in 1918 the Department of Justice charged the IWW with a \$2,500,000 fine. The IWW was done. Under this atmosphere, a large number of demonstrations took place all over the U.S. On the other hand, the Government sponsored a massive propaganda campaign in

¹⁵ Industrial Workers of the World - The IWW is a member-run union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities.

order to justify the joining of the war, such as the Creel Commission¹⁶, for instance: “The newspapers helped create an atmosphere of fear for possible opponents of the war” (Zinn, 359). All war effort along with the diminishing numbers of accepted immigrants and popular demonstrations created a heavy atmosphere in the U.S. The control exercised by the Government and its retainers over the mediums of communication, supported by an oppressive campaign of antiwar repression, was responsible for great anxiety and fear in the U.S. population – particularly among immigrants and socialists/communists, who were deported and/or arrested in big numbers.

Following war hysteria, the wearied people of the U.S started to manifest their anxieties in many different ways. The year of 1919 was marked by many strikes and manifestations. Worker unions, headed mostly by communist leaders, succeeded in getting strongly organized as class. Among many others, Seattle workers stopped for five days in February 1919, a demonstration known as The Seattle General Strike, and in September steelworkers went on strike for about ten weeks. Zinn states that “The Department of Justice moved in, carrying out raids on workers who were aliens, holding them for deportation” (372). The results of immigration and alien ideologies could be felt all over the country; according to Zinn, many of the strikers were recent immigrants of many nationalities (372). Again, Reed brings his opinion on the Russian workers:

Foreigners, and Americans especially, frequently emphasize the “ignorance” of the Russian workers. It is true they lacked the political experience of the peoples of the West, but they were very well trained in voluntary organization. In 1917 there were more than twelve million members of the Russian consumers’ Cooperative societies; and the Soviets themselves are a wonderful demonstration of their organizing genius. (18)

Under the slogan of “Land of the free, home of the brave”, the U.S. had over fourteen million immigrants between 1900 and 1920. By 1920 the government had already controlled the high number of immigrants and the Socialist party was falling apart. The workers were

¹⁶ The Committee on Public Information – it used every communication medium, from April 13, 1917, to August 21, 1919, to support the enlistment and disseminate war propaganda.

back into oppressive work conditions and the rich controlled the means of dispersing information (Zinn, 374). However, the downfall of the Socialist party gave way to the rising of the Communist party, which in 1926 organized a strike of furriers who battled the police and kept striking until they got a response to their claims. As a result, they were assured a forty-hour workweek and their wages were increased. Communists led strikes all over the country during the 1920's until the great crash in 1929.

2.3. Them and Us

The social disturbances in the post-War US society translate an atmosphere of fear, oppression, segregation, and even violence, describing a society that has become unbalanced and unhealthy. The result of this mixture is described by the words of Mikhail Bakunin:¹⁷ “To revolt is a natural tendency of life. Even a worm turns against the foot that crushes it. In general, the vitality and relative dignity of an animal can be measured by the intensity of its instinct to revolt” (308)¹⁸. The first decades of the twentieth century had their portion of “foots” and “worms”, which eventually plunged into revolution.

Times of revolution and social distress are mostly marked by unpleasant and somehow negative situations. Perhaps because of its particular link to the unpleasant faces of society, and perhaps because it speaks to questionable desires alive inside us, they, the monsters, have always been, and will always be, attached to our collective memory: our culture. As culture varies throughout history so does the monster, for it signifies something beyond itself; therefore, as a cultural body changes, so does its monster. The mere act of naming and embodying an abstract aspect into a monstrous figure makes it a receptacle of social/cultural/historical aspect. The monster is then a social construct: a vessel of social values, for what creates its form is the current social understanding of what is and what is not accepted into a given social reality.

In his *Monster Theory*, Jeffrey J. Cohen – literary critic and monster researcher – explores what monsters reveal about the cultures that dream them by contrasting the characteristics of the monster with the cultural background from where it sprung. The monstrous body, as brought by Cohen, is a cultural body, an allegory, as it holds within

¹⁷ Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin (18 May 1814 - 1 July 1876): Russian revolutionary anarchist and founder of collectivist anarchism.

¹⁸ Sam Dolgoff translation, see in references.

itself relevant and deep aspects of the society in which it was conceived. For Cohen, the monster is an attempt of the human mind to give form to abstract anxieties, and for that, it carries information about cultural aspects of the environment where it was idealized. To attempt turning something once abstract into a palpable matter is to attempt fitting something unknown into our previous knowledge of the world: our culture. Through this process the image of the monster becomes a cultural vessel, for it is molded by the culture of the people who dreamed it. Therefore, the text that brings us the monster should, as the monster itself, be laid in the dissection table we call literary criticism and have all its secrets revealed, before it decides to rise from it and to vanish into the gloomy night of history (4).

As it is for this research, we should also look into Stephen T. Asma's idea of how a monstrous nation works. As we can see in *On Monsters*, Asma states that an environment lacking basic needs, as employment or food, can dehumanize populations, as much as too much wealth and prosperity (241). Asma also states that strangers from different lands are not strangers because of their skin color or exotic geographical location. They are strangers for their culture is different. He continues: "communism creates nihilistic, immoral monsters; rabid capitalism and consumerism create hedonistic zombies" (243). These could be translated into xenophobia, and referring back to the previous sections of this chapter, it could speak to the "red scare" within the U.S.

It is possible to argue based on information brought by the previous sections that the scenarios discussed by Asma were present in Lovecraft's U.S.: extreme wealth, a large number of immigrants, followed by economic crisis and ostracizing. Those were scenarios of the U.S. in the first half of the twentieth century. Asma poses that "[w]e know these are monstrous societies, the logic goes, because they produced monstrous results: genocide, terrorism, and torture" (243). Based on Asma's assumptions, it is arguable then that the U.S. had features of a monstrous nation, since such results could be observed in the form of propaganda, sabotage, repression, incarceration, and violent behavior in general, from both parts.

The monstrous societies are, however, a product of its people and/or its government. The ongoing situation in the U.S. had mainly two sides: the government, and the communist/working class – the second one holding a great number of immigrants. The government and its cohorts had to deal with a working class claiming for better working conditions and better wages, which would affect the gains of the country's industry owners. The communist party also was reinforced by

the large number of immigrants which shared the communist ideology with the American communist party, which was also known for standing against the drafts and the war. The government then had to deal with a monster that had no body to be dismembered, no lair to be invaded, no skin-color or national boundaries and had to be fought anyway (241). Government usage of propaganda, police, and other social tools ended up polarizing the population and generating xenophobia disguised as social clash. These attempts of dealing with the social threat represented by the communist party and the working class would cause a reaction of the same proportion on these groups. The monster is then fed by both parts, since one's extreme actions are answered with another's extreme action. This scenario becomes problematic when we put all the elements together, as in the post war in the US. Many immigrants were seen as part of the reason behind a cooling economy, which eventually headed into an economic crisis, taking the US from a prosperous economic bloom to the crash of 1929, and in this way a monster nation is formed.

Lovecraft understood the idea behind the entwining of actions, cause and consequence. He knew that no matter how a singular action is exposed, it would never be as significant as the whole chain of events that generated it. This tendency of chaining events is reflected in his literature. In "The Call of Cthulhu", he wrote:

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. (*The Complete Works*, 238)

These lines encapsulate the idea that events never stand on their own, they are only brought into being by a chain of other events. As there is more to the tree than just its trunk, there is more to an event than its results. This chain of events, the entwining of processes is a current tendency of real life, as it can easily be seen in history. Lovecraft's literature, as a mimetic counterpart of real life, shares the same idea of interlinking. Lovecraft explored and manipulated this resource in his writings as a tool to conduct the reader to the culmination of its horrific tales. Moreover, as stated by the cited quotation, the access of hidden knowledge is always brought by the piecing of events, where the characters pay the ultimate price, as if no person, real or fictional, could

handle a truth so complex, large and malignant. Still in “The Call of Cthulhu”, Lovecraft carries on:

The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (*The Complete Works*, 238)

Even knowing Lovecraft was probably setting the mood for the events that would take place in his short story, which revolves around an investigation leading to Cthulhu and the implications of its existence, there is a catch in his introduction. One cannot let the applicability of these same words to describe the series of events taking shape in the US society go unnoticed – for instance, new scientific research towards fields such as technology or astronomy were causing great social disturbance. The combination of the knowledge unveiled by these new scientific databases could make humanity wish to remain ignorant about aspects of the universe, or the result of harmful usage of newfound knowledge could drive society as we know it to an ending. The literary counterpart of this ambient fear could be read as Cthulhu. The image of Cthulhu is associated with the idea of hidden knowledge and the aftermaths of discovering it. In a literary way, the monstrous Cthulhu could function as an allegory for accessing knowledge and applying it for unhealthy purposes, as technology developed and applied in the war effort. In this way, the literary creation of a monster reflects a real concern of the society which inspired the creation of the monster, even if in an unconscious level.

2.4. Understanding the Fictional Monster

It is possible to read many elements from the historical moment the U.S. was going through after the First World War in Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos. The apprehension of the population in front of such hysteria, xenophobia, and clash between social systems highlight a moment of dramatic cultural and social changes. The crescent number of immigrants bringing different ideologies to the U.S. was a serious matter for part of the population and for the government. On the other hand, the changes brought by these social distresses represented what many others

were waiting for. The monstrous and omnipresent Cthulhu, along with his alien entourage, speak to the fears and pressures experienced by the U.S. people. Its cults and invisible hand slowly moving the pawns of society are a narrative not so far from a reality where people ruled the country from unreachable offices, distant from the eye of the “common” people. Through a different perspective the monster could also be associated with a new social order trying to replace the established one.

As it was discussed, there are different ways to tell the same story. The Great Old Ones and their servants could be good allusions for the miasmatic¹⁹ atmosphere generated by cultural and social struggles within the U.S. The war and its violence, in levels never before experienced by humanity, the horror caused by its use of technology, could also have played a significant role in H.P. Lovecraft’s twisted portrait of reality. All of these elements are used and transformed in Lovecraft’s work, culminating in the main feature of the weird tale, the monster.

The fictional monster in all its complexity is a broad concept and this research will not tackle all of its aspects. For the sake of the argumentation here proposed, two specific conceptions of the monster will be discussed. The theorizations about the monster as brought by Sérgio Bellei’s *Monstros, Índios e Canibais* and Jeffrey J. Cohen’s *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. From these two authors, two “umbrella” perspectives of the monster figure will encompass the further proposed theoretical material. These perspectives approach the monstrous figure as: (i) the embodiment of the cultural anxieties of a society; (ii) the concept of a being who lives on the border of society, delimiting its morals and values. Both authors argue that the monstrous discourse embodies abstract aspects experienced by a person or people, so one can deal with abstract concepts in a more material way. It becomes easier for the human mind to deal with what was once abstract from the moment it starts having a form and a name. A monster is created then in order to facilitate the relation between people and the world around them, since what once could not be understood or considered acceptable can be now placed in the “monster” category.

The monster, as brought by Bellei, is a digression from the norm²⁰. Most monstrous figures, as Bellei approaches them, are composed by the rearrangement, or hybridization of human or animal

¹⁹ Cohen makes usage of this definition in his *On Monsters* to address an abstract and smothering atmosphere of fear.

²⁰ “*divergência em relação à norma*” (12).

physical characteristics. As far as image goes, these aspects cover most of the spectrum related to form. The form, however, when considered alone, is only exotic, or a digression, and of little value. The monster discourse only reaches its pinnacle when related to, and enriched by, our own social history (14). In this way what was once understood only as fictional gains real foundation as it acts as an allegory for real world distresses.

When framed by the social context, the form is no longer the main feature of the monster. The social context leads the inquiring about the function of the form. What could not be represented, only shown – or from Latin *monstrare* – fulfills a social function, and, as society changes, so does the monster and its functions (14-15). According to Bellei, constantly associated to the border concept, the monster fulfills many historical needs in numerous different moments, and can be utilized for better understanding of these needs²¹.

The border concept, or border being as referred further on in Bellei's book, sprung from one out of two other concepts, or means to transmit knowledge, known as the positive way and the negative way. Based on David William's *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*, Bellei elaborates: (i) the positive way consists in transmitting knowledge through an Aristotelian perspective and alike, explaining the world through discursive logic and the explanatory systems produced by it; (ii) the negative way was needed to supply explanations for situations that logic itself could not explain, as proposed by Platonic elaborations, for being either too abstract, or by definition, impossible to represent. This negative system would, then, through the systematic negation of logic, twist the apparent correlation between image and word and generate a deformation able to justify what was once an abstract situation (14 -15).

Having the negative way of transmitting knowledge associated to the monster figure was an effective way to create moral and social rules to coordinate society. The monster would become a receptacle for all that would not be approved by a given dominant group. In this way monsters became the border of society, a tool for social control, where people would not transpose these borders by sharing any kind of value with them, fearing social judgment and all that came along with it. The monster was then carried along with the social evolution, changing as

²¹ “Associado constantemente ao conceito de fronteira, o monstro atende a necessidades históricas em diferentes momentos e pode ser utilizado para uma melhor compreensão de tais necessidades” (14).

society changes, always representing the negative values of society in different historical moments.

Cohen's *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* brings the idea that the monster may also act as the embodiment of the collective anxieties of a whole society. Cohen describes this state of anxiety, or ambient fear, as a kind of total fear. This total fear manifests silently in the daily basis of a given society, "prodding and silently antagonizing but never speaking its own name" (viii). The symptom of this anxiety, according to Cohen, is the monster. If we are unable to envision an oppressive atmosphere, its smothering presence over us becomes also uncanny, supernatural.

Monsters are born from the desire to name that which is abstract and hard to domesticate, and therefore hard to disempower and, what overpowers us somehow threatens us. Moreover, Cohen discusses, "[a]t times the pairing of opposites even more functionally indicates some disquietude or desire [...], representing to different people at different times the desirable new life or the dreaded new disorder: reform or entropy" (83). This aspect brings to light the monster as opposition to the rules of a society, or even society itself. The monster becomes then a means to subvert the norms of society and a tool for changing, where the individual can use the monstrous discourse in order to criticize rather than to oppress.

The monster for Cohen is a presence, code, pattern, or absence that confronts what was elaborated to be received as human. The monstrous discourse is timeless and even if the present studies point to the past, or to the future, it is only because present monsters have beckoned us through those paths. This cultural body, that is, the monster, condenses disturbing, repressed, oppressed, violent, but formative traumas. They are images that carry historical value, for they are a collection of tribulations of a historical period and society. These mimetic images have themselves power. Cohen writes that the monster haunts, it commands: remember me (ix). The monster does not simply connect the past to the present, it "destroys the boundary that demanded their twinned foreclosure" (x). The monster tells untold stories of historical distresses. It carries the social traumas of a given society, and, for being part of a literary genre that is consumed by a great deal of people, it perpetuates the memory of these distresses, from the period of its conception to nowadays.

