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# Ways Myth is Used within Stories

H.P. Lovecraft as a Case Study

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## Introduction

This paper will deal with the relation between myth and stories by focusing on some of the ways in which myth is used within stories. I will argue that myth makes truth-claims. The way these truth-claims are understood, that is literal or symbolic, informs the use of myth within stories. If one understands myth to make literal truth-claims it functions as a social charter. On the other hand, if myth makes symbolic truth-claims it can be used to evoke a sensation, and thereby point to an experience in this world. I will demonstrate that myth within stories makes literal truth-claims for the characters but symbolic ones for the reader. From the readers perspective, myth in stories is not used to regulate or transform society, instead, myth captures in one image what “it feels like”. This image transgresses the use of usual language, and makes one “see” the meaning. To illustrate this argument I believe that the use of H.P. Lovecraft as a case study is worthwhile in helping to shed light on the reason why some stories have mythical elements. Moreover, Lovecraft, as a contemporary example of myth-making, reinforces the idea that as long as there is a human need felt to express a sensation, myth is a way to express that meaning when ordinary language fails.

In this paper, I will explore three different approaches that attempt to understand the meaning of myth: in terms of content; literal truth-claims; and symbolic truth-claims. This is important because the approach taken influences the understanding of the relation between myth and stories. In the first part, myth will be analysed in terms of content; it will be considered as a certain type of story, and give some indication to answer the question of what makes something a myth rather than a story. The second part will discuss myth in terms of the literal truth-claims it makes. Following the viewpoint presented in *Discourse and the Construction of Society* by Bruce Lincoln, I will firstly discuss Lincoln’s classification of narratives, and then apply Lincoln’s framework to Lovecraft’s short story “The Call of Cthulhu”. This part will point out that myth has a different function for the characters in the

story than it has for the reader. Building on this, the third part will discuss myth in terms of its ability to make symbolic truth-claims. I will investigate the sensation of Cosmic Horror and the reason why Lovecraft created a new myth. This part will establish one prominent role myth has within stories for the readers, namely, that it evokes a sensation that points to an experience in this world. I will also discuss the notion of myth as a collective achievement. This will point to the fact that the mythical elements are the ones that move outside of time and express an individual, as well as a universal experience. This will reinforce the idea that a prominent use of myth in stories is a way of expression that leads to gaining a better understanding of this world.<sup>1</sup>

## Part One – Myth defined in terms of content

To begin with, I will classify the narrative of myth in terms of content. This will help to understand the difference between myth and story. The definition is based on *Myth and Reality* by Mircea Eliade. Eliade, states:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the “beginnings”. In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behaviour, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a “creation” [...] myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities. (Eliade 5–8)

On those grounds, the following three major characteristics can be established: Firstly, myth has a religious background, it is sacred, and it involves gods or supernatural beings. Secondly, it is set in the past, and explains the creation of the whole world, or one aspect of it. Thirdly, it informs the religious beliefs and practices of a group of people. To give an illustration, I will analyse the myth presented in the short story “The Call of Cthulhu”.

The myth centres on the “Great Old Ones”, who inhabited this world before the existence of human kind. Although they no longer inhabit this world, a cult exists who

<sup>1</sup> A more thorough study of the use of myth within stories goes beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, further research on this topic would give a broader understanding of the role of myth within stories.

believes that they will return, once the stars are right again:

the Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky. These Old Ones were gone now, inside the earth and under the sea; but their dead bodies had told their secrets in dreams to the first men, who formed a cult which had never died [...] hidden in distant wastes and dark places all over the world until the time when the great priest Cthulhu, from his dark house in the mighty city of R'lyeh under the waters, should rise and bring the earth again beneath his sway. (Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu" 84)

The content of the myth agrees with Eliade's definition. The story tells about an event that has occurred in a previous age; the actors, the Great Old Ones, are supernatural beings. It also tells of an unknown location, the city of R'lyeh. Moreover, the Great Old Ones inform the religious beliefs and practices of a group of people, the Cthulhu-cult. It is old Castro, a cult member, who reveals what the cult believes in. Once the Cthulhu resumes his rule on earth:

mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside [...] the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom. (85)

