

TRANSGRESSING THE MYTH — H.P. LOVECRAFT'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND ITS NARRATIVE EXECUTION An Essay

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The encounter with Howard Philips Lovecraft is a rather dialectic matter. At first one is fascinated with the intriguing, weird, and fantastic worlds he delivered, that the modern reader is often introduced to through pop cultural media. His most famous creation, Cthulhu, is a prominent figure among all those inhuman villains, those monsters that literature and cinema produced, from Polyphemus up to Giger's Alien. But the creator himself does not share his creation's fame. No, his person is as if surrounded by an uncanny mist of uncertainty and the subject of HPL is touched on by the normal reader mostly in some sort of hit-and-run-approach providing just some superficial impressions. No wonder, since in this second phase of the encounter the abysmal depths of Lovecraft's character show up, exposing his political reactionism, racial hate, and (seemingly) unworldly attitude. The modern reader is caught and ashamed of her/his inclination to the poetical yet intellectual world of such a person. Nonetheless HPL is a revered writer of weird fiction, the mastermind behind a sub-genre that came to be known as 'cosmic horror,' and is counted as the father of modern horror in literature and film (making E.A. Poe the grandfather). That is to say: the literary world cannot get rid of HPL and it does not even want to get rid of him. Lovecraft is a (not only pop) cultural and literary phenomenon that offers far more than some unique entertainment. He also was a well-educated person with a clear conception of life that he discussed in a plethora of letters; he tried to stay on a par with the scientific research of his time, especially Darwin's theory of evolution, Freud's psychology, and Einstein's theory of relativity, though his reflections on those and other concepts were mainly receptive and never reached an academic level. Instead his profession was writing 'weird tales,' And by this he offered a very own approach to treating these great philosophical questions: What is man? Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? A superficial look at Lovecraft's way of thinking would

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probably suggest the following answers to these questions: ‘Nothing,’ ‘accidental,’ and ‘there is none.’ But there is more to it. This alleged nihilism bears dimensions of a philosophy of life that to some people may be a vital source for their own thoughts on their very own existence, be it as pessimistic a view on the world as it may. In his debut novel/essay “H.P. Lovecraft. Against the World, Against Life” Michel Houellebecq gives an impression of what he believes the ideal reader of HPL to be like: “No matter what might be said, access to the artistic universe is more or less entirely the preserve of those who are a little *fed up* with the world.”¹ What is it that HPL has to offer for those people that are “fed up” with the world, that are “fed up” with life itself?

To get an idea of Lovecraft’s philosophy of life² we are going to have an exemplary look at one of his earlier writings, namely his 1921 short story “The Music of Erich Zann.” After giving a short outline of the story I will discuss different approaches to reading Lovecraft, starting with a psychological understanding of the tropes he uses, followed by a philosophical extension on the subject, and finally offering a biographical perspective.

1. “*The Music of Erich Zann*”

Though being one of his early writings that originated years before his “great texts”³ that are forming the core of the so-called *Cthulhu-Mythos*, the short story “The Music of Erich Zann”⁴ was considered by HPL to be “among his best.”⁵ Being an early work and still very much under the influence of Lovecraft’s reading of E.A. Poe⁶ it nevertheless features one of HPL’s famous tropes that foster his great texts, namely the cosmic vision. The story is quickly retold:

- 1 M. Houellebecq: H.P. Lovecraft. *Against the World, Against Life*, transl. by D. Khazeni (London: Orion Publishing, 2008), 30.
- 2 Lovecraft himself does not indicate a dedicated philosophy of life though he draws on the ideas of philosophical thinkers. The philosophy referred to here is but implied in his thoughts and writings. Nevertheless, the study of ‘Lovecraft and Philosophy’ is a growing field of research. Cf. S.T. Joshi: *A Subtler Magick. The Writings and Philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft* (Gilette, NJ: Wildside Press, 1996); T. Airaksinen: *The Philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft. The Route to Horror* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999); G. Harman: *Weird Realism. Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Alresford: John Hunt Publishing, 2012); E. Thacker: *In the Dust of This Planet. Horror of Philosophy Vol. 1* (Alresford: John Hunt Publishing, 2011); *ibid.*: *Tentacles Longer Than the Sky. Horror of Philosophy Vol. 3* (Alresford: John Hunt Publishing, 2015), ch. 1.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 41.
- 4 H.P. Lovecraft: “The Music of Erich Zann” (1921) (= Music). In: *ibid.*, *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories*, ed. by S.T. Joshi (London: Penguin, 2001), 45–52.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 376.
- 6 Cf. H.P. Lovecraft: *Chronik des Cthulhu-Mythos*, Bd. I, ed. by M. Frenschkowski (Leipzig: Festa, 2011), 53.

