NECRONOMICON
FROM FICTION TO FALSIFYING HISTORY
A STUDY OF A CONCEPT BY H.P. LOVECRAFT

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Cover image: Illuminatus 1 (1978) by H.R. Giger
PREFACE

Nine years of study and work are before you, accompanied by a lot of thinking and one bright idea. After I disapproved many subjects for my thesis, being much too broad, a visit by my second cousin brought me to a literary study of Lovecraft’s *Necronomicon*, a work of fiction considered real by many readers of Lovecraft’s work. Although my thesis was interactive (a CD Rom accompanied my thesis), this online translated version has more similarities with a book than an interactive thesis. In the 2017 version there are also some additions made, like the Tyson Necronomicon which was published *after* I graduated university. It doesn’t affect the conclusion written to this thesis. Furthermore it is a representation of the thesis I delivered to the University in 2004. This means that it is not the original work, I have taken the liberty to add some information, but also to leave some things out. I have decided not to include the summary, the notes and the sources. This is a free online sample which can be requested through my websites. It is free in a sense that it still is my intellectual property and publishing from this thesis will be in violation with my copyright. You are permitted to use this thesis in the privacy of your home, for reading. If you want to quote from this thesis, you are obliged to name me as a source, and I trust you to do so.

Furthermore I would like to take the opportunity to thank a few people. In the first place I would like to thank Kees ‘t Hart, whose supervision was often a consolation, but who also was able to criticize me harshly. It helped, concerning the final result.
The second person I owe thanks is Timo Taal, for visiting the stage play *Azathoth* in Edinburgh, which lead to the discussion on Lovecraft and eventually brought me this subject.
The following persons have helped me in various ways with this thesis: Alwin Berkhout, Liddy Ackerman, Fred Henneke, the nameless bibliothecary of the British Library and the many people with whom I have corresponded on my research.
A special word of thanks goes to Sjaak Paridaens, whose unusual perspective quieted my nerves on graduating. If you ever read this thesis Sjaak: ‘alas, it is too late’.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is the Necronomicon?

In 1922 Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) writes a short story called The Hound in which a book appears multiple times which will act like a magnet on the readers of Lovecraft’s fiction: the Necronomicon. This book is a literary means in at least nineteen stories, and will have a great following among other authors who work in the spirit of Lovecraft. These stories are called the Cthulhu Mythos. During his lifetime Lovecraft receives letters of people who ask about this illustrious book. He is very meticulous in answering these letters and many writers get the answer that the Necronomicon is his own creation, as well as the author of the book, the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. Lovecraft has the ambition to write the book but doesn’t think of himself as capable. In his letters he writes that he hopes one day someone will take this burden upon him. The myth is born.

It remains a fact that Necronomicon is a work of fiction. There is no evidence for the existence of this book, notwithstanding what some uncareful researchers think. During the seventies of the Twentieth Century a number of books appear in print, calling themselves the one and true Necronomicon. Even worse: there are so many versions published, it becomes clear that Lovecraft created a demand which is supplied from the market: publishers smell cash and want to cheat the gullible Lovecraft-fans out of their money.

But the book starts to find it’s way into other cultural phenomena. The Necronomicon is a plot idea in movies like The Dunwich Horror (1970), Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn (1989), Army of Darkness (1993) and the movie Necronomicon (1994). Many heavy metal bands have chosen Lovecraft as a source of inspiration for their lyrics and during the nineties we see many bands with songs based on one of the falsified editions of the Necronomicon. Even in role-playing-games (RPG) we see games based on Lovecraft, as even in computer games, when a game called Necronomicon is developed for the Sony Playstation. In the world of comics Necronomicon is a much used plot-idea, like in the comic series De Rode Ridder (the Red Knight, a Belgian/Dutch series of adventures by a knight named Johan) where the bad guys use the Necronomicon for their personal gain.

In short: this fictional book has an undeniable influence on western culture. The authenticity of the Necronomicon has already been a subject of study by Daniel Harms and John Wisdom Gonce III with their book The Necronomicon Files. What hasn’t been studied is how this fictional work developed into a real existing book. That is the subject of my thesis.