The religious practices of the cult are based on this promise: "the cult, by appropriate rites, must keep alive the memory of those ancient ways and shadow forth the prophecy of their return" (85). Moreover, there appears to have been an interplay between human beings and the Great Old Ones. In *The Raw and the Cooked* Lévi-Strauss points out: "Myths are anonymous [...] When a myth is repeated, the individual listeners are receiving a message that, properly speaking, is coming from nowhere; this is why it is credited with a supernatural origin" (Lévi-Strauss 18). It appears that in elder times, the Great Old Ones were able to communicate with human beings in their dreams. However, something had happened, the great city R'lyeh sunk beneath the waves, and this form of communication was somehow broken. Ever since, the knowledge of the Great Old Ones has been passed on from one generation to the next, and so the cult has never died. This form of communication reveals another striking feature, namely that the myth has no particular author.

These characteristics give some indication to understand the difference between myth and story, and help to detect the mythical elements within a story. However, it does not explain the use of myth within stories. Therefore, I suggest one should focus on the claims a narrative makes.

## Part Two – Myth defined in terms of literal truth–claims

To further understand the relation between myth and stories, this section explores the idea that narratives should be classified not in terms of content, but by the claims they make. This analysis is based on Bruce Lincoln's framework in *Discourse and the Construction of Society*.<sup>2</sup> There are two reasons for this choice. Firstly, his model focuses on the transformation of narratives from one class to the other. It points to the fact that the boundaries of narrative classifications are not as clear cut, and hence, they can overlap. Secondly, his framework includes the narrators as well as the readers point of view. Put differently, the claims the narrator makes, and the way those claims are understood by the readers, need to be considered.

Lincoln suggests the following distinction between different narrative modes: if a narrative makes no truth–claims at all and is accepted as fictions, it is called a Fable. Stories that offer accounts of the past but lack credibility are Legends; the ones that have credibility on the other hand, are called History. The last category Lincoln mentions is myth: “Myth – by which I designate that small class of stories that possess both credibility and authority” (Lincoln 25). Lincoln makes two crucial observations. The first observation is the particular element that distinguishes myth from any other category, which is authority. Thus, according to Lincoln's model, what makes something a myth rather than a story is defined by the authoritative quality. The second observation is that any narrative form can be reclassified.

<sup>2</sup> Although Lincoln's framework is not a current one, the use of it has traction in contemporary debates. Kevin Schildbrack for example, uses Lincoln's framework in his book *Thinking Through Myth*, where he investigates the reasons why the study of myth in contemporary philosophy is almost non-existent.

Although a narrative cannot be classified in two categories at once, reclassification of any narrative is possible, depending on loss or gain of credibility. Thus, the truth-claims of a narrative can be considered false and later on be considered true. This suggests that there is a relation between myth and stories, and those may overlap to some extent.

Lincoln describes a narrative that possesses authority as a narrative that is raised to a “status of paradigmatic truth” (24). He describes it as a narrative that not only conveys information on how society can be constructed, but rather as “a discursive act through which actors evoke the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed” (24). Henceforth, the notion of authority is highly significant because it influences people’s behaviour. This suggests that the authority of myth is based on the grounds that the audience believes in it, that is to say, the authority of myth presupposes its credibility to the audience. The interplay between, truth-claims, credibility, and authority is found in Lovecraft’s “The Call of Cthulhu”.

“The Call of Cthulhu” is divided into three independent parts: “The Horror in Clay”, “The Tale of Inspector Legrasse” and “The Madness from the Sea”. These three parts are linked together by the protagonist, Thurston, and his accumulation of information about Cthulhu. By gathering information about Cthulhu and the Cthulhu cult, the narrative of Cthulhu gradually gains credibility and authority. I will show that Thurston firstly perceives the narrative of Cthulhu as a Fable, then the narrative transforms from a Fable into a Legend, and finally into a Myth. Thereby, by examining this process, the function myth has for the characters will be established.

In the first chapter, “The Horror of Clay”, Thurston goes through the research of his recently deceased granduncle. This is the first time Thurston comes across the narrative of Cthulhu. The first part of his granduncle’s manuscript concerns a sculpture of Cthulhu. Thurston’s reaction towards this peculiar piece of data is one of disbelief, as he states: “Had

my uncle, in his latter years, become credulous of the most superficial impostures? I resolved to search out the eccentric sculptor responsible for this apparent disturbance of an old man's peace of mind" (Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu" 73). It turns out that the Cthulhu sculpture was fashioned by the artist, Anthony Wilcox. Wilcox reported that the sculpture was inspired by his nightmares. After having read the first part of the manuscript, Thurston's point of view remains one of disbelief: "the ingrained scepticism then forming my philosophy can account for my continued distrust of the artist" (77). So far the narrative of Cthulhu makes no truth-claims and has no credibility. Thurston considers it nothing more but a Fable imagined by an old, deranged professor, and a mentally deranged artist.