Stephen T. Asma's investigation of the human psyche and the monstrous figure, presented in *On Monsters: an unnatural history of our*

worst fears, brings us Socrates' chimera²². According to Socrates, and as pinpointed by Asma, the chimera is actually two beings living in one – which means that the monster could stand for two different things at the very same time. Asma states, “it is necessary to analyze the meaning of the symbol in order to grab ancient ideas about frightening internal monsters” (52). He also discusses Plato's theory that a monster could be formed when the three forces that drive the human psyche (reason, emotion, and appetite) are unbalanced, and as in Plato's *Republic*²³, this monstrous concept can be extended to the creation – or ruling – of a nation, which becomes a monstrous nation.

Asma argues that monstrous civilizations are the product of pathologic societies. The monsters created by this kind of society might also spring from oppressed classes or oppressive systems within that society. He points out that the conceiving of the monster might be an answer of the people against a given ideology. The monster figure would function as an allegory to both ends. If everyone becomes a monster, there will be no monsters, which means that, if everyone embraces a system of values or rules that were once thought as monstrous, then we would become what was once monstrous; therefore, if everyone is a monster, the monster is no longer the exception, thus, no longer monstrous. On the other hand, if no one is a monster, than the monster becomes the materialization of the anxiety floating over that society, which supports both Cohen's theory on the materialization of an abstract anxiety in the figure of the monster and Bellei's discussion on the border being.

The monster discourse as brought by Richards Kearney's *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* defines the monster as a scapegoat, an outsider, who carries the burden of taking the negative aspects of a given society. According to him, the definition of who is part of a society – which would be us – and who is out the society – them, the monsters – makes a happy tribe (26). This scapegoat concept provides more support to Bellei's vision of monster, a being that is on the border of society, negatively mirroring its values. For Kearney, the monster image is also a message: “for saints to remain saintly, strangers had to be scapegoated” (33). For that matter, it is possible to draw on the image

²² Socrates' Chimera speaks of the dual nature of the being. He theorizes that the chimera, the man and the lion could coexist altogether in the same being. However, if they were not in harmony one of the parts could overrule the others and succumb to its own appetites, which would eventually degenerate the being.

²³ Even though Plato's *Republic* is an interesting text, it will not be further discussed by this research.

of the Cthulhu, and other great old ones, as cast out monstrous messianic figures. Neither Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep or Azathoth are inserted in a society, they dwell on the margin of those societies. Even though their cults and worshipers may be inserted in these societies, as their masters, they are mostly outcasts for sharing a different ideology. In addition, these cults expect that the return of their gods end these societies and start a new one, as many modern religions wait for the return of their own messiahs. In such reading it is possible to associate these monsters and their cults to the aspects discussed by Kearney and Bellei. Where, for a society to remain a society, there must be monsters so that people can relate to them in order not to become them, and the scapegoated people, on the other hand, wait and desire their return, so they could rise against those who have oppressed and persecuted them.

By understanding which values are being scapegoated or associated to monsters, we can infer the functioning of a society. Kearney argues that “[a]s the need for expiation grew, in the face of growing corruption and chaos the range of eligible aliens became more disturbingly generous” (33); even knowing that he was not specifically talking about the post-World War One in the U.S., Kearney’s comment is applicable to any society going through a drastic change of paradigms. The alien is most likely to be blamed, for a society would probably remain the same until the infiltration of alien values. Some of these values would be strong enough to cause a drastic change, or disturbing enough to be scapegoated by the dominant classes. In both cases, the scapegoat is likely to be depicted as monster, in a more or less imaginative fashion, but a monster nevertheless. Unless the change effectively takes place, then the exception becomes the rule and the monster, no longer monstrous. Again, taking *The Call of Cthulhu* as reference, Cthulhu cults would be scapegoated and persecuted, in order to keep society the way it is. But if, however, Cthulhu indeed awakes, he would resume his kingdom on Earth, society as we know it would cease to exist and the monster no longer monstrous, for Cthulhu and his cults would be the new society, everybody would be a monster – therefore, no longer monstrous.

Similarly to Cohen’s discussion, Kearney writes that “[m]onsters are metaphors of our anxieties” (117). Kearney exemplifies his statement by pointing out that the demand for horror books and monster books after 9/11 increased in the U.S. He argues that this increase in the consuming of the image of the monster was a vivid example of a society trying to put a mask on an abstract horrific anxiety experienced by U.S. population (120). This allows the assumption that

in an atmosphere of fear, people tend to associate these abstract fears to the image of the monster. The U.S. of the beginning of the twentieth century was experiencing huge social distress, which might have generated an auspicious environment for the generation of monsters. From the beginning of the War in 1914 to the Crash in 1929, the people of the U.S. had dealt with significant changes in their society and in the world. Examples of these situations are: the massive European immigration, especially the Russian waves, fleeing from the Russian revolution of 1917, flooded the country with many alien workers, the opposition to the War, and later on the strikes and demonstrations organized by the American socialist party, which ended up being replaced by the Communist party. All these events were, at some level, connected to alien ideologies and/or revolutionary thinking, and might have been embodied in the form of a monster.

On the other hand, there was the government with its sanctions on immigration and governmental propaganda, controlling the media and taking measures to assure the population would not rise up against the war industry. These actions, along with educational measures to domesticate the newcomer aliens, were attempts of the government to protect the welfare achieved during the War. And, squeezed between these two forces, there were the people: the regular citizen, not involved in revolutionary or governmental parties, living drowned into this miasmatic and oppressive atmosphere.

The smothering presence of these forces that could not be seen or named, only perceived, falls under Cohen's "total fear" definition, and as pointed out before, its symptom is the monster. The attempts to deal with these anxieties reflect concerns of the American people about the future situation of their country, which was being flooded with alien immigrants and ideologies. The prejudice against the poor European immigrants, which were then the majority, fear of socialism and communism, the "red scare," and the chaos of a revolution within the U.S., became a melting pot for the conceiving of the monsters. The spirit of rebellion was clashing against the government. The working classes along with the immigrants, socialists and communists were causing a lot of distresses in U.S. society. A drastic change in the thought paradigms of the U.S. was taking place; the war and the social revolution were changing society, in the individual level as much as in the collective, and national, level. The distresses and reactions caused by the changes could be seen as the social body generating the *Cthulhu Mythos* monsters. Lovecraft would provide a literary representation of this real "total fear" atmosphere, which he called cosmic horror or cosmic fear.

His cosmic fear, however, would adopt much bigger proportions than its real counterpart.

In *Supernatural Horror*, Lovecraft defines cosmic horror as a dreadful atmosphere of horror beyond human comprehension, which springs from unknown territories of imagination and reality: “[a] certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer” (15). Such concept dialogues with Cohen’s concept of total fear. In *Monster Theory*, Cohen suggests that the smothering presences of immaterial anxieties manifest themselves in the image of the monster. This embodiment takes place not only because we must name what it is that threatens us, but also because of our lack of understanding about the threat. Our lack of awareness allows us to imagine a horrific explanation to an abstract threat. Lovecraft discussed these same ideas. He, however, oriented his investigation more to the literary sense of the manifestation of this total fear, and this fear he called cosmic horror, a literary analogue to Cohen’s total fear, and as Cohen’s total fear, Lovecraft’s cosmic horror also created monsters.

Lovecraft, however, suggests a more fantastic approach to the atmosphere of abstract fear theorized by Cohen. His cosmic horror embraces the full definition of total fear, but it also has fantastic elements added to it. Lovecraft explains:

[U]nknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (*Supernatural Horror*, 15)

As it can be observed, Lovecraft would make usage of fear of the unknown along with the atmosphere later on described by Cohen as total fear in order to shape his own storytelling. And from that mixture of real elements along with fictional ones, Lovecraft would draw his monsters. Lovecraft believed that “[t]he unknown, being likewise the unpredictable” (13) has been the source of uncanny fear since our primitive ancestors. For theirs and ours understanding of the world is limited, which opens a door for the imagination to produce explanations for unknown phenomena. Lovecraft also believed that because the experiences of pain and fear are more vivid to the human being than

pleasure, our minds tend to associate the uncertainty of the unknown to dangers, “making any kind of an unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities” (14).

When these elements are put together, “there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation” (14), which would be described also by Cohen, under the name of Total Fear. This state is, for Lovecraft, a force able to endure as long as the human race itself. Lovecraft argues that “[c]hildren 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” (14) – which assures the continuation and vivacity of the Cosmic Horror, for literature, and Total Fear, for the real world. Lovecraft concludes: “With this foundation, no one need wonder at the existence of a literature of cosmic fear. It has always existed, and always will exist” (15).

Starting from a different point, Asma brings up the concept of *Angst* and Fear. He argues that, as defined in Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*²⁴, fear is a frightening response to a natural threat, as a barking dog. But angst, is a deeper response to an indefinite, unnatural threat. This state of anxiety can be related to Lovecraft’s concept of “cosmic horror,” an extravagant response to an uncanny situation. The concept of angst, and therefore Lovecraft’s cosmic horror, also, according to Asma, dialogs with Kant’s concept of *sublime*, an aesthetic experience of pain and pleasure, triggered by something unnatural (*On Monsters*, 185). The sublime is experimented when our mind is not able to comprehend the magnitude of particular events. This experimentation takes place because our mind fails into correlating its accumulated knowledge to the events it has just experienced. The feeling of sublimity, in the case of monsters, comes from the incomprehensiveness of the form witnessed. This incomprehensiveness makes the object of the sublime boundless. The monster idea is the product of a twisted reasoning, which consciously tries to present to the mind an object that is actually beyond comprehension and therefore beyond grasp or understanding.

It can be said that most human characters in Lovecraft’s tales eventually come to experience the sublime, by realizing who the Great Old Ones really are, or merely by acknowledging their existence, when most characters just lose their minds or at least bear great traumas due to encountering these beings. Asma provides a brief yet accurate description of the cosmic horror and its entwining with Cohen’s and

²⁴ Asma’s English translation for the original German title of Heidegger’s book: *Sein und Zeit*.

Heidegger's theories when he writes: "[c]osmic fear or angst or despair suggests, even if only temporarily, that the world lacks the secure structure and meaning that we ordinary assume it to have" (186). From there the sublime takes place, and from the horrific aspects of the sublime, the cosmic horror springs.

Asma comments about H. P. Lovecraft, stating that the latter "is a name synonymous with horror, and many connoisseurs of the genre consider him the rightful heir to Poe's distinguished mantle" (184). He continues: "In his *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft argues that good horror evokes a unique subjective emotion, which he refers to as cosmic fear" (184). Asma agrees with Lovecraft in arguing that horror is an emotion different from fear. Only monsters could cause that horror. This miasmatic fear, Cohen's total fear, Kant's sublime, Asma's readings of Angst could be related to Lovecraft's concept of cosmic horror, and this literary horror is doubtlessly the arena where we can find monsters.

The element to be achieved in Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos is then what he called the "cosmic horror", a mix of hopelessness and uncanny horror. This cosmic horror atmosphere is usually built into his stories through the protagonist's realization of an awful hidden scenario and plot. As the protagonist slowly pieces together the ongoing schemes of the Great Old Ones and their followers, it starts losing its sanity. The sanity loss comes from the idea that the character would be exposed to scenarios so unlikely to be real that its very sense of reality is eventually taken away, until all hope is gone. This situation, mixed with the inevitability of a plot that ultimately will bring the world as we know it to an end, speaks to feelings of hopelessness and meaninglessness. Once the protagonists come to the realization that, no matter what occurs, they do not have any control or cannot hope for any different from the grim fate reserved to them, they lose their mind.

The final straw usually comes along with the revealing of the existence of monsters. That is the pinnacle of most of Lovecraft's tales and a major element of his cosmic horror. What should be understood, and discussed forward, is that these beings cannot be stopped. This inevitability of the tragedy is also a mark of Lovecraftian storytelling – the hopelessness towards the monstrous. The Great Old Ones, Lovecraft's monsters, embody the hopelessness in his stories. These creatures hold powers and even exist – beyond human comprehension, and hence beyond the ability of the human mind to understand them (or, in fact, any ability or effort to handle them at all).

Madness, also a recurrent theme in Lovecraft tales, comes into picture as an element of the cosmic horror – or, more likely, as a consequence of it – through an unhuman experience of uncanny horror: the sublime experience chained to all the horrific events that usually follow it. When this combination takes place, when not even the figure of the monster can be fully understood (let alone its intentions) only the aftermath of its existence, this abstract uncanny horror, dialogues with Cohen’s total fear concept: something so horrific and abstract that the mere existence shakes the foundation of reality itself. This situation of horror where all hope is gone is the cosmic horror.

As an example, we may cite the character Francis Wayland Thurston, from the short story “The Call of Cthulhu”. Thurston learns about Cthulhu by investigating notes found among things left behind by his deceased granduncle, George Gammell Angell, a professor of languages at Brown University in Rhode Island. Before his mysterious death, George was conducting an investigation on his own about certain paranormal activities somehow related to this one creature, which turns out to be Cthulhu. Francis then picks up from where he left and by continuing his investigations, as the short story unfolds, he ends up learning about the true nature of Cthulhu. He learns about Cthulhu’s hidden cults, in many places of the world, and about their grim plan. Even though Francis never encounters Cthulhu himself, he learns about his cults. In addition, he has access to reports of those who had actually been in Cthulhu’s presence, cultists and non-cultists, which helps his figuring out what Cthulhu is. The realization of the existence of such a monstrous being and the piecing together of its agenda is enough to compromise his very sanity for the rest of his life:

[T]his test of my own sanity, wherein is pieced together that which I hope may never be pieced together again. I have looked upon all that the universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me. (*The Complete Works*, 255)

This sample carries many of the recurring elements of Lovecraftian writing. We can identify the lost of sanity, hopelessness, scientific elements, and the horror towards gaining knowledge of a scheme that should not be clear to the mundane eye.

A figurative reconstruction of a historic reality could have such monsters representing many distresses of a collapsing society. If we look at the U.S. of the early to mid-1900s, it is possible to realize its people were also somehow experiencing some of these elements of fear, uncertainty, and hopelessness. The real-life monsters may not be as elegant as the literary ones, but the elements for their formation permeate both reality and fiction. The Great Old Ones could be called many names in the historic reality of the U.S.: industrialism, social struggle, paragon changes, science, and war are some of them. The miasmatic atmosphere and the power struggles towards them, however, have the same names, here and there.

CHAPTER III

FEAR, MONSTERS, HORROR, AND SOCIETY

The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far.

(H. P. Lovecraft)

As the historical background of the research as well as the general ideas towards the monstrous discourse have both been covered, this chapter shall bring Lovecraft's vision of the weird tale, followed by the analysis of his work and monsters based on the theoretical material previously discussed. This chapter then aims at correlating the theorizations of the monster, the historical background, and all its contents through Lovecraft's conceptions of the weird. As a horror author, Lovecraft was well aware of his art, and knew the directions whereby his work should flow. However, he also acknowledged that inspiration could come from the most unlikely places, and that the writer could not be aware of all elements put in his own writings.