1.2 Hypothesis

In what way have sources, writings and explanations by Lovecraft and others played a role in the maintenance of the idea that Necronomicon is a real existing book?
1.3 The importance of my thesis for Cultural Studies

This thesis has four important aspects for Cultural Studies. At first I research the author Lovecraft and his creation *Necronomicon*. A lot of research has been done on Lovecraft the human being, but not into his works of fiction. Except for a research into the attraction of one of his plot ideas, my research is for a significant part on the genre *horror*. This genre hasn’t been studied too often in literary genre history. In the third place Lovecraft has been an underrated author: he appears to be a main influence in the work of contemporary authors like Stephen King, Ramsey Campbell and Brian Lumley. But an author like Hubert Lampo (a Belgian author) is very enthusiastic about Lovecraft. Fourth my thesis offers a detailed report on how history can be falsified: how *Necronomicon* grew from a fictional idea into a printed book.

1.4 Method and execution

The method is executed on literary and archival research. I used the following sources:
1. The stories of Lovecraft in which the *Necronomicon* plays a part
2. The stories of other authors mentioning the *Necronomicon*
3. Lovecraft’s letters
4. The *Necronomicon’s* published mainly during the seventies of the Twentieth Century
5. The internet

Most people who believe in the existence of the *Necronomicon* are fans of Lovecraft’s fiction. So I will look how Lovecraft brings the *Necronomicon* to the reader’s attention. Does he supply much information, or not? Does he mention it along other existing books or persons? How did Lovecraft describe the *Necronomicon* making people believe this book truly existed?

Two other sources outside of Lovecraft’s fiction are the stories written by other authors and his letter exchange. The people who write about the *Necronomicon* aren’t only influenced by Lovecraft but in some cases they are contemporaries. The contemporaries of Lovecraft have a similar writing style and Lovecraft corresponded with these people about his ideas. People who discovered Lovecraft in a later date and started writing in his style will be left outside of the scope of this thesis. They simply work on a concept laid out by Lovecraft. The correspondence can be cut into two categories: correspondence with colleague authors and people who ask Lovecraft for information about the *Necronomicon*. I will question both sides.

The *Necronomicon* in her many printed versions is a product of the belief in the existence of this book. I will look into the ways people have themselves lead by Lovecraft, or came to this book by other means.

The internet is one of the most important sources to research the belief in the *Necronomicon*. There are many websites about the *Necronomicon*, there are bulletin boards concerning Lovecraft and even about the *Necronomicon*. There are websites of high quality informing the reader on Lovecraft and there are sites who supply correct information about *Necronomicon* and the forgeries. All these sources may shed a light on the falsification of history.
1.5 Structure of the thesis

In the following chapter I will sketch an image of Lovecraft’s life, his fiction and his most important works, the so-called Lovecraft mythos. Chapter three is an analysis of Lovecraft’s work concerning the Necronomicon. I will explain how it is used as a plot-idea, the literary tradition of Lovecraft, his correspondence and the Necronomicon in the works of his followers. The fourth chapter will deal with the Necronomicons as they appeared throughout the seventies and eighties. The fifth chapter deals with the debate concerning the Necronomicon, believers and non-believers and the role of the internet in this. Chapter six is the conclusion in which I will answer the hypothesis.
This chapter is about the life of Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937). The most known source is *Lovecraft: a biography* by L. Sprague de Camp (1976), but where Sprague de Camp loses himself in speculation, I also consulted the online biography by S.T. Joshi at www.scriptorium.com. Joshi is one of the most known Lovecraft-scholars, and a well known authority. In the second paragraph we will look into Lovecraft’s works and the third paragraph will deal with a portion of his work, the so-called *Lovecraft mythos*.

### 2.1 A brief biography of H.P. Lovecraft

Howard Phillips Lovecraft is born on 20 August 1890 as the son of Winfield Scott Lovecraft, a trade merchant, and Sarah Susan Phillips, daughter of an industrial from Providence. Until the Lovecraft-family can build their own house, they board with several people. In 1893 Winfield Lovecraft becomes insane because of a neglected syphilis infection, and is admitted at Butler Hospital. Sarah Susan Phillips moves with the young Lovecraft into her parental home with her father Whipple van Buren Phillips and her two sisters in a colonial house in Providence. They concern themselves with raising young Howard. Whipple Phillips has a broad cultural interest and an enormous library. Howard is able to speak at a young age and can read and write at the age of four. He doesn’t attend school, but receives education from his grandfather, aunts and mother. At the age of five he learns about the *Arabian Nights* and is so impressed he declares ‘himself Muslim, designs an oriental corner in his bedroom and uses the pseudonym of Abdul Alhazred. In February 1937 he writes to Harry O’Fischer:

> The name Abdul Alhazred is one which some adult (I can’t recall who) devised for me when I was 5 years old & eager to be an Arab after reading the Arabian Nights.