Thurston's viewpoint changes in the second chapter, "The Tale of Inspector Legrasse". In this chapter, the narrative of Cthulhu is given more credibility. It tells of his granduncle's encounter with the police inspector, John Razmond Legrasse. Legrasse's account tells of a Cthulhu sculpture, which was confiscated during a raid on a supposed voodoo meeting. The cult they discovered was absolutely unknown to them and perceived as the most diabolic voodoo circle of all. It turns out that a group of people exist called the Cthulhu cult, who belief and worship Cthulhu. Although Thurston does not yet belief in the existence of Cthulhu he no longer dismisses it as a Fable: "I felt sure that I was on the track of a very real, very secret, and very ancient religion whose discovery would make me an anthropologist of note. My attitude was still one of absolute materialism, *as I wish it still were*" (88 *original italics*). His attitude towards the narrative has changed, it can now be classified as Legend, since it is a narrative that once was believed as true, but is no longer held credible.

It is in the third chapter, "The Madness form the Sea", where the narrative of Cthulhu gains authority. Thurston reads the diary written by Gustaf Johansen, a sailor, who tells of his encountering with Cthulhu. After having read Johansen's manuscript Thurston concludes: "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” (97). Furthermore, Thurston is convinced that “Cthulhu still lives” (97). The realisation of this truth is, as put in *An Lovecraftian Encyclopedia*: “an unending source of profound unease to Thurston because it shows how tenuous is mankind’s vaunted supremacy upon this planet” (Joshi and Schultz 28). Thurston comes to realise that human kind has no power against Cthulhu and the Great Old Ones, and therefore, that human kind is insignificant. This truth–claim is held credible by Thurston, and thus it gains authority over his action. In fact, it does not inform a belief that will help to construct society, but rather destroy it. Therefore, it mobilises Thurston to get rid of the evidence he pieced together and protect humanity from this dreadful truth.

To reiterate, the strength of Lincoln’s framework lies in his approach to classify narratives in terms of the claims they are making, not in terms of content. These claims are evaluated on the basis of three criteria: truth–claims, credibility and authority. Although a narrative cannot be part of two categories at the same time, it can be reclassified by losing or gaining credibility. For the purpose of this paper, his framework is helpful, because it explores the authoritative quality of myth, and the impact myth has on people’s course of action. Similarly, Kevin Schildbrack claims that Lincoln’s framework “highlights the facts that myths make claims to truth, that these claims are found credible, and that these perceived truths give the myths their authority to provide models or charters for social life” (Lincoln 8). From this, it follows that myth only has authority, and can only be used to regulate and transform society, if the truth–claims a myth makes are perceived as credible.

In view of this, it needs to be clarified if the truth–claims made are supposed to be understood literally or symbolically from the readers point of view. The reader does not necessarily consider myth or mythical elements within a story as literally true. To give an illustration of what I mean, I will consider “The Call of Cthulhu” again. While the truth–

claims of the narrative of Cthulhu are held as literally true by certain characters in the story, this is not the case for the reader. Thus, the myth within the “The Call of Cthulhu” does not function as a social charter for the reader. There are two ways to answer this problem. On the one hand, one can argue that the narrative of the Great Old Ones and Cthulhu cannot be considered a myth. On the other hand, it points to the fact that the reader does not expect the mythical elements in the story to make literal truth-claims. This then suggests that myth within a story are more likely to make symbolic truth-claims.

### **Part Three – Myth defined in terms of symbolic truth-claims**

To point out the nature of these symbolic truth-claims, I will analyse the sensation of Cosmic Horror; the reasons why Lovecraft invented a new myth; Lovecraft’s definition of Weird Tales; and the “Cthulhu-Mythos”. Based on this I will demonstrate that firstly, myth can evoke a sensation that points to an experience in this world, and secondly, that the use of myth in stories can be characterized by imitation and development. Indeed, the symbolic nature of myth is not bound to a single, digestible meaning, but gives way to multiple meanings. It is this quality of myth that is often needed in stories, because myth captures in one image what “it feels like”.