3.1. Howard Phillips Lovecraft's Weird Tale

As a writer, Lovecraft was aware of the kind of literature he wanted to reach with his tales of uncanny horror. *The Supernatural Horror* is a clear example of his understanding on how storytelling should be conducted in his tales and how much control he had over his work. For that, Lovecraft conducted a long research towards what he believed to be the origins of the weird tale. Lovecraft seemed to hold a special concern in distancing himself from the Gothic literature. Even acknowledging the importance of the Gothic elements for the true horror tale, he found the style dull and predictable.

As it is brought in *The Supernatural Horror*, Lovecraft acknowledges that his weird literature was rooted in the works of many Gothic authors before him. These authors, according to Lovecraft, had their importance for horror as a literary genre, but may have failed into delivering a consistent experience of horror. One of them, however, held a special position among many other gothic writers: Edgar Allan Poe. Lovecraft considered Poe a revolutionary Gothic writer and believed

that in his work the uncanny and horrific storytelling had reached its paramount. “Whatever his limitations, Poe did that which no one ever did or could have done; and to him we owe the modern horror-story in its final and perfected state” (53). According to Lovecraft, it is only in Poe’s writings that horror stories are freed from moral didacticism, such as happy ends and standard moral values. Before Poe, however, Lovecraft acknowledges *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), by Horace Walpole, as the seed of what would become Gothic literature (24). Lovecraft himself finds Walpole’s novel “tedious, artificial and melodramatic” (24). However, Walpole introduces many of the elements that became part of the scenario that would be known as the Gothic. Gothic castles, puppet characters, heroes, villains, ghosts, weird incidents and all the paraphernalia that inspired an “imitative Gothic school, which in turn, inspired real weavers of cosmic terror [...] beginning with Poe” (25) are found in Walpole’s novel. For Lovecraft, the Gothic is a scenario where stories share the same plot’s formula over and over again.

Even though those Gothic stories have horrifying scenes and elements of the weird, eventually, at some point, a reasonable explanation is provided, and a morally predictable ending for the characters takes place. This tradition had to be broken for cosmic horror to surface. As the Gothic kept perpetuating its literary tradition, some authors slowly broke off the Gothic turn of events. Poe, however, according to Lovecraft, is the first one to really break off the tradition of moral obviousness and logical explanations (53), which was a big leap compared to his predecessors into the “true weird tale” and, therefore, the cosmic horror. By embracing the powerful feelings of estrangement and gloom, probing into the human mind, rather than the Gothic fiction, Poe reaches terror’s true source.

Lovecraft believed that the fear inherent to each and every human being would make horror stories almost as natural to humans as breathing air and drinking water are. This natural characteristic would then establish the dignity and genuineness of the weird tale as a literary style connected to the human condition. The basis for these kinds of statements lies in a very complex line of thinking. For Lovecraft, the weird tale speaks to feelings so elementary and profound in the human psychic that it is no surprise that, even against all the odds, the weird tale tradition not only survived but reached “remarkable heights of perfection”(14). It was difficult for the weird tale to establish itself as a genre because of its main characteristic, which is also its greatest weakness, the fantastic uncanny scenario.

The weird tale is composed by elements not found in ordinary daily experiences. If we compare Lovecraft's weird tales to other literary works of the time, as Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants* or Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, we note that they are composed by experiences that could be found in the daily life of people. This likeness to real life makes these stories easy for the readers to experience vicariously. If we take Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" as a comparative example, we may come to the conclusion that it is easier to imagine yourself having a drink at a train station than in an extra dimensional island somewhere in the pacific filled with alien creatures. According to Lovecraft, this presence of uncanny and unusual situations would require more from the reader than mundane and ordinary stories of fear. The strangeness of the weird tale demands a good deal of imagination from the reader, since its core proposal is taking the natural and turning it into the supernatural. Daily experiences would be of little use for the reader to relate with the situations created towards the weird tale's plot. The reader's willingness to take that extra step into the unknown would be the channel connecting the reader to Lovecraft's writings, more than known things that could be related to mundane thinking and routine.

Because of this apparent disconnection to reality as we know it, the weird tale walked on a thin line between being rejected by readers or being truly embraced by them. Lovecraft had a clear idea of what should compose a weird tale and a solid opinion on the relevance of the unnatural or supernaturalism's role in the weird tale: "[t]he true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or sheeted form clanking chains according to rule" (15). The weird tale is composed by uncanny and unexplainable situations of horror. The weird tale's main feature itself, the monster, according to Asma, "seems to be the breakdown of intelligibility. An action or a person or a thing is monstrous when it can't be processed by our rationality, and also when we cannot readily relate to the emotional range involved" (10). This feature of not being completely understood would empower the figure of the monster but, on the other hand, it would also be responsible for making its connection to the natural world less evident. The supernatural, then, as a core element of the weird tale, becomes a segregating element for the reading public of weird tales. The supernatural and its monster, however, were elements Lovecraft was not willing to sacrifice for general acceptance. Not only did those elements endure throughout his writings, but they also became core elements of his weird tales.

The process behind this weird equation goes like this: For Lovecraft, things people can understand cause sensations of pleasure and pain, but things people cannot understand are the seeds of marvelous interpretations, personifications, and sensations of fear and awe. The unknown possesses the feature of being unpredictable and, for that, the unknown belongs to spheres of existence we know nothing of, and therefore, have no part with. A vivid example of these thoughts of the unknown, according to Lovecraft, can be found in our dreams: windows to a whole dimension of subconscious and unbound ideas. The dream holds special significance for Lovecraft, so much that many of his tales take place in a dimension called the dreamlands. He discusses:

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. (13-14)

For Lovecraft the dream would always retain its obscure wonderful characteristics. He believed the unknown inherent to all aspects of the human unconscious mind was somewhere he could draw inspiration for his uncanny tales. The unknown within our unconscious is out of our control, it is there that our darkest and most wondrous dreams and thoughts have chosen to dwell. We, however, lack the ability to piece this otherness in our minds together and this state of not knowing all things fuels our imagination.

Imagination shapes not only our thinking but also the way we process reality around us. The monster is a product of our imagination. To think that, driven by our imagination, we could be bringing monsters here, into real life, embodying something we cannot understand or relate to is quite reasonable. Because we cannot fully understand some aspects of life, we fear that which we do not know and this fear ultimately becomes the monster. On the other hand, the unknown has also an uncanny appeal to human beings. The human fascination for wonder and curiosity utterly drives people into the unknown, the place of fear. This relation of fear and curiosity will endure in us as species as long as our imagination keeps filling unknown gaps with monsters. It is almost as if we want to prove that the strange noises in the kitchen at night are really

not some ghost, but rather the wind opening the cabinet's doors. By any means, we must prove our imagination wrong. By these standards, it is acceptable to think that fear literature becomes a natural form for humans to express their fear, fascination, and expectations towards the unknown – as a product of the interaction between not knowing, imagining and acknowledging.

Lovecraft was well aware of the co-relation between superstitions built in the social and individual memory and fears caused by them. He understood the way these superstitious fears were boosted by the lack of knowledge about things that are real. For him fearing a scenario which the mind or common sense could not provide a solid explanation for or have enough relevant information about, but was acknowledged real, was a natural human reaction:

[a]n 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. (14)

Many of Lovecraft stories are based on scientific and astronomic data of those times. The cosmos is often part of his plots, for he knew the lack of information we had towards it would provide prosperous elements for his weird elements. He achieved an intriguing mixture of scientific and psychological elements in order to bring to life his particular form of horror, using cultural superstitions and fears to explore our relation with these unknown places of fear, inside and outside us.

Ideas and insights about fear and weird literature developed by Lovecraft in *Supernatural Horror* speak directly to the theories proposed by monster theoreticians supporting this research. It is also curious to notice the consistency of Lovecraft's inquiry, preempting much of what is being debated in the field of horror stories nowadays. Lovecraft divided fear literature into two distinct categories: one would be the mundane gruesome and physical fear; the other would be the true weird literature. Weird tales have a "smothering atmosphere of unexplainable dread of unknown forces that, once expressed with

seriousness, becomes the most malignant conceptions of the human brain, bending the laws of nature in chaos and taking our safeguards against the assault of daemons of unplumbed space” (15). This state of horror Lovecraft called cosmic horror: a horror linked to the unknown, therefore, the inexplicable and undomesticated. Cosmic horror became then the linchpin for Lovecraft’s weird tales.

A key element for the construction of the cosmic horror atmosphere in Lovecraft’s writings would be the monster: a concept which, by definition, is an attempt to understand that which cannot be explainable – and, therefore, fits in the unexplainable horror idea. Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep, and Azathoth are the human names for the monstrous entities that shall be further discussed. In a less specific sphere, these three monsters share common information – for they are, after all, all monsters. The idea behind this common monstrous background is tied up with the mechanism that generates monsters. Based on Cohen’s, Bellei’s, and Kearney’s investigations, it is possible to assume that all monsters ultimately spring from the strangeness of the human mind and any given experience that it is not ready to deal with. From there, imagination takes the wheel and all sorts of unnatural beings come into being.

As mentioned in chapter 1, unhealthy societies can become the source of all kinds of real life monstrosities: poverty, unbalanced wealth, violent systems of oppression and so on. This miasmatic atmosphere may have an impact on the “nation’s spirit”. A given society may not be able to realize the causes or elements related to its distresses, but a great share of the people of such nations nevertheless feel the weight of living under such regimes. Because of that social condition, and lacking of information for piecing things together, humanity has provided all kinds of monstrous explanations, for the most complex and most elementary – yet unclear – aspects of society. The Greeks gave us the Olympian’s Gods and its heroes and beasts, Christians gave us Satan, the Mayans gave us Kukulcan, the Victorian age gave us Hyde, Dracula, and many others. For better or worse, all these beings are attempts at explaining things which, so far, could not be explained otherwise.

If there is no text without context, then all these wondrous beings are thresholds of what has happened and what is acknowledged as history. Moreover, the act of unfolding the monster, the threshold, is in itself a dissection, an archeological excavation – or at least a social experimentation – for we will be looking to past times, manners, and realities (which might be as distant from us today as we are distant from pre-historic humans). According to Asma, “they [monsters] push our

sense of abnormality beyond the usual anthropological xenophobia” (27).

3.2. Lovecraftian Monsters and Society

It is important to highlight that Lovecraft himself never meant to criticize aspects of U.S. society. In fact, for him, the true weird tale should have nothing to do with these matters. As he states in the *Supernatural Horror*:

We may say, as a general thing, that a weird story whose intent is to teach or produce a social effect, or one in which the horrors are finally explained away by natural means, is not a genuine tale of cosmic fear; but it remains a fact that such narratives often possess, in isolated sections, atmospheric touches which fulfill every condition of true supernatural horror-literature. (16)

What fuels this research, however, is the sentence directly before the passage just mentioned: “Moreover, much of the choicest weird work is unconscious; appearing in memorable fragments scattered through material whose massed effect may be of a very different cast” (16). From Lovecraft’s own words, it could be inferred, even knowing that it was probably never his intention – at least in a conscious level – that he could be drawing from what was happening within his country.

Lovecraft’s tales take place mainly in two different scenarios. One would be an appropriation of the world during the first half of twentieth century, and the other a more fantastic universe resembling a less technological developed period of human history, known as the dreamlands. Many stories of the Dream Cycle also bring deities mentioned in the Cthulhu Mythos, as Azathoth, and Nyarlathotep, for instance. And some of them actually transit from one world to another, as “Nyarlathotep” and “The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath”, discussed further on.

The first scenario is a portrait of the world he knew, with a horrific twist to it. For Lovecraft the human kind would be only one of the many races and civilizations of the cosmos, therefore holder of no particular significance in a more cosmic understanding of existence. From that view, the insignificance of the human kind vis-à-vis the aims of potent alien entities would shape his fictional world. By turning humanity into an element of no particular significance, Lovecraft was

able to create plots and scenarios where his human protagonists could do little, or nothing, in order to avoid the plans of these cosmic entities. This incapacity of the protagonists to act when facing uncanny horrific situations leads to themes as hopelessness, the unmaking of the world as we know it, and the influence of cosmic hidden entities upon humanity.

Other themes as science also hold significance in Lovecraft's tales. Much of his cosmic view comes from scientific researches and discoveries of his time, and the consequences of its usage are explored in his writings. Magic is also a recurrent theme, usually paired with forbidden knowledge, where most of the magic of the world is associated with alien or extra dimensional entities. Lovecraft also creates an intricate pantheon in order to deal with these alien and extra dimensional entities. These creatures are often worshiped by human servants and are often indifferent to human kind, which also characterize such creatures mainly not as evil, but more likely as amoral beings.

The dreamlands, the second scenario proposed by Lovecraft, on the other hand, resembles a not so modern world. Sometimes it is described as an "early middle age", with almost medieval style cities and devoid of modern technology. All sorts of supernatural creatures, along with extra dimensional humans, inhabit the dreamlands. Some people are able to breach through our reality and reach the dreamlands through their dreams; those are called dreamers. A recurring dreamer character in Lovecraft's fiction is named Randolph Carter. He first appears in "The Statement of Randolph Carter" and later on is cited or reappears in "The Unnamable", "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath", "The Silver Key", "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward", "Through the Gates of the Silver Key", and "Out of the Aeons", chronologically.

The fictional universe created by Lovecraft is then an allegory of the world in the first half of the twenty century, a reconstruction of his own reality. However, as a fictional version of the world, it was filled with hidden conspiracies and supernatural creatures behind it. In this world of alien power games and conspiracies, human kind was not a major player and is constantly pushed around by more potent beings, usually getting some smaller part done – or having no significance at all. Based on this scenario, "Azathoth", "Nyarlathotep", "The Other Gods", "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath", and "The Call of Cthulhu" take place, and the connection of their elements with the social moment of the first half of the twenty century will be explored in the following sections of this research.

As a literary cornerstone of the cosmic horror, the monster is a key figure of Lovecraft's storytelling. This research addresses this special literary element represented in Lovecraft's work concerning three different monsters: Azathoth, Nyarlathotep and Cthulhu. Assuming that the monstrous discourse is formed by social negative experiences, the image of the monster might function as a literary representation of social distresses, acting as a body of cultural information. The three monsters here approached inhabit Lovecraft's fantastic universe and speak to those social matters in a literary way.

What makes Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep, and Azathoth and the in-between wars in the U.S. specially connected is circumstantial evidence. Lovecraft was writing about the meaninglessness of the human being, about secret cults and different cultures infiltrated within the tradition in a scenario that mostly represented the U.S. during that period. The role of the monster as a border being and as a negative mirror of society speaks to Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, and Cthulhu's characterization in Lovecraft's stories. In different manners, they shall work as an allegory of the general fear that permeated society, emerging from the change of world power, economy and scientific boom – mainly after the First World War.