During his youth Lovecraft will get acquainted with the Classics and the Romantics, but in 1898, the year his father died, he discovers the author who will influence him deeply:

> Then I struck EDGAR ALLAN POE!! It was my downfall and at the age of eight I saw the blue firmament of Argos and Sicily darkened by the miasmal exhalations of the tomb.

Lovecraft starts writing stories himself and develops an interest in natural sciences, foremost Chemistry and astronomy. Due to this he starts to publish his own scientific journals, handwritten copies which he multiplies through the use of carbon paper. Around 1901 *The Scientific Gazette* and *The Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy* appear. In the meanwhile business of Whipple Phillips is going bad because of a bad investment in a dam. When he passes away in 1904 the daughters sell the house to pay the debts. Lovecraft and his mother move into smaller quarters. And to make matters worse: Lovecraft has to attend school. He isn’t happy in this time of his life: not only does he display suicidal traits, his mother appeared to be insane as well.
During his young adulthood Lovecraft writes letters to magazines like Argosy and attracts the attention by Edward F. Daas of the United Amateur Press Association (UAPA). The UAPA is a national congregation of amateur authors who publish their articles and stories in amateur magazines. Lovecraft also becomes a member of the great competitor of the UAPA, the National Amateur Press Association (NAPA), through which he meets various people and becomes friends with them. They will be the source of his massive correspondence. His activities inside these organisations will be the inspiration for writing fiction. During one of the conventions of the NAPA in 1921 Lovecraft meets Sonia Haft Greene, a woman he admires greatly.

To provide in his meager life support Lovecraft resorts to ghost-writing: writing stories, articles and other texts for people who publish it under their own name. Known clients of Lovecraft are Adolphe de Castro, David van Bush and Harry Houdini. Lovecraft never had a real job.

In 1924 Lovecraft marries Sonia Haft Greene and moves to New York. The marriage doesn’t last long. In 1925 he moves to a one room appartment in Brooklyn, where he doesn’t consider himself happy in between all these ‘foreigners’, and in 1926 his aunts finance his return to Providence. Once returned in his birthplace he continues his work as a ghost writer and under his own name he publishes his most well known stories: The Call of Cthulhu (1926), The Case of Charles Dexter Ward (1927) and The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath (1928). Sonia Haft Greene tried to repair her marriage by suggesting to start a hat-shop in Providence. The aunts of Lovecraft disapprove of the idea, as a woman should not be the main provider according to their aristocratic ideals. Lovecraft cherished these aristocratic ideals during his life.

From 1930-1935 Lovecraft travels a lot in the USA. He has the great desire to visit England, but this wish will never come true. In 1936 Lovecraft has a problem with his intestines, but thinks it is because of the grippe. When he visits a doctor in 1937 he appears to be suffering from intestinal cancer, and the disease has spread itself. On 15 March 1937 Howard Phillips Lovecraft dies at the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital in Providence. After his death his correspondence friend August Derleth has founded a publishing house, Arkham House, which will dedicate itself to publishing Lovecraft’s fiction, and in 1939 the first anthology The Outsider and Others appears. In 1977 a group of admirers of Lovecraft collects money to place a tombstone on his anonymous grave with the inscription I AM PROVIDENCE.

2.2 Lovecraft’s fiction

The American researcher S.T. Joshi is known as an authority on Lovecraft. In his book A Subtler Magick. The writings and Philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft (Gilette, 1982) he distinguishes between five periods: early fiction (1905-1921), the Dunsanian Tales (1919-1921), Regional horror (1926-1931) and two stages of his Major Fiction (1926-1930) and 1930-1935, and last but not least his revisions and collaborations. These stages are not bound to a certain time, but appear to run
through each other. These are clusters of stories which fit into each other concerning a certain theme.