The nameless first-person narrator as the story's protagonist confronts the reader with a mystery right away. "I have examined maps of the city with the greatest care, yet have never again found the Rue d'Auseil."⁷ This Rue d'Auseil is supposed to be in a French city, probably Paris, but to the protagonist it seemed to have vanished, at least from all the maps. In trying to persuade himself (rather than the reader) of the validity of his memory he then takes on to tell the story of when he was a "student of metaphysics at the university" and lived in this very obscure street where he met the even obscurer German viol-player Erich Zann. The protagonist is fascinated by the "grotesque, satyr-like face[d]" man who is living above his room. This fascination emerged from Zann's habit of playing curious music on his viol by night. Being drawn to Zann's music he visits the garret where Zann uses to play his "haunting notes". When asking Zann for his music the reaction is aloof. He even requests that the protagonist should move down to a lower story of the house so he will no longer hear the music. Curiosity triggered the protagonist now makes it a nightly quest to listen to Zann's music secretly. "Then one night as I listened at the door I heard the shrieking viol swell into a chaotic babel of sound [...]." Seconds later Zann grants admission to the protagonist, more forcibly than friendly. He resumes his playing. "[The] screaming viol now outdid itself, emitting sounds I had never thought a viol could emit." The wind rushes, rain pours, the garret's shutters rattle, their glasses brake, the candles sputter, the whole room seems to scream in disharmonic unison with Zann's viol. "Then I remembered my old wish to gaze from this window, the only window in the Rue d'Auseil from which one might see the slope beyond the wall, and the city outspread beneath. It was very dark, but the city's lights always burned, and I expected to see them there amidst the rain and wind. Yet when I looked from that highest of all gable windows [...] I saw no city spread below, and no friendly lights gleaming from remembered streets, but only the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive in motion and music, and having no semblance to anything on earth. And as I stood there looking in terror, the wind blew out the candles in that ancient peaked garret, leaving me in savage and impenetrable darkness with chaos and pandemonium before me, and the demon madness of that night-baying viol behind me." Escape. "Leaping, floating, flying down those endless stairs through the dark house [...]. And I recall that there was no wind, and that the moon was out, and that all the lights of the city twinkled. Despite my most careful searches and investigations, I have never since been able to find the Rue d'Auseil."

Though the word "Auseil" does not exist in French it might be possible, as some scholars believe, that Lovecraft made up a single word from the

7 Lovecraft: Music, 45.

French phrase ‘au seuil’ which means ‘at the threshold.’⁸ Since Lovecraft had at least a rudimentary knowledge of French and once before used crude neologisms that do not bother about orthography (like that of his juvenile pseudonym and later figure “Abdul Alhazred”) it may be possible that this might be intentional. Be it as it may, it surely can be said that the Rue D’Auseil from the story works as a kind of border region between the known and the outer world. In some way, it is real as an intricate alley where people interact with each other while living in the tightest of spaces. In another way it is elusive, when it slips (not only) the protagonists grip and opens up a vision of the cosmos by which the worldly is appalled. With the ending paragraphs HPL evokes a synaesthetic experience between sound and vision: as if the realism of Andrew Wyeth coincides with Kasimir Malevich’s suprematism, resulting in the trembling and pulsating vision of the world like it is depicted in Edvard Munch’s “The Scream.”⁹ Music is speech is image is music is speech and so forth. Through this synaesthetic technique Lovecraft is capable of writing the ineffable and giving the reader an idea of the infinity of outer space that is not just expanding outwardly but invading the very lives of the people of the early 20th century who are witnessing the destruction of their final existential hopes through the accelerating advances of the ‘hard sciences.’ HPL’s writing fixates the anxiety of man who transgressed and transgresses the traditional and known concepts of the world he is living in. Where the humiliation of Copernican revolution evoked anger and indignation the findings of modern post–Einsteinian physics might result in anxiety and fear of living in an indifferent universe where man is but the insignificant blink of an eye and where there is no god to save him.¹⁰ This *horror*