3.3. On Monsters – Azathoth

The first reference to Azathoth can be traced back to 1919, in a note Lovecraft wrote for himself, referring to Azathoth as a hideous name. Even though the story "Azathoth" was published only in 1938, Lovecraft researcher Robert M. Price points out that in 1919 Lovecraft writes in a note the plot: "A terrible pilgrimage to seek the nighted throne of the far daemon-sultan Azathoth" (*The Azathoth Cycle*, iv). Based on this note, Prince²⁵, as other researchers, assumes that "Azathoth" is a surviving excerpt of an unfinished or unpublished longer tale. This plot, however, is not abandoned and would be revisited in "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath", published in 1926.

The Daemon sultan Azathoth lays in the nucleus of the universe. It is a timeless, boundless being who is the ancestor to all Lovecraftian monsters. The daemon sultan, as other Lovecraftian monsters, exists beyond our understanding of reality. A being such as Azathoth is a concept so alien to the human mind that when people have

²⁵ A major figure in H. P. Lovecraft scholarship, Robert McNair Price is the editor of the journal *Crypt of Cthulhu* and many of *Cthulhu Mythos* anthologies. Price has been writing extensively about the *Cthulhu Mythos* since 2003 and is a professor of biblical criticism at the Center for Inquiry Institute.

to deal with it the paradigms we base our reality in are shattered. Humanity and all its purposes and goals are dwarfed before Azathoth. As the Greek mythology's medusa, which would turn into stone any person who directly looked at her, the grotesqueness of Azathoth's existence is enough to drive people insane. Those who have a glimpse of it are likely to lose their mind or even perish before the acknowledgement of the existence of such entity.

"Azathoth" is an almost five-hundred-word short story that tells the tale of a man who receives Azathoth's visit. The story revolves towards an unnamed man living in an unnamed city. In this gray city built of ugly concrete skyscrapers and smoky skies, none could even dream of a beautiful greenish spring or a sunny beautiful day. In this postindustrial/scientific revolution scenario, science has stripped the world of its magic, industrialism had made people's routine and social life seems unimportant or at least ordinary. For the main character, every day seems as living in a sterile twilight reign, among shadows and concrete, working hours to return a one-window apartment which opened to another building. For him, those routines and living conditions would soon drive a man who reads and dreams insane.

At home, this man spends his nights stretching out of the window, looking at the night sky, hoping to see anything but walls and windows in order to keep sane. He then starts tracking the movement of the stars through the night sky, and after a while starts naming them. His observations end up opening his eyes to a knowledge unknown, or long forgotten by this world. Then, one night, while gazing at the night sky, the gulf between this man and the stars is bridged and he is dragged to the world he long wondered about. That man experiences vortices of chaos and beauty unknown to humanity. He is taken away by this dream entity for countless cycles, immerse into opiate oceans of aromas never felt, creatures never seen and suns which no human eyes have ever beheld. After an unknown period, that man is put to rest in a green shore among lotus-blossoms and red camalotes.

One may notice that, besides the title, there is no clear reference to Azathoth in the short story. In addition to the title, we must rely on evidence provided by other texts in order to assume that the entity who abducts the man is Azathoth, for this correlation may not be clarified only by reading "Azathoth" alone. However, other texts such as the story "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath" and the collection of poems titled *Fungi from Yuggoth* provide enough evidence to support this assumption. *Fungi from Yuggoth* is a sequence of thirty-six sonnets written by Lovecraft from 27 December 1929 to 4 January 1930. As

other examples of his writing, the *Fungi* is a collection where some of the sonnets are connected, but in their majority, they are stand-alone pieces – addressing various themes of his fictional world. First published individually by the *Weird Tales Magazine*, they were organized in one volume and reprinted all together. Sonnet XXII, about Azathoth, goes as follows:

Out in the mindless void the daemon bore me, /
 Past the bright clusters of dimensioned space, /
 Till neither time nor matter stretched before me, /
 But only Chaos, without form or place. / Here the
 vast Lord of All in darkness muttered / Things he
 had dreamed but could not understand, / While
 near him shapeless bat-things flopped and
 fluttered / In idiot vortices that ray-streams
 fanned. / They danced insanely to the high, thin
 whining / Of a cracked flute clutched in a
 monstrous paw, / Whence flow the aimless waves
 whose chance combining / Gives each frail
 cosmos its eternal law. / “I am His Messenger,”
 the daemon said, / As in contempt he struck his
 Master’s head. (1-14)

While “Azathoth” is a third person narration, sonnet XXII is a first-person narration. Based on the experience described in the short story, it is possible to assume that sonnet XXII describes the same experience – only this time through the eyes of the abducted man. It is possible to correlate passages of the man’s abduction in “Azathoth” to the experience described by the sonnet XXII. Some passages that appear to be describing the same scene from different perspectives are: “came to that room wild [...] vortices of dust and fire, swirling out of the ultimate spaces” and “for days not counted in men’s calendars the tides of far spheres bare him gently to join the dreams for which he longed” (*Complete Works*, 146) – from the short story – and “Out in the mindless void the daemon bore me, / Past the bright clusters of dimensioned space, / Till neither time nor matter stretched before me” from the sonnet, for instance. Mentions to the whining flutes and insane dancers can also be found in the “The Dream-Quest”, as follows:

[O]utside the ordered universe that amorphous
 blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes
 and bubbles at the center of all infinity—the

boundless daemon sultan Azathoth, whose name no lips dare speak aloud, and who gnaws hungrily in inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond time and space amidst the muffled, maddening beating of vile drums and the thin monotonous whine of accursed flutes. (279)

Similar descriptions of Azathoth can be found in many other short stories of the Cthulhu Mythos, enabling the assumption that Azathoth is actually present in “Azathoth”.

Mainly related to primordial energies, Azathoth seems to have a form of consciousness unknown to humanity – or perhaps it might have no consciousness at all, being an entity of primordial energies and desires, unable of reasoning. Alternatively, as suggested by sonnet XXII, Azathoth could be in a deep slumber, as it dreams our reality. Such view would provide a certain explanation for his apparent unconscious condition. Moreover, perhaps Lovecraft never meant for us to understand this condition, as he brings in the *Supernatural Horror* the weird tale is not to be explained if it intends to maintain its weird features.

The chimerical characteristic of the monster allows it to assume different roles and be the agent of different actions in the same scenario. In order to suggest that Azathoth plays these different roles in “Azathoth” and in “The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath”, it would be necessary to read the short stories following Asma’s suggestion that the symbol must be analyzed in order to understand the idea behind the monster (*On Monsters*, 52). On the other hand, in the story “Azathoth” the research explores the monster as an answer to the anxiety of the human being to escape from an oppressive social atmosphere and recover a long lost link to a more natural state of being than that described by the short story. Further, in “The Dream-Quest to Unknown Kadath”, Azathoth will be analyzed under the light of the monstrous nations, discussed also by Asma, and supported by Cohen’s and Bellei’s theorizations. The Azathoth from the “Dream Quest” constantly referred to as mindless and boundless, complements the Azathoth’s description and may be associated to the idea of a conscience projected beyond the individual. Empowered by its boundlessness and mindlessness, such figure can be seen as a representative of a distressful social atmosphere – affecting the balance of a society. This distressful atmosphere results from the manifestation of an ideology perpetuated by a revolutionary class aiming at changing the social scenario and eligible to be

represented by the monster in the literary text. For, since an ideal does not depend on a central intelligence, and reaches more than the individual, which is also true for an oppressive uncanny atmosphere of fear, as theorized by Cohen, Azathoth could be related to those issues.

3.3.1. Reading Azathoth, the lost dream

Monsters are the extreme answer to abstract anxieties. This reading of “Azathoth” based on the development of the plot of the short sees the monster as an exaggeration of the desire to revive a long lost relation to the world. The short story describes a man stripped from the joy of living who is taken to a tour within places unknown to human kind in the universe, an exaggerated answer to an almost mundane desire. Even though some of Lovecraft’s short stories do not bring any accurate time marker, as a general idea, the non-dreamlands stories depict a scenario which is very similar to the early twentieth-century environment – exploring the negative consequences of industrial and scientific development on the population. Starting from the beginning, an analysis of the introductory paragraph allows reading the scenario where the short story takes place as the smoothing atmosphere of an industrialized and urbanized society, a condition also experimented in the United States of the 1920s.

When age fell upon the world, and wonder went out of the minds of men; when grey cities reared to smoky skies tall towers grim and ugly, in whose shadow none might dream of the sun or of spring’s flowering meads; when learning stripped earth of her mantle of beauty, and poets sang no more save of twisted phantoms seen with bleared and inward-looking eyes; when these things had come to pass, and childish hopes had gone away forever, there was a man who travelled out of life on a quest into the spaces whither the world’s dreams had fled. (Lovecraft, 146)

This scenario echoed throughout the world after the industrial revolution. For comparison matters, the environment and geographical location of the writer become important, so we can read this story as an allegorical reconstruction of history. The U.S., at that time, was experiencing a great deal of discordance and attrition between government and the working class, along with rallies protesting against the war and the mandatory draft among other social economical

disturbances. Taking into consideration that Lovecraft's home country, the U.S., was experiencing similar conditions during the period he wrote "Azathoth", it is possible to assume that Azathoth could speak to a desire of the people to break free from their oppressive routine during and after the industrial revolution. Assuming that the monster figure acts as a literary vessel for social memory, it brings encoded in itself a representation of a set of traumas experienced by that society and in this way, the monster commands it to be remembered. The concept of the monster is deeply associated with the social and cultural moment of its creation; by acting as a negative mirror it expresses a social moment when a part of that society experienced disturbances great enough to traumatize its collective, social memory.

"Azathoth" describes a world stripped out of its magic, where reason, science and industrialization turns the world from something beautiful and full of mysteries into something ugly and oppressive. Under those conditions, the ordinary people are subjected to nonhuman working routines:

It is enough to know that he dwelt in a city of high walls where sterile twilight reigned, and that he toiled all day among shadow and turmoil, coming home at evening to a room whose one window opened not on the fields and groves but on a dim court where other windows stared in dull despair. (146)

Such social system has its impact on the working class individual. As industrialization helps the development of a society as a whole, the individuality of some people has to be sacrificed in order to maintain the social order as it presents itself. The social machine of an industrialized society needs its working class. In an unhealthy nation, then, the worker has to sacrifice much of its individuality in order to keep the machine functioning.

Such joyless life makes the main character aspire and wish for something else from life than what he was subjected to. In "Azathoth", the monster answered to these oppressed desires of the main character: "And one night a mighty gulf was bridged, and the 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"(146). Azathoth reconnected the main character to nature, reestablishing a link that was once lost and which he desired so much: "the dweller in that

room used night after night to lean out and peer aloft to glimpse some fragment of things beyond the waking world and the greyness of tall cities” (146). This nameless character, the dweller of the apartment, is someone who urges for something else besides the material aspects of life.

Azathoth then takes the man to the infinite boundless space. The contrast of the claustrophobic and oppressive way of life of the character and the infinity of the space is to be pinpointed as an exaggeration provided by the monster. Azathoth takes the man from a known, tight routine and small apartment to cast him into the most unknown and vast place known to humanity, the cosmos. Once removed from the apartment, the man is not subjected to mundane experiences like a walk in the countryside, but taken by golden vortices of dust and fire to places beyond the worlds, where he sees:

Opiate oceans poured there, litten by suns that the eye may never behold and having in their whirlpools strange dolphins and sea-nymphs of unrememberable deeps. 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 bare him gently to join the dreams for which he longed; the dreams that men have lost. (146)

The man has been reconnected to something more primordial than he could ever expect. No person or earthly entity would be able take him to such places; the monstrous message needs a monster in order to deliver it, for only a monster could deliver such exaggeration. For a time not counted through human made calendars, the man experienced those things, not even the period of the experience could be understood by the human mind. The story ends when the dweller is left resting in a field of flowers after being gone for an unknown period. Information at the end of the story on whether he is alive or dead is ambiguous. Lovecraft writes that the flowers are lotus and *camalotes*²⁶, both swamp flowers that symbolize birth, death, rebirth, and beauty. This particular selection of flowers may be read as the death and perhaps rebirth of that man’s body or conscience, which could be related to the *sublime* experience discussed in Chapter II. The fact that the man was

²⁶ *Camalote* is the Portuguese and Spanish word used to refer to a flower known as Lily.

left in an open field, perhaps dead, could also be read as death being the ultimate exit door: the only way out of the routine imposed on and endured by some people.

3.3.2. Reading Azathoth, the Dream-Quest and monster societies

Azathoth, however, has another grimmer side. The story “The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath” refers to Azathoth as “mindless”, amoral and all-powerful, a being whose presence should be avoided by any means. This primitive or bestial side explored in “The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath” is reinforced by “The Other Gods” short story. Textual evidence in “The Dream Quest” allows us to identify the other gods as Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, and other lesser gods that compose Azathoth’s court. These two short stories hold particular importance for this thesis as a whole because they are connected in many aspects. “The Dream-Quest” and “The Other Gods” take place in the dreamlands, sharing characters and locations. In addition, both stories mention Azathoth and Nyarlathotep. Also, information shared among the stories allows interpretations that would not be possible if reading them separately from each other. Even though chronologically speaking “The Other Gods” takes place before “The Dream Quest”, the first short story will be discussed only when related to Nyarlathotep, since Azathoth’s participation in it is rather small and could only be perceived after reading the “Dream Quest”.

As regarding Azathoth in “The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath”, the short story cites it in six different times. Mainly described as “the boundless daemon-sultan Azathoth, whose name no lips dare speak aloud” (279), or as “daemon-sultan Azathoth gnaws hungrily in chaos amid pounding and piping and the hellish dancing of the Other Gods, blind, voiceless, tenebrous, and mindless” (284-285). Similar content is also found in all other references to Azathoth (307, 335-336). The short story, however, revolves around the main character: Randolph Carter, a dreamer²⁷. Carter dreams three times about standing in a terrace at this marvelous sunset city of high walls, colonnades, squares, and perfumed gardens. However, each night he stands in that terrace, he feels the presence of the dream’s tyrannous gods, and for that reason he never leaves his spot and goes down to adventure in the city.

After awakening from the same dream for the third time, he decides to pray to the gods of unknown Kadath to find out about his

²⁷ A person who is able to breach our reality through its own dreams in order to walk in the dreamlands.

connection to the city. Even not answered, his prayers are apparently heard; for ever since the day he has prayed to the gods, he ceases to behold that city. Sick of not being able to visit his dream city, he decides to go where no mortal man had gone before, and walks into Kadath, the castle of the Great Ones. In his dreams, he descends to one of the entrances of the dreamlands and starts his quest to find unknown Kadath. Even when told that it is not wise to stand against the will of the great ones and that the two out of the only three other mortal souls had crossed and re-crossed from the other dreamlands were quite mad, he decides to go on. Carter is informed that no man had ever seen Kadath, and that it could be located beyond the limits of earth's dreamlands. He is also told that, in the other dreamlands, where no dream can reach, dwells the mindless daemon sultan and center of the universe Azathoth, along with the Other Gods whose messenger is Nyarlathotep, the crawling chaos, and that there is great danger in meeting them.

