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"H.P. Lovecraft's *The Call Of Cthulhu*: an Intermedial Analysis of its Graphic Adaptation"

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Abstract: My research involves the most renowned tale by the master of modern horror H.P. Lovecraft, *The call of Cthulhu*, and its adaptations into contemporary comics and graphic novels, in particular the one by Swiss writer/artist Michael Zigerlig.

The first part of this analysis focuses on Lovecraft's style and the main characteristics of this tale, including some defining traits of this modern style of horror.

From the methodological point of view, the paper uses Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* (1919) as well as Tzvetan Todorov's *The fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* in order to explore the relationship between the characters' psychological motivations and those *unheimlich* or uncanny (unfamiliar) elements that they may discover within

themselves or others (a strange grim, sound, etc.). I shall explore if these abject feelings arise from the outside (i.e. the sudden realization that things are different from what they expected), or if it has to do with internal factors (i.e. old forgotten and unconscious memories, that in Freud "ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light." (Freud 1919: 5)

The approach summarized above will allow me to unveil an essential point in lovecraftian horror, namely that absolute Truth is unattainable and that the illogical, the unnatural and the uncanny are all part of life and represent ancient chaotic forces within the universe, beyond the world that we perceive every day. Extraordinary and poltergeist elements are, for Lovecraft, a reaction against the 'true' laws of the universe. His characters attempt to find knowledge and scientific explanations in a sort of Faustian spirit that eventually drives them to damnation and insanity. This collapse of the mind will be analyzed in the terms of terror and horror caused by the confrontation of a sublime version of reality, in the terms used by Burke in his book *A philosophical enquiry on the ideas of the beautiful and the sublime* (1757).

The essay will place Todorov's work *The Fantastic* (1975) in relation to Freud's idea of the uncanny. I will show how these works explain the duality present in Lovecraftian characters, who struggle for scientifically logical explanations and at the same time face traumatic events at the climax of the story when they realize that there is no possible explanation.

Finally, in what concerns Michael Zigerlig's adaptation of Lovecraft's work, I will first focus on language, "key to Lovecraft's horror" according to Zigerlig, as well as on the intermedial aspects resulting from the semiotic negotiation between text and images. I shall analyze how language and image interact in order to upset the perceptual experience of the reader and create suspense and fear in the story. In particular, many vignettes use explicit references to vision (see below), traditionally a symbol of the Enlightenment and the rational acquisition of knowledge. The notion of ambiguity in relation to intermedial aspects is of particular interest. (see López-Varela 2008, 2011)

Keywords: H.P. Lovecraft, Cthulhu Mythos, Cosmic Horror, The Call of Cthulhu, R'lyeh, Fantastic literature.

Carlos CORBACHO CARROBLES

H.P. Lovecraft's *The Call Of Cthulhu*: an Intermedial Analysis of its Graphic Adaptation

O. Introduction

Born in Providence in 1890 H.P. Lovecraft is nowadays regarded as a major figure on horror literature; Nevertheless, as many different writers before, Lovecraft's work was mostly ignored during his lifetime. His work is inspired by Gothic writers such as Poe, as well as many other fantastic tales like *the Arabian nights*, *the Odyssey* and many other important works which he read as a child.

He was considered to be a misanthropic and distant person with a troubled personality, as many of his works seem to suggest. In fact, most of the creatures he imagined are "a form which only a diseased fancy could conceive" as he himself writes in *The call of Cthulhu* (Lovecraft 1926: 2). Nevertheless, further investigators on his life and work proved that he was just a sensitive man disappointed with the world who, on the other hand, kept a close relationship with many other writers with who he constantly co-authored works creating what would later be known as the Cthulhu Mythos, or the Lovecraft Circle. As the name suggests, it was Lovecraft who created the basis in which many other authors would write on, and thus extending the whole of a fictional mythological pantheon which nowadays is part of hundreds of works on horror, pulp or science fiction. The weird tales of the Cthulhu Mythos have become the axis for, not only a never ending amount of tales from renowned authors, but also for video-games, films, role-playing games, or graphic novels. Therefore, It could be claimed that H.P. Lovecraft was advanced for his time, as he represented in his tales the themes of interest and anxiety of present day society, more than seventy years after his death.