8 Cf. Lovecraft: *Music*, 377.

9 Malevich’s famous sujet, the black square, is appreciated for its faculty to generate the illusion of a cosmic pull. The black square is surrounded by a white or grey framing, producing the illusion of a window into space. With his work “Wind from the Sea” Wyeth pictures a different aspect of nature, namely its subtle might. The wind is entering the discernable, cultivated, and save space of humanity, depicted through the wafting curtains that give a pictorial idea of the undiscernible and ungraspable omnipresence of nature. Lovecraft’s description of the scene in the garret makes use of both of these concepts. But for him this vision does not result in a meditative or floating state but in a terrifying discharge of inhuman might that shakes the foundation of human existence.

10 Lovecraft as a reader of Nietzsche had an important ally in thought when the latter gave an impression of the insignificance of the human species at the beginning of “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense.” In “A Genealogy of Morals” Nietzsche writes: “It seems as though man, since Copernicus, had slid upon an inclined plane, — he ever more rapidly rolls away from the center. Whither? Into the Nothing? into the ‘piercing feeling of his nothingness?’” (F. Nietzsche: *A Genealogy of Morals*, Works, Vol. X, ed. by A. Tille, transl. by W.A. Hausemann (London: Macmillan, 1897), 216.) Lovecraft knew this work (cf. H.P. Lovecraft: *Against Religion*, ed. by S.T. Joshi (New York: Sporting Gentlemen, 2010), 131).

vacui is the mindset that shaped HPL's writing. To get a better understanding of it the psychological interpretation of this anxiety needs to be investigated.

2. *The Psychological Account*

Lovecraft's figures are always on the verge to either death or insanity. They are crossers between a caring and an uncaring world. And in transgressing the boundaries of the known they (and HPL's readers) witness the coalescence of these worlds. They are designed to be some kind of human blank or workpiece so that the reader is not distracted by their personalities but instead can witness their descend into the abyss unobstructed. And the abysmal is synonymous with annihilation. Though the Lovecraftian cosmos is populated by a large amount of superhuman beings that are often accounted as 'gods,' the person who oversteps the threshold and enters the realm of these beings witnesses their sacrosanct power. But these gods are no personal gods that take care of humanity and its striving, they are not hostile to man either. They are simply indifferent to man. The uncontrollable cosmos and entities of HPL's fictional world are like an incarnation of the modern anxiety: "An unfeasible history, a process that is not at our disposal creates anxiety."¹¹ (Post)Modern humanity lost its grip on certain concepts that in the past would guarantee a literal *kosmos*, a world that is 'in order.' Instead it is now left with the vortex of an infinite space-time. The infinite cannot be comprehended but experienced. In his work "The Concept of Anxiety" Søren Kierkegaard describes the transcendental dimension of the phenomenon: Anxiety to him is the "dizziness of freedom" that is a result of the transcendental process where the person is trying to get a grip on her existence.¹² But in trying so the person also experiences the possibility of possibility (of other potential concepts of existence) and by that experiences the dread of choosing wrong. Without even a decision made, the process of making a decision became the basis for anxiety. Being free to be an individual human being means also to seize the opportunity to fail to be the human being one wants to be, and this is causing anxiety. In the case of the anxiety of modernity this plays out as follows: with the removal of popular or even global (meta-)narratives the individual human being has to compensate the loss by itself. But where to start? Grasp at the straw of tradition? or religion? or nation? or family? It's damned if you do and damned if

11 H.-D. Kittsteiner: *Wir werden gelebt. Formprobleme der Moderne* (Hamburg: Philo, 2006), 18. Transl. T.M.

12 S. Kierkegaard: *The Concept of Anxiety. A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin (=Concept of Anxiety)*, ed. and transl. by R. Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), IV 331.

you don't.¹³ Life no longer bears an intrinsic stability. For Kierkegaard now anxiety other than fear is a feeling devoid of an object, whereas fear always knows the object that causes it.¹⁴ By that he means the vortex of possibility that causes the individual to become desperate in its existence. Jacques Lacan though objects Kierkegaard on that and suggests a more precise phrasing of the matter. To him anxiety is "the looming loss of the possibility to operate symbolically."¹⁵ By that anxiety becomes a "signal of reality," that there is something uncanny happening that cannot be comprehended.