When crossing the dreamland he gets in touch with all kinds of beings from rodent people to creatures that look like human frogs; he even talks to Atal – who is an old priest in “The Dream Quest” and the young apprentice of another priest called Barzai from “The Other Gods”. Atal speaks to Carter about Barzai the wise, who got dragged into the skies by the Other Gods only for trying to see the gods of earth²⁸ – his punishment for trying to find Kadath would be much more severe. After several episodes and several warnings about avoiding the presence of daemon-sultan Azathoth and the wrath of the crawling chaos Nyarlathotep, Carter learns that Kadath could be found beyond onyx mines, and only a certain race of creatures that served Nyarlathotep knew of its location. That was a good thing, for he would not need to go to other dreamlands, beyond earth, and therefore risking crossing ways with Azathoth or Nyarlathotep. Carter then tricks the creatures into taking him to the mines and after some serendipities he arrives in Kadath thanks to ghouls and bat-winged flying creatures known as night-gaunts; but Kadath was empty. At that point, Carter wonders how close of a watch Nyarlathotep kept of his journey and if his visit was not indeed expected. It is then that he hears a trumpet echoing through Kadath. After that trumpet sound Carter realizes that the ghouls and night-gaunts went missing, and whatever power was responsible for that, it was not from earth's dreamland. A mob enters the room and a pharaoh-like man emerges therefrom. That man knew who Carter was and what he intended there. The pharaoh like man is actually

²⁸ This is a reference to “The Other Gods”

Nyarlahotep and he tricks Carter into thinking that the gods had left Kadath to dwell in his dream city. Nyarlahotep then sends him in a quest to find this city, so he could convince the gods of men to return to Kadath, restore the balance of things and dwell at his dream city. He provides Carter a shantak, giant bird like creature, and tells him to steer it towards the Vega star. He instructs Carter in order to avoid encountering Azathoth, which is actually a trick, for he sends Carter straight to Azathoth's court. As Carter leaves, the pharaoh finally reveals his identity to Carter and wishes him good luck. After a while, Carter realizes that Nyarlahotep had actually tricked him and sent him straight to Azathoth's court. He remembered then that he was in a dream and jumped from the shantak. While he was falling, he thinks about his childhood and wakes up in his home in Boston. Meanwhile "Nyarlahotep strode brooding into the onyx castle atop unknown Kadath in the cold waste, and taunted insolently the mild gods of earth whom he had snatched abruptly from their scented revels in the marvellous sunset city (337)".

As the journey of the main character is not the main issue this research, even though it is arguably the strongest point of the short story, my focus is directed to Azathoth, in order to relate it to the monstrous society as brought by Asma. In an unhealthy society, the monster may symbolize an abstract atmosphere of fear and may be responsible for turning its own people into monsters, as a response to that fear. In "The Dream Quest", we can relate Azathoth to two concepts behind this atmosphere. The first, and more explicit idea in the summarization, is regarding Azathoth as a border being. It inhabits the borders of the earth's dreamlands and should be avoided by all means. It defines the border of society and keeps its people safely confined into it. When read under that light, Azathoth encompasses the idea that beyond the borders of society there is chaos and monstrosity, therefore it is safe to remain within the tribe. That reasoning dialogues with Kearney's ostracization concept, since, according to it, what makes a certain people different from another, makes them a happy tribe. For within the tribe lies security and a sense of what is right or wrong, therefore, it makes the tribe happy for being different from the chaotic outside world, whose creatures should be avoided or ostracized for not sharing the same social values of the tribe. The border monster becomes monstrous not only because of its forms, but because its culture is so abstract and alien to the human conceptions that more than the form, the information which it brings makes it a stranger. The monster is a stranger then, kept on the border for society does not want to become like or even deal with it.

When understood as a border being, Azathoth works as a negative mirror of society. As cited before, “The Dream Quest” brings the image: “outside the ordered universe that amorphous blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the center of all infinity—the boundless daemon sultan” (*The Complete Works*, 279). This passage can be compared to the monster/society relationship, where the ordered universe is bordered by the monster, a boundless daemon who rules the chaos beyond the established order as an allusion to an ordered society and the strange chaotic world outside of it.

The border concept related to the reverse mirror idea brings to light the second concept related to Asma’s theory. In this context, Azathoth could be read as the collective unconscious of a sick nation, a monstrous nation. The non-material aspects of this entity, boundless, mindless, chaotic, idiot god, located outside the earth’s dreamlands, could function as a monstrous nation on the border of a healthy nation. This relation could be read as a literary representation of an ambient of collective fear. In the U.S., such collective fear could be illustrated by “the red scare”, as discussed in chapter one. It is known that at some point of the first quarter of the twentieth century the prejudice of the U.S. population against immigrants had reached its pinnacle. The immigrants that were mostly ostracized were those of communist and socialist beliefs. Most of these immigrants reached the U.S. because of the War, the Russian Revolution and other social and financial issues that their nations could be going through. As it is defined by Asma, war, civil war, and social/economic disturbances are symptoms of monstrous nations. As these other nations were experiencing many distresses, the U.S. was blooming economically, since virtually none of the issues the rest of the world was experimenting actually reached the U.S. When comparing the relation between the U.S. – and the world and Azathoth and the dream lands – it is possible to read Azathoth as these monstrous nations, which the inhabitants of the wealthy nations should fear and avoid. Beyond the borders of the healthy nation lies chaos and uncertainty, which are monstrous features.

The reading of Azathoth as an illustration of sick nations positioned outside an ordered society, and the way these societies affect each other, can also be associated with what Cohen defines as an ambient of total fear. Cohen’s total fear is responsible for starting the process that turns a nation into a monstrous nation. If a society is surrounded by a chaotic environment, it will associate negative values to that which it does not want to become. As this wealthy society is pressured and permeated by the outside monstrous nation, it will also

adopt measures to assure that it will not be affected by its neighbor monster. These measures could be exemplified by a sanction on the immigration or the creation of educational programs for aliens, as an attempt to domesticate the monster. The enforcing of these practices, however, when motivated by a state of collective fear, are themselves a symptom that the once wealthy nation could now be turning itself into a monstrous one. For the same tools used for social control can be turned into tools of oppression for an unbalanced society. Since this state of fear does not need a mind of its own, for it exists in the collective social mind, the monster created by it might as well be unconscious and primitive. The human instinct to rebel against, or fear, what could be understood as oppressive may be represented by such monster; and then the once wealthy nation would become as monstrous as the outside one.

Even though it does not act directly above the earth's dreamlands, Azathoth's influence and presence on its borders affects the way that the whole land behaves. For even not directly experiencing its actions, no one in the dreamlands desires to come into Azathoth's presence. Here another parallel could be traced. Even though the War never reached U.S.'s soil, the congress found that U.S. troops should be sent overseas. Most of its citizens, however, did not want to take part of the War and were not favorable to the drafts. This matter became serious to the point when it generated many conflicts between the population and the government, and was punishable by the espionage act, also cited in chapter one. The dreamland's/Azathoth relationship could also be read as an allegory of these matters. The presence of Azathoth symbolizes destruction and chaos, such as war. Also, as it happens with the drafts, only when enslaved and subjected to Nyarlathotep's will, people would go from the dreamlands to Azathoth's presence. "The Dream Quest" speaks of alike acts, in which instead being drafted and sent to war, people were enslaved and taken outside the borders of the dreamlands, to chaos: "he was dragged within a low doorway and made to climb infinite [...]; Carter was locked into a chamber [...]. What his fate would be, he did not know; but he felt that he was held for the coming of that frightful soul and messenger of infinity's Other Gods" (278).

Even not having a mind of its own, the monstrous presence forces people to act in unusual ways. The monster could be an external undesired element, or even a distress that a nation could be experiencing, such as mandatory drafts in order to fight the war. As this kind of monstrosity springs from a collective shared idea, the monster figure needs no conscious mind or intelligence itself. For this kind of

monstrosity lies in the collective cultural body, therefore not needing a central intelligence of its own, working more as a mob mentality and less as an individual will. It can manifest for internal or external distresses and can be the source of a problematic process of changing. In this way, Azathoth can be read as an atmosphere of uncanny fear responsible for turning healthy nations into monstrous ones.

3.4. On Monsters – Nyarlathotep

Nyarlathotep is the crawling chaos, the god of a thousand forms, the messenger of the Other Gods. Nyarlathotep is a direct descendent of Azathoth. Even though Azathoth has spawn many ‘Other Gods’, Nyarlathotep, unlike the others, is not a “seed of Azathoth” and is the only Other God considered as son of Azathoth. Unlike the Other Gods, Nyarlathotep is malicious, manipulative and cruel. Nyarlathotep is uncannily wit, speaks many human tongues and has a thousand forms. He is also not bound to any kind of imprisonments, like Cthulhu – who is sleeping – or other gods – who are trapped in other dimensions and in outer space. Mainly, Nyarlathotep is an agent of chaos and madness. He watches over the other Gods of the dreamlands and Earth and is Azathoth’s messenger.

Differently from many of the Other Gods, people often had mistaken Nyarlathotep for a human. In “The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath”, and “Nyarlathotep”, for example, he shows himself as a pharaoh-like human being. He usually drives people insane through manipulative actions and deception. As much as in “The Dream Quest” and “Nyarlathotep”, he appears as a manipulative, cruel and extremely intelligent entity. From the words of Lovecraft himself: “Nyarlathotep, horror of infinite shapes and dread soul and messenger of the Other Gods” (331). As Azathoth, Nyarlathotep also has a sonnet named after it (XXI. Nyarlathotep), which also makes reference to the short story named after it:

And at the last from inner Egypt came / The
strange dark One to whom the fellahs bowed; /
Silent and lean and cryptically proud, /
And wrapped in fabrics red as sunset flame. /
Thongs pressed around, frantic for his commands, /
But leaving, could not tell what they had heard; /
While through the nations spread the awestruck
word / That wild beasts followed him and licked
his hands. / 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 (1-14)

The sonnet explores many aspects associated with Nyarlathotep, the bringer of the idiot chaos, which can be associated with Azathoth, since it is the idiot god, and Nyarlathotep is its messenger: the human-like form shown in “The Dream Quest” and further in “Nyarlathotep” and the power issue represented by the wild beasts following him and leaking his hands.

Nyarlathotep speaks to the idea of drastic change, for he is the bringer of chaos. Chaos is the first step before the coming of something new. For a new system to rise, an old one must fall. Nyarlathotep can also be associated with mechanisms of control, for he is the messenger of the other gods. Through deception and physical acts he oppresses and assures everything runs properly for his agenda to be fulfilled. As the other gods, Nyarlathotep also has worshippers and agents within the physical world and the dreamlands. However, different from Cthulhu, who needs his cults in order to awake, Nyarlathotep does not have any dependence on his followers. His agents act only to move pieces into the right places, and perform other tasks, while he takes care of specific matters with his own hands. Nyarlathotep also has uncanny knowledge of everything, which he uses with cruelty and elegance in order to take people into his web of madness and deceit.

In “The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath”, Nyarlathotep is fearsome and loathing. Carter, the main character, is told many times that it is not good to defy the will of the gods and that an encounter with Nyarlathotep should be avoided by all means. The fear towards Nyarlathotep is justified mainly for his power and cruelty. He is known for being tricky and harsh. Nyarlathotep is a major player in the power games of the extra dimensional alien gods, since he watches over the gods of men, the other gods, and even Azathoth. The monster in Nyarlathotep acts not only as a frontier that should not be crossed, but also as a watcher and a punisher. This figure shown in the “Dream Quest” would function as Bellei's and Williams's considerations on the negative way of transmitting knowledge, as it stands by the idea that a person can be taught by negative stimulation. Supporting this idea, the “Other Gods” develops a similar plot, where a priest to the gods of men tries to find the gods, which wish to remain hidden, and after the first glimpse of the hidden gods of men, the priest is dragged by the other

gods never to be seen again. “The Dream Quest” brings a very alike plot, a man who wants to visit a city forbidden by the gods and is punished by it. The system of punishment acts as an attempt to domesticate unwanted behavior, from characters in Lovecraft storytelling and people in real life.

“Nyarlathotep” presents us the same tricky and evil character of “The Dream Quest”, but it takes place in the real world instead of the Dreamlands. The short story revolves around a social unstable scenario where the world is already suffering from a strange social illness and a sense of monstrous guilt is upon the land. Even the seasons of the year do not seem to be the same anymore and people feel that the world is changing. From among this situation Nyarlathotep comes from Egypt, mesmerizing the world with his knowledge on sciences and strange gadgets that he combined in even stranger ones. Nyarlathotep walks the world making theater presentations involving electricity and science only to draw people into the theaters and when the show was over and people left the building, their world was forever gone, changed in a very chaotic and desolated way. Since the image of Nyarlathotep is associated with sciences, technology, and great destruction, my reading of “Nyarlathotep” explores the short story as an allegory for the destruction caused by the usage of technology and science in the First World War. Supported by the similarities of the short story’s scenario and the scenario of the U.S., and the world after the War, the reading proposes understating the monster Nyarlathotep as the collective fear of the unknown towards the usage of new technology and science, and also the social trauma caused by it.

3.4.1. Reading Nyarlathotep, Mesmerizing Technology

As discussed before, the short story “Nyarlathotep” has a slightly different vein from those in “The Dream Quest” and “The Other Gods”. The very first point that stands up is that, unlike the other two short stories, “Nyarlathotep” takes place in the “real world”. As “Azathoth”, it is a first-person narration by an unnamed character, which takes place in Lovecraft’s reconstruction of the early twentieth century. This story begins by situating the reader in a distressful period of political and social upheavals. There is a sense of guilt upon the land and an atmosphere of uncanny fear and tension. The reason why such distresses took place is unknown, and even the seasons of the year were behaving oddly, as if the control of the world had passed from known gods to unknown gods. Amid this chaotic atmosphere, out of Egypt, came Nyarlathotep. His identity was a mystery and no one knew who he

was, but in Egypt the fellahin²⁹ bowed down to him even not knowing why. Nyarlathotep looks like a Pharaoh from old times and into the “lands of civilization”; he is known for buying strange instruments of glass and steel and combining them into even stranger instruments. He speaks of sciences, electricity and psychology, and gives exhibitions throughout the land. His spectators are always speechless and the cities he visits know no peace during the small hours of his presentations. The nightmarish screams had even become a matter of public problem, as the cities visited by him start looking grimmest after his visit. Nevertheless, people talk to each other and advise each other to see Nyarlathotep. It is then that, in a hot Autumn, Nyarlathotep goes to the narrator’s city. Advised by his friends, the narrator decides to see the exhibition. Once there, he, who is more educated than most and who knows science, protests and finds it is all about tricks and imposture of static electricity. Nyarlathotep then conducts all spectators out of the theater. Slowly, the narrator and the group of people that went to the exhibition start noticing that something was different. From loose pavement to a dilapidated tram-car, the city seems to have been ravished by some kind of power while they were in the exhibition. The party then divides itself into two groups. Some of the people quickly disappear into a dark alley, leaving only shocking moans behind, others go down to a subway station never to return. As the narrator walks, he could hear sounds of his companions vanishing and feeling the uncanny fear created only by monsters, but could barely see through what now was a titanic snowdrift. It is then that the narrator realizes that the world he knew was gone, replaced by this new twisted reality, filled with monstrous shapes and haunters in the dark.