The style in which Lovecraft writes is no longer considered Gothic, but cosmic horror. The main reasons are mainly that the terror depicted in Lovecraft's tales is not focused on ghosts or that sort of creatures, but rather it is related to alien entities from beyond human understanding. The monsters in the Cthulhu Mythos come from beyond time and space and are always used to represent the feebleness and meaninglessness of mankind. Lovecraft's tales are not excessively worried about some past burden or crime for which the characters should pay for. The importance of the Lovecraft's horror is rooted in his nihilism. Truth is unattainable, and this realization triggers a breakdown in the characters of the tale which unveils the unimportant role of humanity in the history of the universe. The characters, after pursuing a search for knowledge, discover that human known history is nothing in comparison with the whole existence of the universe, and they find out that there are other civilizations and beings that have existed even before we could remember them, and continue to exist, waiting to regain the place that humankind took over during their absence.

Magic has an important role in these tales, often connected with the world of dreams and imagination, even if it can be considered as a science alien to human minds. Whenever

the fantastic creatures appear, the normal laws of physics are no longer valid. This is seen in the appearance of Cthulhu in the analysis of the tale. Another important characteristic of this style is the fact that the creatures are neither human nor related to humans. They are hybrid beings, as Cthulhu, a grotesque amalgam of different concepts, never easy to define or categorize, designed to create ambiguity, another fundamental trait of these tales.

For all the above mentioned it is stated that cosmic horror is no longer Gothic; However, in my opinion it is because of all of these characteristics that I claim that, if not a Gothic writer, Lovecraft is the next step of the Gothic, or at least the middle stage between Gothic and contemporary Science-fiction. Lovecraft's tales are his own way of expressing his troubled conception of society and his lack of faith in humanity. Furthermore, it could be claimed that the previously stated characteristics of his cosmic horror evolve from the substrata in which the Gothic novel is rooted: The sublime, the uncanny and the abject. These three pillars, along with Todorov's *The fantastic* are the ideas on which my essay will analyze our chosen tale.

1. The call of Cthulhu

From all of his works, the most emblematic is the one which I analyze in this essay, *The call of Cthulhu*. Cthulhu, being the best known creature from Lovecraft's imaginary pantheon, is almost a coat of arms for anything branded after him. The sinister silhouette of a gargantuan dragon-like creature with a pulpy head rising from the depths is the main image to be found in anything inspired by Lovecraft's works, and is also widely recognized in popular culture nowadays. It is first found in a clay bass relief craved by a troubled-minded artist after some vivid nightmares. And it is through nightmares that the creature gets in touch with the people of the world as we understand when reading the tale.

During the second part of the tale, the main character, Francis Wayland Thurston, contacts with the inspector John Legrasse who happens to possess another sculpture of unknown historical origin for experts, that was obtained after raiding a violent cult in a dark forest in New Orleans. Incredibly, Francis finds out that the artist who dreamed and craved the clay bass relief had imagined exactly the same illegible runic writings and the creature depicted cult's idol. The mystery is even enlarged when we are told that an unconnected cult of Eskimos from Iceland chanted exactly the same words as the supposed voodoo cultists of New Orleans.

The climax of the tale unveils during its last part, with the words of the late Sailor Gustaf Johansen as we learn that the dreams of the artist begin at the very same time as earthquakes and storms made the ancient tomb city of Cthulhu, R'lyeh, arise from the depths. Johansen's description of what he finds is the same Cyclopean city that different artists beheld during their weird dreams. Johansen narrates the hell he experienced in that nightmarish city in which the laws of physics did not work properly. In the end, only he managed to escape with another sculpture of Cthulhu that Wayland discovered in a magazine before investigating the report of the sailor who, like Wayland's uncle, died in mysterious

circumstances.