2.2.1 Early Fiction
Joshi distinguishes between the very first youthful endeavors into storytelling like *The Beast in the Cave* (1905) and *The Alchemist* (1908) but also the first supernatural horror stories like *Dagon* (1917) and *The Tomb* (1917). There are various opinions on the early works of Lovecraft. Fans on bulletin boards are often quite enthusiastic about every story Lovecraft writes, researchers appear to be far more reserved. Sprague de Camp acknowledges qualities, but considers this period as one of experimentation. He adds to that:

In many of them however, are contained nuclei -in theme, conception or image- of those later masterpieces which give him his well-deserved place in weird fiction.

Lovecraft doesn’t only write stories in this period. He experiments with the so-called *prose poem*: a prosaic text with a framework of poetry. For example you have *Nyarlathotep* (1920), *Ex Oblivione* (1921) and *What the Moon Brings* (1923). Besides these works Lovecraft publishes a number of essays in various amateur magazines.

2.2.2 Dunsanian Tales
These stories are inspired by Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, the eighteenth Baron Dunsany (1878-1957). Alongside his Irish tales Lord Dunsany writes in the fantasy genre. His influence on fantasy-authors like Ursula Le Guinn and J.R.R. Tolkien is undeniable. Today the name Lord Dunsany appears to be unknown. He is responsible for some of the best read books at the beginning of the Twentieth Century: *The Gods of Pega* (1905), *Time and the Gods* (1906), *The Sword of Welleran* (1908), but some poetry, stageplays, essays and reviews as well. The attraction of Lovecraft towards Dunsany is the explicit division between reality and the dreamworld. Most of Dunsany’s stories play in the dreamworld. Lovecraft writes about ten stories with a significant Dunsanian influence. One of them is quite paradoxal: *Polaris* from 1918. This story is written a year before Lovecraft learns about the work of Dunsany. Joshi wonders rightfully if Lovecraft borrows themes from Dunsany he simply could have thought of himself. In the later works of Dunsany the stories are taking place more and more in reality (being the real world instead of the dreamworld) which causes Lovecraft to lose interest.

2.2.3 Regional Horror
The term *Regional Horror* makes one suspect that Lovecraft starts to write horror stories about his own region, Providence and in a broader sense the state of Rhode Island. But this is not what Joshi means. The term is quite problematic. Joshi doesn’t define *Regional Horror*, but considers this a term where Lovecraft’s stories are taking place in a topographic and recognizable decorum. The story *The Music of Erich Zann* (1921) is set in Paris, *The Hound* (1922) partly in Great Britain and partly in The Netherlands and *Herbert West Re-Animator* (1921-1922) is set in
Massachusetts, but in a fictional town called Arkham (later identified as Salem). The stories of Lovecraft up to 1925 are for a part set in New York and have racist undertones, symbolizing the disgust Lovecraft felt for the Big Apple. On his return to Providence in 1926 he blossoms again. His letters show excitement, literally shouting praise for being back in his town of birth. Lovecraft starts with what Joshi calls his *Major Fiction*.

### 2.2.4 Major Fiction 1926-1930

An important feature of Lovecraft’s *Major Fiction* is the increasing length of his stories compared to his earlier fiction. His first *Major Fiction* story is *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* (1926), showing more of a kinship with the Dunsanian tales. The first important change in narrative follows with *The Call of Cthulhu* from 1926. Lovecraft weaves three storylines neatly into one compact narrative. Lovecraft’s stories are getting longer and longer, regarding the series of stories he writes after *The Call of Cthulhu*. Containing fifty thousand words makes *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* the longest story Lovecraft ever wrote. Around 1927 he tries to get a book of his short stories published, but the publishing houses rather work with a novella than an anthology. Why Lovecraft never submitted *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* is up until now a mystery. He continues his lengthy stories with *The Colour out of Space* (1927), which most critics consider his best work. Lovecraft starts to work more on his pseudo-mythology. His best known story is written in 1928: *The Dunwich Horror*. In 1945 it has been worked on as a hear-play for the American Armed Forces in Europe, and in 1970 a movie was made based upon this story. The last story in this period of Major Fiction is the atmospheric *The Whisperer in Darkness* (1930). This story was translated to the cinematic universe by the H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society in 2011.