As the short story begins, the reader is already informed that the “general tension was horrible. To a season of political and social upheaval was added a strange and brooding apprehension of hideous physical danger; a danger widespread and all-embracing, such a danger as may be imagined only in the most terrible phantasms of the night” (83). Even before the monster appears, the whole scenario was already plunged into Cohen’s total fear atmosphere, supporting Asma theorizations of a monstrous nation, which gives a hint that something was probably about to happen. In the middle of all this tension, Nyarlathotep comes from Egypt, showing himself as a pharaoh-like human, who brings with him all sorts of technological gadgets of glass and steel. He speaks of sciences, technology, psychology, and tours the

²⁹ a peasant, farmer or agricultural laborer in the Middle East and Africa.

world with a presentation of horrific consequences. This passage speaks to the social political panorama of the world and the U.S. after the First World War. There was political tension between nations. The world power had shifted hands, from known to unknown rulers. The massive immigration had affected greatly the socio political scenario in a global scale. The U.S., due to the massive waves of immigrant and the returnee soldiers, was also working its way through the consequences of the ending of the war. In addition, the bitterness of a war which drenched Europe into blood and cost so many American and European lives was a very alive memory in people's minds. The horror of the massacre caused by the new war machinery had been felt throughout the world, since the First World War was the most violent one until that point. One of the main reasons for this is believed to be the usage of technological machinery along with old war tactics.

Bearing in mind that the world was not the same once the spectators watched Nyarlathotep presentations – associated with the image of Nyarlathotep as the upcoming of a dubious usage of technology and sciences – allows the drawing of some assumptions. The first one would be the connection of his image to the aftermaths of scientific and technologic development, and the traumas generated by its usage. The main character describes: “He spoke much of the sciences – of electricity and psychology – and gave exhibitions of power which sent his spectators away speechless [...], men advised one another to see Nyarlathotep” (84). At first, science drew the attention of the people, but soon the fuzz towards it was replaced by anguished experiences:

I went through the night with the restless crowds to see Nyarlathotep [...]. And shadowed on a screen, I saw hooded forms amidst ruins, and yellow evil faces peering from behind fallen monuments. And I saw the world battling against blackness; against the waves of destruction from ultimate space; whirling, churning; struggling around the dimming, cooling sun. Then the sparks played amazingly around the heads of the spectators, and hair stood up on end whilst shadows more grotesque than I can tell came out and squatted on the heads. And when I, who was colder and more scientific than the rest, mumbled a trembling protest about “imposture” and “static electricity”, Nyarlathotep drove us all out, down the dizzy stairs into the damp, hot, deserted

midnight streets. I screamed aloud that I was not afraid; that I never could be afraid [...]. We swore to one another that the city was exactly the same [...]; when the electric lights began to fade we cursed the company over and over again, and laughed” (84)

From there, the main character and the group with him start a walk through the city only to find out that it had being ravished by some strange force. Even the pavement blocks were loose and from there on, the group was slowly disappearing one by one being taken by creatures now haunting in the shadows of the city.

Secondly, Lovecraft writes “A sense of monstrous guilt was upon the land, [...] everyone felt that the world and perhaps the universe had passed from the control of known gods or forces to that of gods or forces which were unknown” (83). This could also speak to post war trauma in a social scale. The world has seen what a technological war and scientific driven warfare was now able to accomplish. The War had changed the world. Within the U.S. society, as an example, the immigration brought new ideals, of the revolutionary kind. In a global scale, the world had new masters sprung from the chaos of the war. In a small scale, Nyarlathotep accomplished in his short story what the war has done to the world.

Science and its applications were still an ocean of mysteries in the beginning of the twentieth century. Nyarlathotep also embodies the social gambling discussed earlier in this Chapter. He represents a change into pre-established values and traditions of the daily life of a social group. As an example, the first half of the twentieth century was the time when most homes were changing their artificial illumination from oil lamps to electricity-based light bulbs, which caused major changes in the world that reflects in our society today. Science also plays an important role, since it is replacing old beliefs by new scientific based discoveries and explanations. The gamble lies in the uncertainty of the future, which, according to Lovecraft, results in fear of the unknown – the collective anxieties of society – as proposed by Cohen. Anxiety was caused by fearing new technology, probably as a consequence of the war. However, as science, Nyarlathotep makes his way into people’s lives, and people line up in order to see his exhibitions. And as science, Nyarlathotep starts to open the eyes of the people to something else: “those who knew Nyarlathotep looked on sights which others saw not” (83).

Nyarlatotep drags the main character from one of his exhibitions to a nightmarish world of fear and madness. As Nyarlatotep escorts the narrator and his friends outside the theater, it takes a while for them to realize they were not home anymore. The city is abandoned, and broken as if it had been deserted a long time ago. As the men walked, they realize that something was very wrong, and as their souls were filled with dread, they came apart.

And through this revolting graveyard of the universe the muffled, maddening beating of drums, and thin, monotonous whine of blasphemous flutes from inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond Time; the detestable pounding and piping whereunto dance slowly, awkwardly, and absurdly the gigantic, tenebrous ultimate gods—the blind, voiceless, mindless gargoyles whose soul is Nyarlatotep. (84)

As Nyarlatotep used technology to trick man into a world of madness and chaos, it is possible to read this as a critique of the technology and science as responsible for quick, and many times not so benevolent, changes in society. The advances in other areas, as astronomy and physics, also shook many of the dogmas about human existence. It is possible to assume that this last excerpt makes reference to an atmosphere of fear of change caused by the scientific advancement leaving people without a solid concept to rely on since science was providing more questions than answers to people. As an example, the religious place and role of the humankind in existence were being challenged by science, what was responsible for a great deal of doubts and fears in the population. Echoes of these kinds of attritions can be observed until the present date, in the form of religious versus scientific education – e.g. the teaching of creationism versus evolutionism in schools.

3.4.2. Reading Nyarlatotep, power means power, the law of the land

The question of power is constantly running in the background of most of Lovecraft's tales. These power relations and the exercise of power are hardly the subject of the tales themselves, though. If we take into consideration the stories already discussed, it is not hard to leave power behind when naming subjects like journey, change, chaos,

industrialization, etc. Power, however, is the one element that enables all these other actions to take place, the *deus ex machina* of Lovecraftian story telling. Lovecraft, however, takes these relations to a completely different level, since the beings involved on these exercises are very powerful entities, of the monstrous kind. One of the key elements in the maintenance of this power is Nyarlathotep, which exercises it in its full. “The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath” gives us an idea of the extension of his power in the dreamlands. “Nyarlathotep” also shows how easily he can bend even the real world. The power to be discussed by this section, however, is the power of oppression, the one maintained between the oppressor master and its oppressed slaves. And, also the power of the ruler upon its ruled. It will explore how Nyarlathotep extends its power throughout many social layers of the worlds, and perhaps even to the one step above him in the power pyramid: Azathoth “petting his masters head” (Sonnet XXI).

“The Dream Quest” provides us with most of the information we need to read power in Nyarlathotep. However, these power relations can be better understood when complemented by readings of “Nyarlathotep”, “Azathoth”, and “The Other Gods”. As stated, “The Other Gods” is chronologically linked to “The Dream Quest” and is presented only at this point because the background provided by the other three short stories and the sonnets allows the drawing of conclusions impossible to be drawn without reading them first. The story revolves around the quest of an old priest, Barzai, and a younger priest called Atal in order to come into the presence of the gods of men, also referred to as gods of earth. The story takes place in the dreamlands, therefore, its cities and people are not direct representatives of “our reality”.

Once the gods inhabited the peaks of earth, but as people and their cities start to climb those peaks, the gods move upper onto those peaks and spare no man who looked upon them. Even so, the gods feel they should leave the peaks, and move to Kadath, the city of the gods. Kadath lies in a cold waste unknown to men, and even if found, no person should ever be free to return from there. However, when homesick, the gods of earth used to come back and play at the top of the peaks. Barzai, who is learned in the ways of the gods, believes that his knowledge could protect him against the wrath of the gods and make him half a god himself. He then decides it is time to look upon the face of the gods and, since legends say that the gods often come to the high summit of Hatheg-Kla – because they miss dwelling there – he decides to climb up the summit. Along with him, he takes his young apprentice,

Atal, who is very afraid of the legends. Up the summit, they go. They climb, until they finally camp and wait for the gods. In an eclipse night, they came. Barzai then starts to climb up even more; it was long before Atal followed him and at some point Atal could not see Barzai anymore. The more Atal climbs, the more he feels strange fears. After a while, he hears Barzai shouting that he could hear the gods. Atal himself could not hear the gods and then Barzai shouts again believing that he would soon be looking at the face of the gods. Then Atal feels a change in the air as if reality was being bent by strange forces. The light of the moon starts to fade and there was terror in the sky and the screams of the frightened gods had turned into laughs. While Atal tries to make sense of all that was happening, he hears a loathsome laughing in the dark, mixed with Barzai's cry of horror and anguish, as if a lifetime of suffering was packed into it. Barzai had encountered something else than the gods of earth amid the clouds and the fading moonlight. Barzai cries out aloud: the gods of the outer hells that guard the feeble gods of earth were there and then Barzai was dragged into the sky. As Atal flees, the moon comes out and there is no sight of the gods of the earth or the other gods. Atal is never convinced to go back to the mountains or even pray for Barzai's soul. On the top of Hatheg-Kla, the gods of earth still come to play, for they know they are safe, like they were when earth was new and people not given to the climbing of those places.

"The Other Gods" puts into the picture some important elements. In what concerns the plot, it is possible to perceive some core elements that correlate it to the "Dream Quest". Simply putting: we have a man who wishes to get in touch with the gods of men; that man starts a quest against the will of those gods and pays the ultimate price for going against their will. The little twist at the ending of "The Dream Quest" saved Carter from having the same destine of Barzai. Now, it is only thanks to the information provided by the "The Dream Quest" and "Nyarlathotep" that we can assume that the Other Gods, gods to the feeble Gods of Earth, were actually Nyarlathotep and probably other lesser idiot gods from Azathoth court.

In "The Dream Quest" Nyarlathotep refers to the event involving Barzai. He says, "[w]hen Barzai the Wise climbed Hatheg-Kla to see the Great Ones dance and howl above the clouds in the moonlight he never returned. The Other Gods were there, and they did what was expected" (332). At this point, Nyarlathotep had not revealed his identity to Carter. We know it is him because of the passage in "Nyarlathotep" that says: "Nyarlathotep came out of Egypt. Who he was, none could tell, but he was of the old native blood and looked like

a Pharaoh.” (83). A similar reference is found in “The Dream Quest” passage: “[t]hen down the wide lane betwixt the two columns a lone figure strode; a tall, slim figure with the young face of an antique Pharaoh” (332). The assumption that this figure is Nyarlathotep is expanded when he reveals to Carter that he is indeed the crawling chaos. Once it is established that Nyarlathotep is the character in both short stories, “The Dream Quest” provides us more evidence that links Nyarlathotep to the forces that dragged Barzai. The short story describes “the daemon-sultan Azathoth gnaws hungrily in chaos amid pounding and piping and the hellish dancing of the Other Gods, blind, voiceless, tenebrous, and mindless, with their soul and messenger Nyarlathotep” (284 -285). As Azathoth and the Other Gods are constantly mentioned as mindless, blind, idiot, and so on, it is plausible to assume that Nyarlathotep is their voice and soul, and Azathoth’s messenger is the one taking actions in their name. Therefore, Nyarlathotep can be the figure to which Barzai referred as “The other gods! The gods of the outer hells that guard the feeble gods of earth [...]! That cursed, that damnable pit” (84). This god is, therefore, responsible for Barzai’s punishment, which raises the point: would Nyarlathotep be suitable as an allegory for a system of oppression responsible for maintaining a pre-established order? The answer to that might be a sonorous ‘yes.’

Nyarlathotep exercises a complex maintenance of the power of the other gods over existence. As we have seen in the stories here cited, Nyarlathotep has power over the gods of earth, the other gods, and the dreamlands. It may not directly affect the “real world” as it does with the dreamlands, but as it is shown in “Nyarlathotep”, this force is powerful enough to transform our reality. In addition, it is also possible to argue that Nyarlathotep has power even over Azathoth, who apparently has no mental faculties of its own, or is in a mental state in which it could not answer by himself, as the sleeping idea presented by the sonnet. His powers are used to keep a tight control of his dominated. Nyarlathotep is the monster representing an atmosphere of total fear; his presence is felt throughout the dreamlands where everything runs according to his will.

When read under Asma’s theorizations about monstrous nations, Nyarlathotep’s uncanny presence generates unbalances in society, and, as a response to that, society creates monsters of its own, all symbols to the exaggeration of their own conditions, as the zombification of the workers mentioned before. “The Dream Quest” and “The Other Gods” bring to light the effects of stifling the dominated and the side effect of the oppression, rivalry. Barzai and Carter are both

rebels in the sense of defying the order, the will of the gods. Both characters can be read as countering the dominant power; establishing disorder, which always represent a certain danger to the dominant order, and therefore must be smothered. Nyarlathotep is very efficient in shutting down those rebellious movements, to the point where even the clash of powers is questionable, since Barzai's and Carter's plans and actions do not really matter in the sense of corrupting the order of things. As soon as Barzai has a glimpse of the gods, he is dragged to the skies to never be seen again. Carter never really reaches his city, and even knowing that, at the end, he manages to save his own life, the whole legitimacy of his quest is questionable since Nyarlathotep foiled it. Even Carter feels that Nyarlathotep was actually playing him along his quest: "He felt that his visit had been expected, and wondered how close a watch had all along been kept upon him by the crawling chaos Nyarlathotep" (331).

All along "The Dream Quest", we find evidence of the control Nyarlathotep has over Carter's journey, to the point where almost every creature or person Carter meets was related with it: "from cold and twilight Inganok, whose strange-faced sailors and onyx-traders had in them the blood of the Great Ones" (307); "It is Nyarlathotep [...] that the fungous moon-beasts serve [...], the toad-like abnormalities on the jagged rock in the sea" (331); "the remote and prehistoric monastery wherein dwells unaccompanied the high-priest not to be described [...], and prays to the Other Gods and their crawling chaos Nyarlathotep" (315); "Carter now felt very sure; for clearly the slant-eyed merchant was an agent of the darker powers [...], the Great Ones in their onyx castle"(315), and so on. His power extends then throughout all levels of society; we have sailors, traders, enslavers, and priests subjected to his will, which could be thought as power extending throughout all social economical and ideological aspects of society.