It is important to remark the elements that are present in the tale. Firstly, the narrator writes in an "unreliable" first person point of view, trying to convince the reader of a fantastic story and sharing his fears of facing something incomprehensible. There are also places of mystery and darkness, like the forest in New Orleans or the vast and forgotten city of R'lyeh, both standing for the typical dungeons and castles of Gothic. Finally, the monster represented by Cthulhu and its mysterious cult, is a mixture of categories that work against the contemporary status-quo, as I shall analyze further on.

This tale is developed through the investigation of the anthropologist Francis Wayland Thurston, whose scientific mind struggles with the discovery of the Cthulhu cult. The way in which Wayland faces every step of the investigation, or at least how he said he experienced it is what makes this tale a fantastic one. Lovecraft uses a first person narrator because, as Todorov states in his book, *The fantastic*, "The first-person narrator most readily permits the reader to identify with the character." (Todorov 1975: 84) It is reading Todorov when we understand that the fantastic as a genre only takes place during the hesitation of either the character or the reader. His theory could be summed up in his own words "The fantastic confronts us with a dilemma: to believe or not believe?" (Todorov 1975: 83) The use of a first person narrator to share the experiences that a character undergoes is almost essential in order to create the doubt that characterizes 'the fantastic' before it becomes the uncanny or the marvellous. However, at the very beginning of the tale we find that the character is mostly aware of alien forces superior to common knowledge:

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 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 call of Cthulhu 1926:1)

Obviously, the main message of this first paragraph foretells the entire story, unveiling the sensation of solitude and meaninglessness of mankind, considering it but a small and absurd spot in the wholeness of the universe. But what is remarkable here is that, taking into account Todorov's theory, the character is fully aware of strange powers from the beginning. This would consequently undermine the essence of the fantastic in the tale. Nevertheless, the use of the narrator-character maintains the ambiguity, and according to Todorov the use of a dramatized narrator is much preferable to a non-represented narrator, for the former can lie, while the latter would directly drive us to the marvellous.

There are several parts in the text, wherein the narrator expresses the hesitation as in "the scattered notes gave me much material for thought - so much, in fact, that only the

ingrained scepticism then forming my philosophy can account for my continued distrust of the artist." (The call of Cthulhu 1926: 4) or "The dream-narratives and cuttings collected by the professor were, of course, strong corroboration; but the rationalism of my mind and the extravagance of the whole subject led me to adopt what I thought the most sensible conclusions." (The call of Cthulhu 1926:10) Thus, we experience the effort of the character to maintain his scientific approach in the uncanny events that he is undergoing. Furthermore, the unconscious of the reader highlights this doubt thanks to the use of the past, as it entails that what he thought is no longer acceptable.

Another point of this tale which works in favour of the fantastic is that almost everything told here are supposed confessions of different characters which also create ambiguity, for instances this paragraph in page 8 of the text:

It may have been only imagination and it may have been only echoes which induced one of the men, an excitable Spaniard, to fancy he heard antiphonal responses to the ritual from some far and unilluminated spot deeper within the wood of ancient legendry and horror. This man, Joseph D. Galvez, I later met and questioned; and he proved distractingly imaginative. He indeed went so far as to hint of the faint beating of great wings, and of a glimpse of shining eyes and a mountainous white bulk beyond the remotest trees but I suppose he had been hearing too much native superstition. (The call of Cthulhu 1926: 8)

It is precisely the use of words such as *Imagination*, *fancy*, *hint*, *glimpse* or *suppose* what highlights the possibility of mere illusion. In Todorov "There exists another variety of the fantastic in which the hesitation occurs between the real and the *imaginary*. In the first case we were uncertain not that the events occurred, but that our understanding of them was correct. In the second case, we wonder if what we believe we perceive is not in fact a product of the imagination." (Todorov 1975: 36) Even the climax of the tale, the sailor's confession, could be regarded as simple madness, were the doubt not possible due to all the previous discoveries and the uncanny coincidences between the dreams of the artists and what the sailor describes in his tale.