Such a signal is the vision of "space illimitable" in Lovecraft's story. The nameless protagonist tries to comprehend it, but by assigning to it the concepts of "pandemonium" and "demon madness" must admit that he has no idea of what he actually is afraid of.¹⁶ He is in plain terror for not his life is at stake but his existence. He is a mere insignificant entity in contemplation of the infinite, a cosmos that does not care about humanity let alone one certain individual. Relative to infinity any number, be it as large as it may, still tends to or equals zero. "The Music of Erich Zann" makes distinct use of this quantitative trope and by that it visualizes an idea of the philosophical concept of the sublime as portrayed by Immanuel Kant in the "Critique of Judgement." That leads to:

3. *The Philosophical Interpretation*

Kant distinguishes between two modes of the sublime: the mathematically and the dynamically sublime.¹⁷ He delineates the aesthetical perception of both modes by using examples from man's experience of natural phenomena like beholding a mountain from its foot (mathematically sublime) or witnessing "clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like"¹⁸ (dynamically sublime). In that

13 Cf. S. Kierkegaard: *Either/Or*, ed. and transl. by H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), I 22–24.

14 Cf. Chr. Demmerling: "Philosophie der Angst." In: L. Koch, *Angst. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (Stuttgart, Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2013), 31–41, 33.

15 A. Tuschling: "Psychologie der Angst." In: Koch, *Angst*, 41–51, 48. Transl. T.M. Cf. also J. Lacan: *Die Angst. Das Seminar / Buch X*, ad. by J.A. Miller (Vienna: Turia und Kant, 2010).

16 Giving this non-information to the reader is a prominent technique of the horror genre, namely the *narrative blankspace*. Those blankspaces only give the impression of labeling that which causes anxiety, but actually they maintain the gap that evokes anxiety (Cf. M. Lickhardt: "Narration." In: Koch, *Angst*, 189–197, 193).

17 Cf. I. Kant: *Critique of Judgement (=CoJ)*, transl. by J.H. Bernard (London: MacMillan, 1914), §§23–29.

18 *Ibid.*, §28.

way, the sublime differs drastically from the beautiful. Where the aesthetics of the beautiful results in a “disinterested satisfaction”¹⁹ the sublime not only appeals to the human mind but starts the course of contemplation and reflexion.²⁰ For Kant this will result in the following: The immensity of nature “while making us recognise our own physical impotence, considered as beings of nature, discloses to us a faculty of judging independently of, and a superiority over, nature.”²¹ Through Kant’s argument sifts the confidence in reason and the spirit of the Enlightenment. Lovecraft’s (and our) world but witnessed the humiliation of humanity by the theory of evolution, witnessed the culpability of reason that produced weapons of mass destruction, in short: the “Dialectic of Enlightenment.”²² And the Lovecraftian conversion of the aesthetics of the sublime can be seen as the ironic answer to the confidence of the philosophers of Enlightenment. Reason loses to itself. It loses itself within itself. The aesthetic of the sublime becomes an “‘anaesthetic,’ abysmal, and dizzying topology of anxiety”²³ symbolized once again by “space illimitable.”

But it does not stop there: The nameless protagonist is both in terror and awestruck by the synaesthetic vision. It is the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.²⁴ And even after his escape, his descend into the abyss of insignificance (“leaping, floating, flying down those endless stairs”) he right away tells the reader of his struggle to find the Rue d’Auseil. He is drawn there to return. And he wants to return. This phenomenon that can be understood as ‘Angstlust’²⁵ (anxiety pleasure) resonates once again with Kant: The aesthetics of the sublime inherits a dynamic dimension. The experience begins with the feeling of *Unlust* (pain) but results in the feeling of *Lust* (pleasure).²⁶ The abysmal is not simply scary but also seductive. The idea of one’s own nonbeing is intriguing for the selfish and anthropocentric human being since it is always contrasted by the absolute significance of its very own individuality. And this tension can generate the energies of what came

19 Ibid., §2.

20 Cf. J.F. Lyotard: *Immaterialität und Postmoderne*, transl. by M. Karbe (Berlin: Merve, 1985), 97.

21 Kant: CoJ, §28.

22 M. Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno: *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by G. Schmid Noerr, transl. by E. Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

23 Cf. B. Wolf: “Raum.” In: Koch, *Angst*, 148–156, 152. Transl. T.M. Here the topology of ‘anxiety’ is demonstrated in reference to Poe’s story “A Descent into the Maelström.”