Against the monster, then, Barzai and Carter start their rebellion. And also there is Atal. Barzai's companion, Atal, is also an interesting piece. He is present in "The Other Gods" and "The Dream Quest", and in opposition to Carter, we can read Atal as the domesticated rebel. It is important to highlight that in the dreamlands, Carter was the alien, acting against the dominant order, out to be domesticated, as Atal was, or perish, as Barzai. Atal is not a direct victim of the will of the gods, but he follows Barzai almost to its bitter end. At the ending of "The Other Gods", Atal's trauma is such that he never returns to the mountain, and would not even pray for Barzai's soul, which is harsh for a priest. Talking with Carter, Atal states:

“Barzai the Wise had been drawn screaming into the sky for climbing merely the known peak of Hatheg-Kla. With unknown Kadath, if ever found, matters would be much worst” (281), which would give us a glimpse of the extent of the repression of Nyarlathotep. The short story continues: “When Barzai the Wise tried to see earth’s gods dancing by moonlight. So, Atal said, it would be much better to let all gods alone except in tactful prayers” (281), which caused Carter a little disappointment, but not enough to shut him down, yet “though disappointed by Atal’s discouraging advice [...], did not wholly despair. First he questioned the old priest about that marvellous sunset city seen from the railed terrace, thinking that perhaps he might find it without the gods’ aid; but Atal could tell him nothing” (281). Atal’s silence is questionable from the domesticated point of view, since he certainly does not want to draw the wrath of the gods upon him. His brief experience with Nyarlathotep’s power is enough to keep him in line.

The mentioned passages speak to the monster as a mechanism of control. It is clear that Nyarlathotep controls the dreamlands and nothing there happens against its will. Even rebellions have the duration he desires. A clear example of that regards Carter joining forces with ghouls – friends of him – to battle the toad-like people, in order to free enslaved ghouls from the toad people ships. After the battle, the ghouls abide to help Carter to storm Kadath. This event culminates in:

[A]nd when the echoes of the third blast had died chucklingly away Randolph Carter saw that he was alone. Whither, why, and how the ghouls and night-gaunts had been snatched from sight was not for him to divine. He knew only that he was suddenly alone, and that whatever unseen powers lurked mockingly around him were no powers of earth’s friendly dreamland. (331)

There is no rebellion against such control – at least in literature – as illustrated by the many attempts of Carter to get to Kadath or his dream city, always foiled by Nyarlathotep. In the society of the early twentieth century, too brutal or oppressive methods of social control become problematic, at some point. It is easy to associate the toad people to enslavers and the ghouls, enslaved, to a relation where one part of society profits from the other. It is also easy to associate the ghouls’ rebellion with a manifestation against the oppressor. The complex exercise of power takes place when the dominant system uses

the rebellion to justify tools of oppression, through violence or ideological propaganda. The generation of a social scapegoat in order to justify controlling actions has the cost of building order through disorder. If a dominant system creates a monster to justify its actions, as making aliens as scapegoats because of their cultural differences, it ultimately incites a rebellion against its own. This revolution, which at first may act as a motive to unite the dominant classes against the monster rebel threat, may end up crumpling, at some level of society. Eventually, the rebellion either collapses and plunges the people into a state of extreme oppression, which could not sustain the social system, or it reaches proportions that allow it to overpower the current order. As an example we can cite the Russian revolution, which culminated with the dethroning of the tsar, a civil war, and the rising of the communist party to power. This illustrates a situation where a system succumbed to the revolutionary. The current social order was replaced by an even more extreme group, which ruled the Soviet nation for a long time, a situation that the U.S. government was willing to avoid.

In the U.S. these power struggles are exemplified by the workers' strikes during the first quarter of the twentieth century, which fought the dominant classes and government and had to struggle against propaganda and the State's tools of social control – such as the law and its enforcers. Still in the U.S. an example of using disorder to justify tools of oppression can be found in the espionage act, used to punish and incarcerate those who acted against the interests of the nation – which actually reflected only the interests of the dominant classes. Such effect was involved with the World War One, with its aftermaths, and in the U.S. society, as one of the many nations directly affected by it.

On and on, power does mean power – it does not matter if emerging from science, politics, ideologies, economy, or violence, its origin does not compromise its efficiency. Power over others is what maintains human society in place, being the law and religion for moral and idealistic control or the many polices and military departments, for protection of rules and reprehension of the rebel. As society goes unbalanced, such power can be used to enslave and oppress rather than to protect and serve. The corruption of the power generates the total fear atmosphere, which is converted to cosmic horror and generates monsters such as Nyarlathotep: the embodiment of the oppressive power of the Other Gods over Lovecraft's fictional reconstruction of the early twenties. As a cultural body, Nyarlathotep encompasses many disturbances in U.S. society of the beginning of the twenty century. It embodies concerns of the people about technological and scientific

discoveries and applications, the tension between the dominant class and the workers' party, and the oppressive atmosphere created by the government in order to domesticate the immigrant and their alien ideologies. It is possible to read all these power struggles in the image of Nyarlathotep; even without Lovecraft's will to make it that way, the environment in which he was inserted seems to have played a significant role in his writing.

3.5. On Cthulhu

Unarguably, Cthulhu, after whom the Mythos is named, is the most famous character in Lovecraft's tales. This cosmic entity of gigantic proportions slumbers in the sunken city of R'lyeh, located at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. Part of a pantheon created by Lovecraft, Cthulhu is a priest to The Other Gods, gods older than the world itself. Such beings are described by Algernon Blackwood, one of Lovecraft's characters, as "forms of which poetry and legend alone have caught a flying memory and called them gods, monsters, mythical beings" (238). Despite the fact that Cthulhu is in his great slumber, it communicates with mankind through dreams. The Great Ones "told their secrets in dreams to the first man, who formed a cult which had never died" (246), ensuring in this way that they would not be forgotten.

Cthulhu's first appearance takes place in "The Call of Cthulhu" and therefrom it took over the imagination of writers and readers up to nowadays. As other stories by Lovecraft, the "The Call of Cthulhu" was written in a way to resemble a journal found among the papers of the late Francis Wayland Thurston, of New York. It is done in this way to make it seem more real. Also, along with "Azathoth" and "Nyarlathotep", "The call of Cthulhu" takes place in Lovecraft's reconstruction of the early twentieth century. Structured into three distinguished parts: The Horror in Clay, The Tale of Inspector Legrasse and The Madness from the Sea, it is filled with references to books and places, highlighting its verisimilitude.

The first part, "The Horror in Clay", reports the finding of curious texts among the notes left by Thurston's deceased grand-uncle. George Gammell Angell was a professor at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, who died after he was attacked by a black sailor in the winter of 1926–27. The manuscripts and notes revolve towards a small sculpture described as if it was a bizarre creature with an octopus head, dragon-like wings and hands and feet with huge claws, in a sitting position. Along with the image lied a document with the words "'CTHULHU CULT' in "characters painstakingly printed to

avoid the erroneous reading of a word so unheard-of” (239). We learn that the sculpture was handcrafted by a student at the Rhode Island School of Design, an artist named Henry Anthony Wilcox, inspired by his dreams of a creature lying in a nightmarish city. Angell's research reveals that many other people were dreaming about the same creature and city, during the same period. Curiously, most of the affected people are either scientists or artists, while the average people of society and business people are mostly unaffected by it. In many of those places, voodoo orgies, suicides, and strange artistic manifestations of all sorts are taking place.

In the second third of the story, “The Tale of Inspector Legrasse”, Angell unveils that his uncle has actually had a previous experience with the word and image of Cthulhu in an American Archaeological Society meeting. There, a New Orleans police official named John Raymond Legrasse had asked the present scientists to identify a statuette he had apprehended from a voodoo cult that he and his fellow officers raid upon some time before. The statuette is of an octopus-like headed monster, with enormous claws on hind and forefeet, and long wings.

Legrasse tells the people that, on November 1st, 1907, he had led a party in search of many women and children who were believed to have been kidnapped from the community. The police ended up finding the victims' bodies being used in a ritual towards the statuette. About one hundred deranged people were participating of the ritual, chanting the words, "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn"(245). After killing some and arresting forty-seven other cultists, Legrasse interrogates them. The cultists worshipped the Great Old Ones who had lived before there were any humans, and came to our world out of the sky. They tell the officers that the Great Old Ones were gone but not dead. According to them the cults were all around the world, hidden in distant wastes waiting for the great priest Cthulhu rise from his house in the city of R'lyeh and resume his ruling upon the Earth. When the stars are right, Great Cthulhu would call, and his cults would be waiting to liberate him. The cultists identify the statuette as Great Cthulhu. After interrogation, they also translated the ritual chanting word to "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming."(244). Thurston then starts to believe that these cults were real and that his uncle's death was everything but natural, or accidental.

In the part titled “The Madness from the Sea,” Thurston discovers an Australian journal article about the Alert, a yacht found drifting on the Pacific Ocean, with two sailors inside, one dead and one

alive and a strange stone idol in their possession. It seemed that the sailors left Auckland, New Zealand, in a schooner named Emma. On March 22nd they crossed paths with a heavily armed yacht named Alert, and a weird looking crew which attacked them. After some losses including its captain, the Emma crew won the battle and second mate Gustaf Johansen took over the Alert, since Emma was too damaged and had to be left behind. Alert's crew had in its possession the strange idol. The next day they found and landed on an uncharted island. After the death of some sailors, they tried to sail the ship back but were caught by the storm of April 2nd and drifted from that time till his rescue on the 12th. For the period they landed on the island up to its rescue, Johansen could not remember much.

Thurston is convinced that the episode and the strange idol are connected to the events and dreaming that take place during the same period. He ships off to Oslo, in order to reach Johansen, but he was dead. His widow, however, gave Thurston a document in English he wrote about the island episode. It spoke of the island as if it did not belong to our reality. Johansen describes structures found on the island as oozy and mood and of a cyclopean masonry. He heads ashore at the city of R'lyeh, the city of Wilcox and many other dreams. While exploring the island they accidentally step into the chamber of Great Cthulhu and accidentally manage to awake him from his millennial sleep. They flee, and are pursued by Cthulhu, described at this point as a walking mountain. Only Johansen and a second man managed to get to the ship and sail away. Cthulhu, for reasons unknown, decided not to continue the chase. The two men leave the island, but Johansen's mate is insane and terrified of his vision of such creature, so he would soon be dead. After reading the report, Thurston finishes the short story sure of his death, as almost everyone involved in the unveiling of Cthulhu Cult had died as well. His dreams would forever be haunted by the existence of the hideous Cthulhu.

As described in the short story, Cthulhu used to rule this Earth along with his subjects, before humankind's existence, in ages of unknown chaos. Cthulhu, as other Outer Gods, could travel throughout the universe when the stars were right, but when the stars are not, some of these entities become imprisoned in different dimensions. In the short story, the stars were not right, yet, and Cthulhu was in his great sleep in the city of R'lyeh. Cthulhu and his subjects had been sleeping for ages in R'lyeh, where spells are keeping them from dying. These same spells, however, are also keeping them from awakening. The Cthulhu Cults around the world are necessary: for they will provide an outside force

needed for Cthulhu to fully awake when the stars are right, so he can resume his rule of the Earth.

The image of the monster becomes the embodiment of fear, oppression, intolerance, greed and other negative aspects of a given culture. Cthulhu, like other monsters, is also a representation of something wrong, something wicked in society, so deep no words can describe and could be only shown. This disturbance can be read in the sense that the Cthulhu Cults seem to know what will happen once Cthulhu awakes, and they would rather plunge the world in chaos and destruction than continue living under a social system the way it is presented. In addition, as brought by the short story, all members of cults around the world belong to outcasts or to non-dominant groups of society, which may correspond to dissatisfaction with the current social system. These groups are more likely to rise against a dominant system, in order to uplift from lower to upper layers of society, or even to reshape the social order itself, which in this case corroborates with the destruction associated with the awakening of Cthulhu.

The undying feature of the cults helps to tie the knot on the social ideology hypothesis. The messianic image of Cthulhu works as an ideal, for his cults perpetuate his image through the centuries. If we take into consideration that Cthulhu needs the aid of his cults in order to wake up, if no one believes in him, than he could never wake up, and as an idea, it would cease to exist. The perpetuating idea of Cthulhu, as a monster, can be read through Cohen's argumentation of the monster as a receptacle of social traumas. For, as a trauma, it is carried in social memory, not to be forgotten, the monster commands: "remember me". Cohen theorizes that the monster beacons to the past in the sense that it is a body which contains the social traumas of a group of people.

So, if we understand the monster discourse in this way, it is plausible to assume that the literary element Cthulhu brings into itself are the traumas of the society Lovecraft was living in, for Cthulhu is his idea of what a monster could be. This conception, however, is a social construct, and not only Lovecraft's. In this way the monster becomes a window opened to the past, and the fictional element, Cthulhu, becomes a register of the society of those times. So as long as Lovecraft's writings are read, the window will remain open. When related to the fictional scenario, we have the same idea of perpetuation, for Cthulhu will only be able to walk on earth again if his cults endure; therefore, again, the perpetuation of the monster relies on external sources, as it happens in real life with ideas read in the monster. Since his awakening will not only assure the continuation of its ruling on earth, but will rather

take Earth to the state it was during his ruling, it could also be associated to the idea that the monster will connect the past to the present – but now in a fantastic way. In other correlation of this idea with Cohen’s theorization is that, until its return, Cthulhu, basically, exists only in people’s dreams, or people’s minds, as an idea. This hypothesis along with the idea that a monster is the representation of negative aspects of a society will be discussed under Cthulhu’s light in the next section.

3.5.1. Reading Cthulhu, individual commitment to a group effort, the downfall of civilization

Lovecraft’s allegory of the early twentieth century scenario in “The Call of Cthulhu” gives it a more realistic appeal than other short stories discussed previously in this research. The dates and places unarguably link it to that specific period of the U.S. history, at least for the first two thirds of the story. One particular point highlighted in the short story is the cult’s issue. It presents a different power relation between Cthulhu and his cultists and Nyarlathotep and its followers. While the stories “The Other Gods” and “The Dream Quest” display mostly a one-way direction flow of power, from the oppressor to the oppressed, “The Call of Cthulhu” pictures a two-direction power relation, where Cthulhu needs its cults in order to wake up and resume his kingdom upon Earth. Curiously enough, the first quarter of the twenty century was remarkably distressful in the sense of having much attrition between social classes. Much social distress could come from this attrition, which may end in social conflict and revolution. These kinds of distresses generate the atmosphere to create monsters, be it from Cohen’s atmosphere of abstract total fear, or Asma’s monstrous nation idea. To some extent, the monster needs the social distresses in order to exist, since this kind of disturbance is what will make the monster a body of social traumas. For only when the form is enriched by social context that the monster exercises its functions in its full, a bearer of social history (Bellei, 14).