According to the aforementioned, we ought to accept that this text is not fantastic but marvellous as in the end R'lyeh, Cthulhu and the cultists are proved real; However, it is my opinion that the way in which the marvellous events are approached is what allows the survival of the fantastic elements. What for the reader is plainly marvellous, the narrator conceives as uncanny, because as we have seen in the first paragraph of the tale, these experiences are not considered mystical, but rather a different science or perspective of reality that we are not prepared to conceive.

In what terms is this "uncanny"? In Freud, "It (the uncanny) undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror" (Freud 1919: 1). Basing his study in the German word *heimlich* – belonging to the home – Freud argues that uncanny is anything which is unknown but connects with something familiar in the unconscious, or that

something initially familiar becomes something gruesome or *unheimlich*. It may be something "that has undergone repression and then emerged from it." In complementary terms in the tale, R'lyeh *emerges* from its repression in the depths of the oceans as it explicitly explained in the text: "In the elder time chosen men had talked with the entombed Old Ones in dreams, but then something happened. The great stone city R'lyeh, with its monoliths and sepulchres, had sunk beneath the waves;" (The call of Cthulhu 1926: 9) Furthermore; It could be claimed that the oceans are metaphorically the unconscious of the earth - if we consider the earth as the home or a complementary part of mankind – where lost memories from ancient times are kept in darkness. When those memories resurrect or emerge, the conflict between what used to be familiar and is now uncanny appears.

More importantly, the reader now understands that even if the great old ones have come from the stars, they owned the earth long before humanity. The earth was their home; therefore the alien Gods actually belong to the "home" - It is humanity that is something alienated to the earth. Going back again to that first paragraph of the tale we may now understand the uncanny element within. Wayland does not only consider his society unimportant, but he also regards the earth as something wherein he doesn't belong anymore, as when the narrator states "When I think of the extent of all that may be brooding down there I almost wish to kill myself forthwith." (The call of Cthulhu 1926: 14) As stated in the abstract of this essay; Uncanny is anything that should be hidden and yet comes to light, and that is precisely what happens in the tale.

Another important trait of the uncanny in the tale comes with the dreams and the cult rituals. Superstition has always connected the world of dreams with foresight and revelations. The first images of the tomb city of R'lyeh are mentioned as dreams and hallucinations and its only further in the tale that we learn that this place is no dream at all. When the narrator learns from the sailor's tale that R'lyeh is real, the place is already familiar, having been first mentioned by the delirious artist. When the artist's delusion is proved real the uncanny once again emerges in the reader or in Freud's words: "This is that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality." (Freud 1919: 15) Finally, the cultists are depicted as savages of an uncivilized faith. Almost all of them are mad and primitive creatures, which correspond to that dark age of the world when every culture was animistic and primitive. Second to Freud, we still keep some unconscious part of that era which could be re-activated whenever we witness something which may prove those surmounted superstitions as real. In the same way as the dreams of R'lyeh and the oniric messages of Cthulhu, when the creature is proved real – And therefore all the rites and spells of which we have been previously told – the frontier between reality and superstition disappears again. When "The primitives beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed" (Freud 1919: 17), is when the uncanny occurs.

Once this concept is clear, it is possible to discuss the role of the place, which

connects with another essential issue – The idea of the sublime. In Burke, as the uncanny is a great tool for terror:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke 1757: 13)

In contrast with the uncanny, the sublime does not focus on familiarity; It is strongly connected with nature and its vastness. Burke Claims:

An even plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean; but can it ever fill the mind with any thing so great as the ocean itself? This is owing to several causes, but it is owing to none more than to this that the ocean is an object of no small terror. (Burke 1757: 43)

Burke's work contributes to the understanding of the interest of nature both in Romanticism and Gothicism, as it was one of their usual settings. The sublime is connected with the idea of awe and terror imposed on a subject who beholds an object of great magnitude or power. It is the presence of this object impossible to control or understand that causes astonishment when by comparison the subject understands how small or powerless he is against something apparently infinite. Historically, the terror of considering the individual a small, powerless plaything amongst the might of nature and the universe was originated as a logical consequence during the enlightenment and the modernity. The amount of scientific discoveries enlightened a supposed dark age of history. However, every answer raised more questions, unanswerable at the time, which helped to create the terror of feebleness and of being nothing; On the other hand, it helped to understand that there are things beyond our past or present state of ideas.