#### **Weird Tales and Cosmic Horror**

One aspect which illustrates a prominent role myth has within stories can be identified by discussing Lovecraft’s definition of Weird Tales. In *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft explains that the aesthetic motive of “the weirdly horrible tales” (Lovecraft *Supernatural Horror in Literature* 12) does not seek to present an optimistic point of view, and thereby uplift the reader to a “suitable degree of smirking optimism” (12). Instead, the aesthetic motive is based on fear, more precisely, the fear of the unknown. According to Lovecraft, atmosphere is the essential quality that characterises Weird Tales:

A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present

[...] Atmosphere is the all-important thing, for the final criterion of authenticity is not the dovetailing of a plot but *the creation of a given sensation*. 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” (15–16 *my italics*)

From this it follows that Weird tales are not defined in terms of a plot line. Nor are they defined by certain content, such as gods, foreign places or ancient books. They are characterised by the prevailing mood or tone of the work. This prevailing mood or tone, in short the atmosphere, is one where the readers’ understanding of the world is disturbed (cf.15–16). Cosmic Horror cannot be explained away by natural means, because if it could, it would become meaningful to us, thus we become meaningful in it. This in turn would destroy the experience of Cosmic Horror. Secondly, the fact that there is no intention to teach or produce a social effect suggests that the use of myth within Weird Tales cannot function as a social charter. Instead, myth within Weird Tales evokes the sensation of Cosmic Horror and thereby forces the reader to experience the world in a different way. In short, the mythical element in Weird Tales is used to evoke the sensation of Cosmic Horror, and such horror expresses an experience in this world.

The reason why Lovecraft invented a new myth is coupled with the idea that myth within stories, (of which Weird Tales are an example), evoke a sensation, and express an experience in this world. David E. Schultz explains “From Microcosm To Macrocosm” the word Cosmic as used by Lovecraft expresses “a new-found realization of our place in the cosmos [...] Lovecraft forces us to shift the focus from the immediate and humanocentric to the point of view taken by the vast uncaring cosmos” (Schultz 208). The concept of Cosmicism evokes in the readers a type of fear, referred to as “Cosmic Horror”. In *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, Lovecraft states: “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* 12). In *A Dreamer and A Visionary* S.T. Joshi understands

myth as a narrative that provides an explanation of our existence, and our experience in this world. It is a way to make the unknown, known. In this sense, myth gives ones live meaning and makes one feel connected to the universe. Put differently, myth creates content that helps us understand our existence in this world (cf. Joshi 246). Secondly, Joshi claims that Lovecraft tries to subvert this process with his “pseudomythology” (246). However, I am arguing that Lovecraft’s main intention is not to subvert any existing mythology, but to create his own myth; because the existing pool of myths do not evoke the sensation of Cosmic Horror. That is to say, they do not evoke the sense of meaninglessness and disconnection. Thus, Lovecraft comes up with a myth that corresponds to this sensation and experience of this world.

The myth in “The Call of Cthulhu” represents “the unknown” and thus evokes Cosmic Horror. One mythical element that evokes the sensation of Cosmic Horror is Cthulhu itself. Indeed, the sculpture of Cthulhu captures this sensation in one image:

The aspect of the whole was abnormally life-like, and the more subtly fearful because *its source was so totally unknown*. Its vast, awesome, and incalculable age was unmistakable; *yet not one link* did it shew with any known type of art belonging to civilisation’s youth—or indeed to any other time. *Totally separate and apart*, its very material was *a mystery* [...] The characters along the base were equally baffling; and no member present [...] could form the least notion of even their remotest linguistic kinship. They, like the subject and the material, *belonged to something horribly remote and distinct from mankind as we know it*; something *frightfully* suggestive of old and unhallowed cycles of life *in which our world and our conceptions have no part*. (Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu” 80 *my italics*).

This description illustrates that the source of Cthulhu is totally unknown. Because it appears to move outside of time and space and no relation towards human kind can be established, it is a source of the unknown. The subject, as well as its material, and its language, are distinct. The use of words such as “frightfully”, “mystery”, and “horribly”, reinforce the sensation of Cosmic Horror that emanates from the sculpture/ image of Cthulhu.