The social environment may play a significant role in the conception of the monster as the image of the Grim Reaper, representing death, during the Black Plague in fourteenth century Europe. This is a vivid example of the theorizations by Cohen, where he states that the human mind has the need to embody abstract aspects of fear in order to deal with them. Asma also points out that, when subjected to unusual circumstances, a nation may become a monstrous nation. When a nation becomes monstrous, it is probable that it will experience transformations in its social order. “The Call of Cthulhu” can be read under this light by

using the relation between Cthulhu and its cults. All around the world, different people worship Cthulhu: “This was that cult [...], hidden in distant wastes and dark places all over the world until [...] Cthulhu [...] rise and bring the earth again beneath his sway” (246). What makes this relationship interesting is that, once Cthulhu is awakened, it will plunge the world into chaos. The awakening of Cthulhu implies total anarchy, “for then mankind would have become [...] free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in joy [...] and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom. (247)”. There is not much gain in this scenario, to humankind at least, nevertheless the cults are out there, worshipping and waiting for the awakening day to come. This speaks to a desire to replace the social order, whatever the price, even if the means for it to be done entails social revolution.

When looking at the scenario resulting from the awakening of Cthulhu, from the point of view of a dominant group, it becomes clear that this revelry must be stopped. In this reading, the cults might be seen to symbolize a group eager for change – but the dominant system would resist and this relation would generate attrition and class struggle. That emerging situation could be related to the consequences of Cthulhu’s awakening. Lovecraft understood that imagination functions along with fear, where imagination kicks in generating fearful solutions for answers reason or knowledge could not provide. Cohen states that monsters are generated by abstract atmospheres of fear. It is plausible then to propose a reading where Cthulhu would be a reconstruction of the distresses caused by the social changes of in the U.S. That would be sustained by the numerous passages of the short story displaying Cthulhu worshippers always as nonwhite Americans, such as “the prisoners all proved to be men of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type” (246), “[m]ost were seamen, and a sprinkling of negroes and mulattoes, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands, gave a colouring of voodooism to the heterogeneous cult.”(246), “tribe or cult of degenerate Esquimaux”(243), and “a queer and evil-looking crew of Kanakas and half-castes” (250), among others, could be the basis for relating this reading to the fear of the U.S. citizens of infiltrated alien ideologies. That is also a literary representation of the melting pot versus the salad bowl cultural social organization, where even inserted in the same society, the minority groups are not seen as part of it.

When we read Cthulhu as a monster that could destroy society, and its worshipper as outcasts, foreigners, and low-level citizens, we can

assume that a dominant cast of society could see these people and their monsters as something to be ostracized. For, as foreigners, or outcasts, they carry ideals originated from outside the ruling system, and such ideals could always get strong enough to overpower the current social order, as it spread through non dominant classes. The dissemination of such principles must be stopped by the dominant class, which would justify the usage of enforcing methods to preserve the current order, as the police force for instance. This scenario could be related to a large part of “The Call of Cthulhu” narrative.

It becomes possible to link the image of Cthulhu to distresses caused by the class struggles taking place in the U.S society during the early twenty century. These distresses would account for hysteria, xenophobia, to a clash between the capitalist economic model and the communist one represented by the industry owner, government and the working class. The oppression of the population is also highlighted. In front of such dramatic changes in a particular delicate historical moment, the U.S. people had much to fear for years to come. The crescent number of European immigrants willing to work for less money and the bringing of different political views to the young U.S. was one of their major concerns. In this context, Cthulhu could represent the actions of an invisible hand which slowly moves the pawns of society along with his cults, or the people who rule the country from offices distant of the eye of the people. Cthulhu and his servants are good allusions to shadow governments and cultural infiltration in the U.S.

3.5.2. Reading Cthulhu, echoing in eternity

The Cthulhu cults hold yet another very important aspect in “The Call of Cthulhu” and in the social role of the monster itself: the undying memory of the monster. The cults are directly responsible for the enduring image of the monster: “that cult, [...] had always existed and always would exist” (246). For, if when analyzing the monster Cohen argues that it causes us to look at the past, it is only because the monster beacons us there, such is the importance of the monster as a social and historical cultural body. This speaks to the assumption that if the monster is generated by a social distressful situation, it must contain in itself information about that which brought it into existence. As argued by Cohen, the monster is passed from generation to generation, in social memory, in order to illustrate and remember particular traumas.

It becomes possible to propose a reading where the act of worshipping and waiting for Cthulhu could symbolize the passing of an idea from generation to generation. When the monster is read as a

memory carrier, a vessel of social memory, it opens a window to past times. Since “The Call of Cthulhu” was published in 1928, and its plot and scenario are so connected to the 1920’s in the U.S., it is plausible to assume that Cthulhu is the vessel which perpetuates historical information from those decades, a trauma in the collective social memory of that society. There are many facets to this monster, however, and its relation to its cults can be read in different ways. Cthulhu could account for the distresses caused by social struggle in U.S. society – as highlighted in the previous section – or, along with his cults Cthulhu could be read as an ideology opposing the current order of the country, or even yet as the fear of the massive immigration the U.S. was handling: foreign people and their alien monster ideas.

Under this scope, Cohen concludes that the monster should be analyzed as a code to be cracked in order to obtain information from it. Sharing the same opinion, Bellei also argues that the monster answers to many social needs and therefore can be used to understand those needs. Cthulhu and his cults then could be literary reconstructions of the many social groups which lived by and fought for their own ideologies. It could represent the government and the people versus immigrants, industrialists versus workers, capitalists versus communists, and so on. One side of the coin will always feel threatened by the other, and could as well see the other side’s ideology as a monster, sustained through time and culture by its own cults.

When encoded in literature, the social struggles experienced by a society live in the image of the monster, for it originates from the perception of the author of what it is to be a monster. These ideas towards the monstrous are most probably picked from the collective social knowledge of a society, since it represents values not wanted by that particular group. The ideas behind the monster are rather from the collective before they gain life through the individual. These ideas also apply to social memory, and, for the monstrous discourse, the social traumas in this memory. Our cultural background keeps these monsters very close in order not to forget the traumas of the past so the collective would profit out of it. The monster could represent, for instance, a particular sequence of harmful events or an ideology which caused great distress. In this way, the perpetuation of the image of the monster is intrinsically connected to a social learning mechanism. As proposed by Bellei and Williams, the image of the monster holds valuable lessons learnt through the negative way. By distorting the discourse, it explains what cannot be explained and assures through social trauma that the

consequences of certain actions or situations remain deeply rooted in the social memory.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

Studying the image of the monster in literature has become more than just studying a deformed shape or a way to scare people through scare stories. The study of the monster is a beautiful adventure, an endeavor into the human essence. In order to discuss some of the many roles played by the monsters in human culture, this research has touched subjects such as discourse analysis, history, social memory, and cultural studies, enriching the analysis of the literature which brings us such particular characters. The monster, after all, as stated throughout the work, is in fact a code to be broken, a cultural element of great social value.

The monster is not a monster only because it looks different; it is a monster because it behaves differently. Cultural differences between peoples, lack of knowledge about certain events, situations never experienced before, are just some examples of the elements which may cause the creation of monsters. The lack of knowledge, individual or social, towards the unknown, may require an unorthodox explanation for certain facts that are unexplainable by the knowledge shared by a given society. This out of ordinary situations may require unusual answers, and the monster discourse seems to be fit for this task.

Fear, a common human reaction when facing the unknown, also represents a significant slice in the conceiving of the monster. When facing such circumstances, the atmosphere of fear can cause the mind to create explanations for this abstract experience. As humans have a great deal of difficulty to manage these abstract matters, the mind creates an image in order to materialize these abstract conditions present in the real world. The attempts of our psyche to deal with these abstract fears have been prolific in many ways. One of the results of this frightful interaction between people and the world may be manifested in the exquisite element of the monster figure, the ultimate embodiment of our fears and distresses.

Created by imagination, monsters are symbolic responses to real life distresses. Based on the theoretical framework developed from Cohen, Asma, Kearney, and Bellei's work, it is safe to argue that the monster can be inspired by social fear. Therefore, it could act as a reversed mirror of social values adopted by a given society. By understanding the processes behind the figure of the monster, it becomes a revealing element of the relation between the culture that conceived it and the way they understood the world outside. The social function of

the monster is to act as a framework allowing humans to deal with the strangeness of the world outside and other human groups. In this way, the monster becomes a tool allowing accessing the cultural body that dreamed it. The social characteristics of the monster often reflect the way that the society which dreamed the monster image understands the world, therefore the monster is an open window to those who have conceived it.

Fear has inspired societies through the world to dream their own monsters since the most primitive stages of humanity. The perpetuation of the idea of the monster takes place through the perpetuation of culture, where, as a cultural element, the monster discourse is transmitted through the ages from generation to generation in order to fulfill social roles. With the advent of writing and literature, monsters have found their way in a niche that, according to Lovecraft, is as natural to human beings as breathing: horror stories. Horror and monster stories have been part of the human culture in general, even because the monster helps to define what it is to be human – there must be sinners for the saints to remain saint.

The monster's social function, however, may vary from society to society and from period to period of that same society's history. The image of the monster has been used to teach values, to discriminate, to validate the taking of actions, to criticize, to warn, to justify the existence of gods and other abstract aspects of culture. Perhaps the human willingness to explaining unknown phenomena through the image of the monsters might be good evidence that the practice of creating monster stories has been a relevant part of our culture for so long. If there is no text without context and if the image of the monster carries cultural values, it can be argued that the monster signifies something beyond itself; beyond its form, it also has meaning. This meaning could as well spring from the personal experiences of the one telling the story, for this research: H.P. Lovecraft and his social environment, the U.S. of the in-between world wars.

As a cultural element expressed through a literary way, it becomes relevant to take into consideration the social moment the U.S. was going through while Lovecraft was conceiving his horror stories and monsters. As a U.S. citizen, Lovecraft's reasoning is rooted in a common sense shared between the social group his is part of, even though he was an individual, his ideas were drawn from the collective cultural body wherein he was immersed. Therefore, as any individual who is part of a cultural body, Lovecraft's thoughts were first social thoughts – then, after being processed by his own particular ideas, the

once social knowledge has become his individual thoughts. His ideas were a reflection of the collective cultural ideas, inspired by history and by the present situation of the social group he belonged – in this case, a nation dealing with social and economic distresses attributed mainly to a group of foreigners, and their alien ideals.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Lovecraft conceived a fantastic world of alien monsters, cults, parallel realities, strange technology, forbidden knowledge, and hidden conspiracies. During this moment, the U.S. was experiencing an economic and technological boom, and the world was recovering from the First World War; the U.S. government had to deal with waves after waves of alien immigrants and social conflicts. The working class, along with the socialist and communist party, were dealing with an oppressive industrialist economy and protesting against the government actions towards the war effort; and immigrants were dealing with the growing prejudice of the U.S. born citizens. Even knowing that Lovecraft himself did not believe that the weird tale should have any social functions, he also believed that inspiration may come from the most unusual places – for that matter, even real life.

Lovecraft seemed to be aware of his own work, as he expressed in his *Supernatural Horror*, and also in control of his writing. He had complex ideas about how fear works in the human mind and how it could be expressed in literature. His ideas about fear and monstrous bare parallel significance to the study presented by other theorists in this research, where the difference is that Lovecraft's ideas point towards literature, instead of the cultural construction of the image of the monster. The likeness between Lovecraft's inquiring and the other authors' cultural theory is remarkable.

In what concerns this research, the analysis of Cthulhu, Azathoth and Nyarlathotep, under a theoretical frame work based on literary criticism and, at some level, cultural studies, allows one to pose that these monsters, and the short stories they make part of, can be read as revealing elements of the moment the U.S. was going through in the first half of the twentieth century. Many of the social distresses and social fears the U.S. was experiencing as nation can be related to fictional elements of the short stories and characteristics of the monsters. Under this light it is possible to approach Lovecraft's writings as to identify themes as xenophobia, oppression, fear of technology and science and social power struggles.

In this research the themes previously cited are evidenced in readings of the short stories: "Nyarlathotep"; "The Other Gods";

“Azathoth”; “The Call of Cthulhu”; and “The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath”. Readings of “Nyarlathotep”, based on the theoretical approach of the monster discussed in this research, allowed us to speculate that there was a concern expressed, in the text, on the usage of new technology and its repercussions. If we consider that “Nyarlathotep” was published shortly after the First World War, one of the most technological and brutal wars in history, it becomes rather plausible to understand such concern about the usage of technology.

“Azathoth” brings up a different feeling to the same oppressive atmosphere of the years following the War. It can be related to the desire of the people who were exploited under oppressive working hours and deprived of a healthy human condition to change the reality they were living. This was the same desire that could have motivated social struggles towards the U.S. during the same period. During the post war period, the working class, for instance, revolted against the industrialists and the government, resulting in strikes and conflicts throughout the nation, even violent ones. The monster in “Azathoth” could then be related to the motivation behind these kinds of social struggles.

“The Call of Cthulhu” brought a rich array of elements into this research. We have a monster that is going to end existence as we know it, and a group of cultists plotting for his return. These cultists are described as “seamen, and a sprinkling of Negroes and mulattoes, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands, gave a colouring of voodooism to the heterogeneous cult” (The Complete Works, 243), a clear reference to foreign peoples and their culture. If we strip the story from its fantastic elements, we have immigrants whose beliefs and practices would result in the ending of the pre-established order. At the same time in the U.S. the government was investing resources in massive anticommunist propaganda, a bureau of Americanization; and it has also created the espionage act. These are measures taken to deal with and domesticate new foreign ideology, aiming at preventing its spread through the population and end up compromising the current governmental model.

Having all these social disturbances along with the literary elements in the same time span allowed arguing that the social movements taking place in Lovecraft’s own country could be read in his weird tales. The theorizations of other researchers and literary critics presented in this research made possible to create a framework which made the correlation of the social moment to the image and actions of the monsters in Lovecraft’s stories possible. This correlation occurs due to the understanding that the creation of a monster is an attempt to

handle something that was once abstract in a tangible manner. In this way the image of the monster acts more like a symptom of much deeper social distresses. This research understood that the monsters created by Lovecraft can be read as representations of the social distresses suffered by the U.S. in the early twentieth century.

The historic research, done in order to allow the correlation of Lovecraft's work and the moment the U.S. was going through, enabled the analysis of these three particular monsters according to the framework proposed: the study of the monster as a vessel for social traumas. The crossing of the historic data and the theoretical framework of the image of the monster made possible to argue that a link between the U.S. society of that period and Lovecraft's monsters is pertinent. This opens up space for us to read Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep, and Azathoth as social receptacles for the distresses endured by the population of the U.S. during the first half of the twentieth century. The monster, after all, is intimately connected to what makes us human, alien, and familiar at the same time: a revealing element of human culture and condition.

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