Time was also considered a fundamental aspect of the sublime, and the Gothic literature used old castles and ruins as banners of the decay of humanity. What in the past was a mighty empire of mankind – for instance Rome or any great kingdom – in their present was an obsolete ruin. Thus, the Gothics understood the sublime that a fallen civilization caused in a subject. Lovecraft uses this in his own style: R'lyeh is the tomb for Cthulhu, it is the dungeon in which he was caged before humanity took the place of the great old ones. In these terms is easy to understand that R'lyeh is exactly the same thing as the old ruined castles and dungeons of the Gothic. In addition, Lovecraft equally portrays the place of humans as something short in relation to the myths he has created - "They, like the subject and material, belonged to something horribly remote and distinct from mankind as we know it." (*The call of Cthulhu* 1926: 6)

But sublime is not only related to vastness, or immensity and the relation subject-

object. It is important to remember the relevance of darkness and its relation to danger and the ultimate terror – The concept of Death. For this purpose it is essential to analyze more excerpts from Lovecraft and Burke. The first appearance of a dark natural setting in the tale is the woods from the second part of the tale:

...for miles splashed on in silence through the terrible cypress woods where day never came. Ugly roots and malignant hanging nooses of Spanish moss beset them, and now and then a pile of dank stones or fragment of a rotting wall intensified by its hint of morbid habitation a depression which every malformed tree and every fungous islet combined to create. (.) The region now entered by the police was one of traditionally evil repute, substantially unknown and untraversed by white men. There were legends of a hidden lake unglimped by mortal sight, in which dwelt a huge, formless white polypous thing with luminous eyes; and squatters whispered that bat-winged devils flew up out of caverns in inner earth to worship it at midnight. (...) It was nightmare itself, and to see it was to die. (*The Call of Cthulhu* 1926: 7)

The sublime is related to terror, and therefore with darkness and obscurity. Burke claims that obscurity is basic in the arousing of terror. If something is easy to see, its mystery diminishes; therefore, night and darkness are essential for obscurity. Burke, in his own words states:

Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds, which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings. Those despotic governments, which are founded on the passions of men, and principally upon the passion of fear, keep their chief as much as may be from the public eye. The policy has been the same in many cases of religion. Almost all the heathen temples were dark. Even in the barbarous temples of the Americans at this day, they keep their idol in a dark part of the hut, which is consecrated to his worship. For this purpose too the druids performed all their ceremonies in the bosom of the darkest woods, and in the shade of the oldest and most spreading oaks (*Burke* 1757: 43)

It is remarkable how the idea of darkness is related to heathen temples. Somewhere in the unconscious of men there is the idea that these rituals and ceremonies are stronger when veiled in darkness and mystery. It is no coincidence that the Cthulhu cultists, first considered as Voodoo, worship their gruesome god in a swamp never traversed by civilized men. The dark and grotesque rituals of this cult are empowered by the obscure surroundings of this place. As a summary, the setting of nature in this tale is often depicted as something evil, obscure and full of secrets. Be it the deep oceans where an ancient evil awaits or the

gloomy woods where the cultists plot against the civilized world.

Once the narrator and place have been discussed it is time to analyse the role of the monster. Mainly regarded as the antagonist of a story, the monster is an essential character for horror narrative. It is always some kind of creature or being which threatens the *status-quo* of the tale. It is the disruption of categories and things as they were previously regarded. Cthulhu is a mixture of things, something only possible to describe in vague terms. The very first description of the creature manages to represent the very idea of obscurity in its form "If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing." (The call of Cthulhu 1926: 2) As stated before, the obscurity of its form creates an uneasiness which develops later into horror. But Cthulhu is not only physically a monster, it is the concept previously explained of the sublime into character. Huge as a mountain, belonging to the depths of the earth where its lost memories remain, Cthulhu is the past plotting against the present of mankind.