## Cthulhu–Mythos – Myth as a collective achievement

The claim – that myth within stories evokes a sensation that points to an experience in this world – can be strengthened by showing how Lovecraft’s invention has grown and developed over time. The following section will focus on the notion that the symbolic nature of myth gives way to multiple meanings. It will be shown that myth can be understood as an ever–changing narrative that lives on imitation and development. Furthermore, the claim that myth–making is a contemporary phenomenon will be reinforced.

Lovecraft’s myth is not just an expression of his experience in this world, instead, it corresponds to an entire group of writers and readers. The mythical cycle underlying the series of *Weird Tales*, written by Lovecraft, his peers and contemporary authors, is referred to as the “Cthulhu Mythos”.<sup>3</sup> This paper assumes the standpoint that the “Cthulhu–Mythos” is not created by one author, but collectively. In *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the Cthulhu Mythos* Lin Carter points out: “the most unique thing about the Mythos is the fact that it spread beyond Lovecraft himself” (Carter XVIII). In addition, in *H.P. Lovecraft and the Cthulhu Mythos*, Robert M. Price distinguishes two stages of the Cthulhu–Mythos. The first stage is the one of Lovecraft and his contemporaries; the second stage is the expansion of the Mythos after Lovecraft’s death (cf.Price 85–95). This suggests that Lovecraft’s myth is not an idiosyncratic narrative, but a culturally embedded myth. In *The Age of Lovecraft* Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock give a brief summary of important collections that were created after Lovecraft’s death. This list of collection points to how Lovecraft’s myth has developed and transformed, and also points to its contemporary significance.<sup>4</sup> From this it

<sup>3</sup> The term “Cthulhu–Mythos” was invented and prompted by August Derleth. (cf. *The Age of Lovecraft* 10–11)

<sup>4</sup> “Important collections include *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* (1969), with contributions by Robert E. Howard, Brian Lumley, Robert Bloch, Clark Ashton Smith, and August Derleth; likewise, *New Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* (1980) includes works by Stephen King, Ramsey Campbell, Lumley, and other writers claiming Lovecraft’s influence. Similar collections have appeared regularly over the past twenty years, including *The New Lovecraft Circle* (1996), edited by Robert M. Price and featuring stories by Campbell, Lin Carter, Alan Dean Foster, and Thomas Ligotti; *Black Wings of Cthulhu* (2010), edited by Joshi and including Caitlín R. Kiernan, Donald R. Burleson, Brian Stableford, and Philip Haldeman; *Lovecraft Unbound* (2009), edited by Ellen Datlow with fiction by Joyce Carol Oates; and *New Cthulhu: The Recent Weird* (2011), edited by Paula Guran and featuring contributions from Neil Gaiman, China Miéville, Kim Newman, and Cherie

follows that there is no original version.

### Cross-referencing

In *The Age of Lovecraft* Sederholm and Weinstock observe that the themes and influences of Lovecraft are popular today, and assume an intellectual as well as cultural influence. Indeed, they describe his influence as a cultural moment and claim that we are living in the “Age of Lovecraft” (Sederholm and Weinstock cf.3). What is important from their observations for the purpose of this paper is the fact that the “Cthulhu–Mythos” is considered a cultural moment. This suggests that something about Lovecraft’s perception of the world and his stories have broken free, moved outside of time, and the questions, anxieties and desires Lovecraft addresses point to a universal experience. This observation is linked to the idea that myth is a collective achievement and has no author. To illustrate this claim in more detail, I will discuss the fact that other authors not only participated in Lovecraft’s myth, but also came up with their own additional mythical elements. Thereby the myth of Cthulhu and the Great Old Ones grew and expanded.

There is a further point to be made about the Cthulhu–Mythos, namely, the fact that Lovecraft and his contemporaries used to refer to each other’s works within their stories.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that Lovecraft is both writer and reader of the Cthulhu–Mythos. I agree with Javet's claim in *The Pen(s) That Never Stops Writing*, that it “is only when Lovecraft, the myth–teller was joined by others that it became a common creation” (Javet 39). This web of cross–references gradually expanded, and in this sense the “Cthulhu–Mythos” not only grew but became a collective creation.