Joshi sees three ways in which protagonists in Lovecraft’s stories deal with the supernatural: in *The Call of Cthulhu* there is no mention of good and evil, the narrative is beyond the conception of good and evil; the *Colour out of Space* has an evil which no one actually understands and *The Dunwich Horror* has a clear diabolic character and a heroic opponent. *The Whisperer in Darkness* unites all these versions (beyond good and evil, the evil we don’t understand and the classic conception of evil) in one story. Lovecraft explained his view on the evil in his stories not as something the monster chooses to do, but being totally indifferent to our suffering. All these stories are published in *Weird Tales*. Lovecraft will write nine more stories after 1930, in a timeframe of five years. A small encore will follow in 1937 with the story *The Evil Clergyman*.

### 2.2.5 Major Fiction 1931-1935

The second Major Fiction period of Lovecraft is one of decay. Between 1935 and 1937, the year of his passing, he doesn’t publish an original work but submerged himself into revisions and collaborations with other authors. Another change is Lovecraft’s ongoing flirt with the Science Fiction genre. The story *At the Mountains of Madness* is a famous example: instead of the supernatural as a theme, Lovecraft chooses for the unknown as the antagonist. This makes him enter the field of science fiction. Typical Lovecraft traits do surface in the story *The Shadow over*
Innsmouth, although it contains one new feature: the action scene. This is strange for Lovecraft, as he thinks action is a weakness in literature. He tries to create a certain atmosphere and considers action as an easy way out. When writing *The Dreams in the Witch-House* Lovecraft starts to complain about the declining quality of his fiction. This might be caused by the rejections he continuously receives from *Weird Tales*, not so much because of the quality, but because of the length. *Weird Tales* suffered from the Great Depression as well and can’t afford publishing long stories anymore. Lovecraft will write three more stories: *The Thing on the Doorstep* (1933), *The Shadow out of Time* (1934) and *The Haunter of the Dark* (1935).

2.2.6 Revisions and Collaborations

As a means of income Lovecraft resorts to ghost-writing and revising other authors’ stories. Most of the time his clients come to him with a plot, characters and setting and Lovecraft devises a story around it. This story is published under the client’s name, although in many cases it is actually Lovecraft who wrote it. Many critics think to see Lovecraft’s hand in stories he had nothing to do with, but which appear to be very clever imitations. For the subject of this thesis four revisions are important: *Medusa’s Coil* (1930) with Zealia Bishop, *The Horror in the Museum* (1932) and *Out of the Aeons* (1933) with Hazel Heald and *The Diary of Alonzo Typer* (1935) with William Lumley. In some of the cases Lovecraft gets paid for his revision-works, but according to Joshi he charges too little. In many cases Lovecraft doesn’t want to get paid because he wants to support the author’s talent or he owed the author a favor. In some cases Lovecraft collaborated with other authors like E. Hoffman Price on *Through the Gates of the Silver Key*. Certain stories are advertised as collaborations between Lovecraft and, for example, August Derleth, but no collaboration took place. Derleth based himself on notes by Lovecraft and published these stories postumously and can’t be considered as a collaboration.

2.3 The Lovecraft mythos

A part of the stories by Lovecraft are known as the *Cthulhu mythos*. This is a quite problematic term. Joshi speaks of *Lovecraft mythos*, as Cthulhu isn’t the most important creature from his pseudo-mythology, the emphasis is more often on Azatoth and Yog Sothoth. Lovecraft never coined the term, he speaks of Cthulhuism or Yog Sothothery. Responsibility must be given to August Derleth, who started to make a mess of the mythos by adding a pantheon of *Elder Gods* who oppose Lovecraft’s *Great Old Ones*. I follow Joshi’s use of the term *Lovecraft mythos*, although many authors still use the obsolete *Cthulhu mythos*. Daniel Harms, writer of among others *The Necronomicon files* and *Encyclopedia Cthulhiana* defines a *Cthulhu myth* on his website:

I tend to define a “Cthulhu Mythos” story as one which included an imaginary element (character, god, book, place) from another accepted Mythos stories (springing originally from Lovecraft’s stories which include either Cthulhu or the *Necronomicon*). Thus, if story A mentioned one of Lovecraft’s creations from a story mentioning one or both of these key elements, it would be a Cthulhu Mythos story. If story B mention an element from Story A, it too becomes a Mythos story, and so forth. I exclude parodic material and those based on elements which turn up much
more often in non-mythos fiction (i.e. Sherlock Holmes is not Mythos, though he does turn up in Mythos tales), but I include other media such as poems, pseudo-scholarly essays, occult works, television shows, radio dramatizations and gaming material, in my definition.