But more important than Cthulhu are the cultists. They are also a mixture of "categories", more precisely they are outcasts and "mixed-blood". They are constantly described in the text as "men of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type. Most were seamen, and a sprinkling of Negroes and mulattoes, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese" (The call of Cthulhu 1926: 8) often using the word *mongrels* to refer to the sailors. They are regarded in derogative terms, even when referring to sailors that are not really proved to be cultists. It is remarkable that Lovecraft chose people of those characteristic to be the wild and ferocious cultists of his demonic faiths. They are almost categorized as a contrast with the intelligent, well-educated and intellectual characters which are commonly chosen to be the "hero" of the tale; Therefore, it could be claimed that the real "other" in the tale, is not the monster itself as it is actually really distant and alien to the reality of the character, but the cultists built up in hordes of Eskimos, Arabs, Chinese, Hispanics... and almost everyone different from the white educated Anglo-Saxon.

As a consequence it could be stated that both social groups distant to civilization (sailors and mongrels) and nature (oceans, swamps, woods) are seen as the monsters of the tale and their dwellings, respectively. They care and worship darkness and evil powers that work against the status quo of white civilization. This evil other is maximized by the use of the great old ones and the tale and their uncanny nature, essentially bound to the idea of darkness and terror as they are portrayed as something older than humanity an even the earth, leaving the place of mankind (not just the white man and his civilization) as feeble and meaningless. This horror of being nothing is portrayed by the point of view of a single person, in order to create the proper feeling in the reader, which is ultimately, the real objective for Lovecraft – To create in the reader the doubt that we may not be as relevant and great as we may expect.

2. The Adaptation from Lovecraft's Work

In this section the essay will analyze the way in which this tale has been adapted in new media, particularly in the graphic novel by Michael Zigerlig in order to decide whether if his adaptation succeeds in maintaining the original message of the tale or loses its pace during the translation from language to image.

A basic point in this adaptation is the language of the original tale. As Zigerlig himself expressed in an interview "language is the key to Lovecraft's horror". As it has been stated before, terror as part of the fantastic is only able to exist in a certain use of literary language. Therefore it is essential to be extremely careful when adapting a fantastic tale into a different media. After reading the graphic novel the reader finds out by comparison that the text has been carefully respected with few changes in order to correlate to the brief linguistic style of graphic novels and comic books. The basic language of a graphic novel depends on the image, and therefore the media of expression needs to be brief, quick and effective. The use of images leaves an important mark on the memory, heightening the relevance of image over written language. Assuming all this, it is easy to understand the difficulties of this kind of adaptations and the need to elude the gaps between these different means of language.

To start this analysis it should firstly be established how this is an intermedial work. According to Asunción Lopez-Varela in her essay *Génesis semiótica de la intermedialidad: fundamentos cognitivos y socio-constructivistas de la comunicación*, intermedial texts are hybrid media, with crossing between discourse and other representational modalities. Comic books are an example of such in that they fuse image and text. This juxtaposition is easily seen in Zigerlig's work. Although mixed, text and image are mainly heterogeneous elements. In this case, the author chooses to separate them even more, by framing them separately, instead of using text balloons within the image. This also means that characters have no direct voice in the vignettes as part of the images. The images themselves are different illustrations worked apart but pieced together in order to create the expected narrative order marked by Lovecraft's voice.