24 Cf. R. Otto: *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2014).

25 Cf. T. Anz: “Angstlust.” In: Koch, *Angst*, 206–217. This idea is already introduced by Kierkegaard when he calls anxiety a “sympathetic antipathy and a antipathetic sympathy.” Cf. Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, IV 313.

26 Kant: CoJ, §27.

to be known as the Freudian concept of a death drive or *Thanatos*.²⁷ It is the “Lust am Kreatürlichen” as F.W.J. Schelling puts it.²⁸

Despite the fatality of his insignificance, the protagonist moves on with his life; despite Lovecraft’s disgust for life and loathing of the world, he kept writing. In the final paragraph I will elaborate on this existential dimension to give an outline of Lovecraft’s philosophical thinking.

4. *A Biographical Perspective*

Lovecraft is a self-proclaimed materialist, and in his materialism he is as dogmatic as it gets. This orthodox materialism works as the foundation of his contempt for the world and humanity. Though being at times radical in thought he but never became a political figure let alone an agitator. But the antagonists where his disdain becomes radical und apodictic are religious people that entered his orbit, and immigrants that entered New England.²⁹

What HPL despises is (to him) the idea of the “Semitick farce of Christianity,” meaning the introduction of a transcendent element to the religious sphere with the goal of “moulding ... mankind in a literal and not a merely poetick sense.”³⁰ It may sound ironic but HPL’s argument against religion in general is its unworldliness (*Weltabgewandtheit*). Instead, in line with his materialistic worldview, he is devoted to ancient Graeco-Roman thought, especially that of Epicurus and Lucretius.³¹ Another aspect of this is his early admiration of ancient (pantheistic) mythology, first of all that of Homer and Ovid, which in retrospect he saw as his “last flickering of religious belief.”³² With that in mind it is no wonder that HPL as a writer of fiction came up with stories of our world that is once again populated by godlike beings, although this repopulation surely is not what the romantic spirit hoped for. But Lovecraft never intended to create a mythology, and the idea of the so-called “Cthulhu-Mythos” goes back to his scholars, not to himself.

27 Cf. S. Freud: *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920), Studienausgabe, Bd. 3, ed. by A Mitscherlich, A. Richards and J. Strachey (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1975), 213–272.

28 Cf. F.W.J. Schelling: *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1984), 74.

29 Here I cannot elaborate on the latter point despite its obvious importance. Hence I recommend the perusal of the following article: W. House, *We Can’t Ignore H.P. Lovecraft’s White Supremacy*. URL: <http://lithub.com/we-cant-ignore-h-p-lovecrafts-white-supremacy/> (06.11.2017)

30 Lovecraft: *Against Religion*, 131.132.

31 “And Greece, whose culture was the greatest of all, antedated Christianity and originated materialism.” (Ibid., 73.)

32 Ibid., 3.

What he created was rather an “anti-mythology.”³³ His cosmology shows an indifferent universe and indifferent gods. His materialism denies any transcendent being that might work as the substantial source of ethics. And by that HPL’s stories are the poetical transformation of what Horkheimer and Adorno called the “mythical fear” of Enlightenment: “Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is nothing other than a form of universal taboo. Nothing is allowed to remain outside, since the mere idea of the ‘outside’ is the real source of fear.”³⁴ In Lovecraft’s work the religious hope is smashed by the positive reality of godlike beings that have nothing in common with the Christian god or any ancient Graeco-Roman pantheon who are supposed to be either fully or at least partially committed to the human interest. But so is modern man’s confidence in reason: the positivistic hope is shattered when it realizes that nature and the cosmos are not at man’s disposal. There are cosmic forces that elude the human comprehension. Mankind is left with all the data it acquired through scientific research, it is left with all its art, left with all its religions, left with all its sense and meaning — but to no avail. His mythology is not an aetiological narrative that muses on the meaning of life and the significance of man, but a narrative that eliminates any idealistic foundation of life. What is left is mere reality. But for Lovecraft this is an uplifting concept. “Materialism is not the tragedy [...]. It is grey rather than black [...]. No change of faith can dull the colours and the magic of spring, or dampen the native exuberance of perfect health; and the consolations of taste and intellect are infinite. [...] The disciplined intellect fears nothing and craves no sugar-plum at the day’s end, but is content to accept life and serve society as best it may. [...] There is nothing better than oblivion, since in oblivion there is no wish unfulfilled. We had it before we were born, yet did not complain. Shall we then whine because we know it will return? It is Elysium enough for me, at any rate.”³⁵ Lovecraft, in line with Epicurus, Lucretius, and Bertrand Russell,³⁶ can accept life in very terms of oblivion and insignificance. Once again it sounds ironic, but HPL’s worldview was rather worldly. To him it is the life we have that we can foster, not the life we want. We do not need a paradise or heaven on earth. We do not need an