Building on the idea that myth expresses a universal experience the following

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Priest. Novels that participate in the Cthulhu Mythos include Fred Chappell’s novel *Dagon* (1987), a book that successfully blends Lovecraftian themes with the grit of Southern Gothic; *Cthulhu’s Reign* by Darrell Schweitzer (2010); and *That Which Should Not Be* by Brett J. Talley (which also features Cthulhu on the cover, 2011).” (*The Age of Lovecraft* 11)

<sup>5</sup> In *The Pen(s) That Never Stops Writing*, Javet states that Lovecraft and several authors discussed the idea of referring to each other’s works within their stories: “Among them Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961), Robert Ervin Howard (1906-1936), Robert Bloch (1917-1994), Frank Belknap Long (1901-1994), August Derleth (1909-1971), Donald Wandrei (1908-1987), or Henry Kuttner (1915-1958)” (20).

paragraph illustrates that it is an ever-changing narrative. This will also give some indications why myth-making is a contemporary phenomenon. When it comes to myth-making one needs to focus on the writer and the reader, because any myth-writer is also a myth-reader. I agree once more with Javet, who argues: “For the readers, there was not a single creative entity behind it but a multiple one, with various versions. There is not a good or a bad version, a wrong or a right one; there are as much truths as there are versions” (41). Content is added, some ideas are developed and/ or transformed, different versions and interpretations emerge. In this sense, I would argue that the experience a myth expresses may transform depending on the myth-reader, who then in turn writes his own myth. This suggests that the truth-value of myth is not to be understood literally, but can be found in the relation between writer and reader.

As mentioned above, myth is characterised by this collaborative notion. Myth does not tell an individual fantasy, but expresses a universal experience. However, the shared experience is still unique to each individual. To put it in other words, each individual experiences the same sensation, but some individuals might be more impressed by a certain aspect or quality of the sensation. Whereas one writer may stress one particular aspect or quality in their writing, another writer may add an entirely new element to the myth. Thus myth in stories can open up meaning, and give ways to use it, reapply it, and add foundations.

To sum up, one striking occurrence in the “Cthulhu-Mythos” was the fact the authors did cross-reference each other in their works. Each myth writer is also a myth reader, and the myth is understood as an ever-changing narrative, that transforms each time it is used in a story. Since myth is understood as a collective achievement, it has no identifiable author.

This leads to the following assumptions: If the truth-claims myth makes are understood symbolically, myth opens up different interpretations, and establishes multiple meanings. This is linked to the fact that myth within stories can evoke a sensation that points

to an experience in this world. More precisely, it gives an image of an experience. It also demonstrates the idea that myth is a collective achievement that is characterized by imitation, transformation and development. From this it follows that the use of myth within stories can point to a human need felt to express a sensation that cannot be articulated by means of ordinary language. Thus, as long as there is a human need felt to express a sensation that points to an experience in this world, where ordinary language fails, myth is a way to express that meaning.

## Conclusion

Using H.P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" and the "Cthulhu-Mythos" as a case study, this paper examined the relation between myth and story, in particular, it shed light on one prominent role myth within stories can assume. Myth can be used to evoke a sensation and thereby point to an experience in this world. This is attributed to a human need felt to express something that transgresses ordinary language.

Firstly, this paper discussed myth in terms of content and secondly, in terms of the truth-claims myth makes. In terms of content, it has been established that myth centres on supernatural beings; tells of a time before human existence; refers to unknown geographical places; and informs the religious beliefs and practices of a certain group of people. This part gave some indication of the difference between myth and story and provided a way to detect the mythical elements within a story. Following Lincoln's framework in *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, the second part defined myth in terms of its literal truth-claims. The essential feature that distinguishes myth from other narratives is its authority. Lincoln's framework has then been applied to Lovecraft's short story "The Call of Cthulhu". Thereby it has been shown that for the characters, myth works as a social charter. By contrast, this is not the case for the readers. In view of this, the third part demonstrated a prominent role myth plays within stories if the truth-claims myth makes are understood symbolically. Focusing on

the sensation of Cosmic Horror and “The Cthulhu–Mythos”, it has been demonstrated that myth in stories is used as a way to evoke a sensation and express experience in this world. Accordingly, myth does not help to shape and transform society, but mirrors a universal experience. As a result, this paper has demonstrated that myth within stories can answer a human need felt to express something that goes beyond the use of ordinary language.

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