With the aforementioned, it could be claimed that in this precise graphic-novel the texts plays a more relevant role in the narrative than images, which seem to describe what Lovecraft evokes with words. This assumption retakes what has been stated above – Language is essential in the representation of Lovecraft's horror. As the essay has previously analyzed, it is due to his use of obscurity and ambiguity in his representation of the world that Lovecraft creates a thrilling sensation in the reader. Again on the issue of the fantastic, Todorov analyzes Lovecraft style:

Another endeavor to situate the fantastic, one much more widespread among theoreticians, consists in identifying it with certain reactions of the reader: Not the reader implicit in the text, but the actual person holding the book in his hand. Representative of this tendency is H.P. Lovecraft, himself the author of fantastic tales as well as of theoretical work devoted to the supernatural in

literature. For Lovecraft, the criterion of the fantastic is not situated within the work but in the reader's individual experience – and this experience must be fear. (Todorov 1975: 34)

Consequently, an adaptation without Lovecraft's own words to plant the seed of doubt would simply be impossible. Zigerlig is trying not only to respect Lovecraft's language but also the intention of his works impression. The tale is a complete flashback, as the starting point is placed after the discoveries. The story itself is structured as a testimonial text of different people but all told by a frame narrator, this being Wayland; Therefore, rather than representing actual events the tale evokes the memories of the character's stories. The piecing together of speechless images with separated text boxes creates in the reader the same effect as a voice over in films, the idea of a frame narrator relating somebody else's story – Which, in its own way works also in favor of creating a general oneiric display of the whole story. This negotiation between text and image creates the atmosphere which is essential for Lovecraft, as Todorov proved in his work *The fantastic* when directly quoting Lovecraft for his explanation of what creates the fantastic.

Atmosphere is most important, for the ultimate criterion of authenticity [of the fantastic] is not plot structure but the creation of a specific impression.... Hence we must judge the fantastic tale no so much by the author's intentions and the mechanisms of the plot, but by the emotional intensity it provokes.... A tale is fantastic if the reader experiences an emotion of profound fear and terror, the presence of unsuspected worlds and powers. (Todorov 1975: 34)

Therefore, Zigerlig managed to negotiate between an already completed literary text and his own images to recreate the essential atmosphere of doubt and unreliability created in Lovecraft's testimonial and epistolary style. However, the use of the original text is not the only tool used to recreate the atmosphere. Zigerlig chooses to represent the text in black and white images as using well as plenty of mirror-like illustrations.

The decision of using black and white images may correspond to the intention of enhancing the obscurity of the text. The use of these two colors enhances the effect of shadow and light in the drawings and Zigerlig clearly makes profit of it when representing the darkest places of the tale, leaving almost no place for white in those vignettes . In several pages of the comic-book it would seem that darkness is engulfing some weak traces of light, as a metaphor of a dark world almost invading a white one. One more reason for the use of black and white images could be that Zigerlig is trying to imitate the silent films of this tale's decade, as in the example of the short film based on this same tale, which imitates that precise style in spite of being filmed in 2005; Obviously, this would also correspond to the decision to imitate a voice over style.

During the above mentioned interview, Zigerlig expressed his effort in working on the symmetrical illustrations that dominate the book. The uses of these images do not only work in favor of the general obscurity of the text, but most precisely correspond to the

uncanny already discussed. Freud already worked on how mirrors correspond to the idea of uncanny in relation with the concept of the double. In some way they prepare the reader for the new physics of the world the sailors finally release. These mirror-like illustrations correspond to the non-euclidean reality in which the Great Old ones dwell, as it is described in R'lyeh. This world is a disrupted and mad vision of our world, as it twists when contacts with the new physics.

Regarding the idea of the mirror images it is remarkable how Zigerlig decided to leave in the last page the beginning of Wayland's manuscript. Ending the tale with the very same words it started with, not only enhancing the effect of the already mentioned paragraph and its metaphors of darkness and ignorance, but also creating a cyclical or symmetric effect in the whole text which corresponds with the use of these symmetric illustrations.

Is interesting to compare Lovecraft's own description of the tomb city with Zigerlig's illustrations to see how effective his representation of R'lyeh is:

Without knowing what futurism is like, Johansen achieved something very close to it when he spoke of the city; for instead of describing any definite structure or building, he dwells only on broad impressions of vast angles and stone surfaces - surfaces too great to belong to anything right or proper for this earth, and impious with horrible images and hieroglyphs. I mention his talk about angles because it suggests something Wilcox had told me of his awful dreams. He said that the geometry of the dream-place he saw was abnormal, non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours. Now an unlettered seaman felt the same thing whilst gazing at the terrible reality.