33 Cf. D.E. Schultz: “From Microcosm to Macrocosm: The Growth of Lovecraft’s Cosmic Vision.” In: D.E. Schultz, S.T. Joshi (eds.): *An Epicure in the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honor of H.P. Lovecraft* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), 212.

34 Horkheimer, Adorno: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 11.

35 Lovecraft: *Against Religion*, 72.

36 Cf. B. Russell: *The Value of Free Thought. How to Become a Truth-Seeker and Break the Chains of Mental Slavery* (Girard, KS: Haldeman-Julius, 1944).

illusive ideology or a political utopia. “Surely we can think of life as having something of beauty, and only a glutton wants eternity.”³⁷

Considering this rather humble statement one can understand the idea of the Lovecraftian anti-mythology: His mythology ignores the basic aspect of the myth that essentially works as an explanatory model of the world. There is neither a creation or an *in illo tempore* whence the world originates, nor is there an eschatological prospect. But nonetheless his work is not ‘not a mythology’ for its whole purpose is to facilitate the materialistic account. Lovecraft’s stories console the materialistic or even the nihilistic mind. They function as the narrative affirmation of a non-religious or non-spiritual mode of thought. When mankind re-experiences primal fear in the form of a technology (that may cause mass or even global annihilation) and scientific achievements (that simply cannot be denied) the need for myth arises. For a sheer logocentrism lacks the narrative ability to offer adequate answers to individual, and existential needs (despite its inner logic and coherence). But myth does not necessarily mean apotheosis or the simple return to a former, ‘innocent state.’ “Myth allows man to live, by depleting superior power; for man’s happiness, it has no images.”³⁸ The myth presents an order; this order might be terrifying, but at least it is order. Anxiety gets canalized, the non-object becomes objectivized in form of “Cthulhu,” “Yog-Sothoth,” “Nyalathotep” and all the other “Great Old Ones.” This is the “‘apotropaic’ accomplishment of naming.”³⁹ In that way Lovecraft’s anti-mythology is a plausible form of myth for a secular society. Instead of a romantic or Nietzschean concept of remythification HPL’s approach shows what Hans Blumenberg calls “work on myth:” *mythos* and *logos* complement each other in a dynamic process and bring forth stories and narratives which do not account for one or the other but the very dynamics of the process. Lovecraft found a way to cope with the “absolutism of reality”⁴⁰ that natural sciences imply, namely writing. “Every story gives an Achilles’ heel to sheer power.”⁴¹ In this respect, his mythology is not even necessarily to be seen as an anti-mythology; since this presupposes that a new myth must only be rated relative to an old myth. But this would mean the disregard of change and process, that is the reality of human life. And although his figures are but mere blanks of human beings, their experiences grotesque, and the creatures abysmal; and with himself being an embittered and deluded person in some respect, what Lovecraft does is very human: He tells stories.

37 Ibid., 73.

38 H. Blumenberg: *Work on Myth*, transl. by R.M. Wallace (Cambridge; MA: MIT Press, 1985), 31.

39 Ibid., 15.

40 Ibid., 3–33.

41 Ibid., 16

Abstract

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An Essay

Howard Philips Lovecraft counts as the father of modern horror literature. His narrative work is considered to be an anti-mythology which gives way to the readers imagination. The essay elaborates on his narrative technique that is determined by psychological and philosophical motives. Furthermore, Lovecraft's stories are said to portray a nihilistic world view. The essay argues that there is more to Lovecraft's work than a nihilistic perspective, namely a philosophy of life that is motivated by his reading of Epicurus and Lucretius. On the subject of mythology the thesis is, that an anti-mythology does not necessarily mean non-mythology. Lovecraft's literary work is rather transgressing central mythological tropes in light of his philosophical worldview. It is a way of expressing his philosophy of life in a narrative way.

KEY WORDS: Lovecraft, Houellebecq, Kierkegaard, Lacan, Kant, Blumenberg, transgression, myth, mythology, anxiety, sublime, materialism