Johansen and his men landed at a sloping mud-bank on this monstrous Acropolis, and clambered slipperily up over titan oozy blocks which could have been no mortal staircase. The very sun of heaven seemed distorted when viewed through the polarising miasma welling out from this sea-soaked perversion, and twisted menace and suspense lurked leeringly in those crazily elusive angles of carven rock where a second glance shewed concavity after the first shewed convexity. (...)

As Wilcox would have said, the geometry of the place was all wrong. One could not be sure that the sea and the ground were horizontal, hence the relative position of everything else seemed phantasmally variable. (*The Call of Cthulhu* 1926: 14)

Lovecraft mentions the Futurism style, which is remarkable for the stylistic analysis of the comic-book. This artistic branch characterized by chaotic paintings of irregular forms is a clear inspiration for his tomb city. It could be said also that Zigerlig used this on his behalf,

as it is possible to see some similarities of his drawings of R'lyeh and some Futurism's paintings.

But these drawings do not only inspire Futurism. They are also related to the already mentioned idea of the sublime. Huge, cyclopean buildings, in the form of devastated ruins that by comparison make the people look like ants. These remnants of a forgotten civilization are the aforementioned idea of decay and immensity of time, which by comparison makes mankind and its civilization completely irrelevant.

The idea of the sublime comes as a consequence of the Enlightenment, where rationality and the acquisition of knowledge was the center of society and development. The idea of vision was related to this acquisition of knowledge as well as metaphorically related to fire and light. This has been already discussed in this essay in contrast with the metaphor of darkness as ignorance and mysticism; therefore it is remarkable how Zigerlig represents the cultists in his work, as well as how he portrays the idea of vision. Vision is a metaphor for learning, facing and assimilating the Truth in the process of beholding a concept. As Burke argues, what causes the sublimity is the undermining of the power of the subject when realizing his powerlessness against the faced object. There are several vignettes working on this concept of vision and how the subjects, collapses after facing the 'truth' or 'reality' of the cultists of the monsters. There are three relevant examples within the comic: the Esquimos flaying a victim in their rituals, a lady burned alive in the New Orleans rituals, and at the end of the book a civilian facing Cthulhu.

The second one is particularly relevant to the idea of madness and the terror of the sublime. As argued before, fire is as well a common metaphor of the enlightenment, but it is precisely fire what burns and blinds this woman. It is a classical metaphor warning the reader against the danger of too much knowledge. The last image represents the overwhelming horror of finally facing the truth, the collapsing of the mind and sanity. The unnamed civilian is confronted with the very image of horror that Cthulhu represents, just before he is murdered by it. The image of the creature is so big that it does not fit in the vision – and therefore the mind- of the subject.

For all the aforementioned it could be claimed that in general, Michael Zigerlig has made a great effort in this adaptation of the tale. Not only he has respected the author's own words but has also worked thoroughly in order to recreate the atmosphere of utter terror and doubt which is so relevant in Lovecraft's style, by the use of different artistic resources. The only flaw in this work is that at the end of the Comic, Cthulhu is shown in a present day setting causing havoc around the world. This is achieved by means of violent pictures. Probably it would have been a better idea to leave the possibilities of Cthulhu's release to the imagination of the reader, since the main reason of using obscurity and ambiguity in terror is to let the mind of the public to freely recreate all the terrifying consequences

3. Conclusion

As it has been proven all along the text, Lovecraft created a particular style of horror that has inspired many different authors and intellectuals. Lovecraft's own theoretical discussions set the basis for this inspiring personal style. He also created his whole mythological pantheon of fantastic characters and settings. His writings have been adapted to comics, films and videogames, and even served as inspiration for visual artists. The complete Cthulhu Mythos set the soil for future works on contemporary fantasy and science-fiction becoming a beacon of basic literature for anyone fond of this branch of sub-culture in the field of contemporary fiction.

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