This is a limited definition: only the names of Cthulhu and Necronomicon make a story a Cthulhu Mythos story. Both are inventions of Lovecraft, justifying the term Lovecraft-mythos. I would like to expand this definition: all the fictional deities from the Necronomicon should be added (Azathoth, Shub Niggurath, Hastur, Nyarlathotep, Yog Sothoth and eventually Cthulhu), all fictional places like Innsmouth, Arkham, Kingsport and Dunwich and the mention of the Miskatonic river and Miskatonic University make a story Lovecraft Mythos. Next to Lovecraft other authors also added gods to the pantheon. Clark Ashton Smith invented Tsathoggua and Robert E. Howard Kathulos (see the phonetic resemblance with Cthulhu). Lovecraft prefers ‘unspeakable words’ like the ones from his story The Call of Cthulhu:

Ph‘nglui mglw nafh Cthulhu R’Lyeh wgah’nagl fhtagn.

Possibly Lovecraft was influenced by the mythology of Toltecs and Aztecs, whose gods also have hard to pronounce names like Quetzalcoatl, Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli, just to name a few.

The Necronomicon is hardly the only book about which is written in the Lovecraft Mythos. More manuscripts are mentioned. The definition of a Lovecraft Mythos story needs to be extended and precised. A Lovecraft myth also mentions the Pnakotic Manuscripts, De Vermis Mysteriis by Ludvig Prinn, the Unaussprechliche Kulten by Friedrich von Junzt, the Book of Eibon and Comte d’Erlette’s Cultes des Goules. When we analyze how many stories of Lovecraft carry these elements, we come out at a large part of his oeuvre. Lovecraft creates a mythology, a sphere outside of our known reality populated by wondrous beings, horrible gods and forbidden manuscripts.

A Lovecraft mythos story isn’t bound to all these elements. When a story mentions the city Arkham but not the Necronomicon, it still is a Lovecraft Mythos story. One of the elements is necessary, not all of them. In short: Joshi’s term Lovecraft Mythos is apparently the correct one. From this point of view the prose poem Nyarlathotep (1919) appears to be the first Lovecraft myth. Many consider The Nameless City as the first Lovecraft myth, because of the explicit presence of the author of the Necronomicon: Abdul Alhazred. An oversight of all the Mythos stories isn’t necessary, but I want to give you a list of all the stories that mention the Necronomicon. These stories will be our guide through this thesis. The following table of Lovecraft Myths mentions the Necronomicon or it’s author Abdul Alhazred.
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>The Nameless City</td>
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<td>1922</td>
<td>The Hound</td>
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<td>1923</td>
<td>The Festival</td>
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<td>1926</td>
<td>The Descendant (never finished)</td>
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<td>1926</td>
<td>The Call of Cthulhu</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>The Case of Charles Dexter Ward</td>
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<td>1927</td>
<td>History of the Necronomicon</td>
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<td>1928</td>
<td>The Dunwich Horror</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>The Whisperer in Darkness</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>Medusa’s Coil*</td>
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<td>1931</td>
<td>At the Mountains of Madness</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>Dreams in the Witch-House</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>The Horror in the Museum*</td>
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<td>1933</td>
<td>Through the Gates of the Silver Key*</td>
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<td>1933</td>
<td>The Thing on the Doorstep</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>The Diary of Alonzo Typer*</td>
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Stories marked with an * are revisions, collaborations or ghost-writings.
The Lovecraft Family. To the left Sarah Susan Phillips, in the center young Howard and to the right Winfield Scott Lovecraft. The reason young Howard is dressed like a girl has everything to do with his mother’s wish to have a daughter.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft as a young boy
Lovecraft in his late twenties

A rare photograph of Lovecraft and his wife Sonia Haft Greene.
Howard Lovecraft in his forties.

Lovecraft in the doorway of his 66 College Street Apartment
CHAPTER THREE  THE NECRONOMICON IN FICTION AND LETTERS

In this chapter we will look at the Necronomicon in its original context, as the brainchild of H.P. Lovecraft. First I will study the Necronomicon in Lovecraft’s fiction and explain this with the example of four stories. The second paragraph explains the literary context we can categorize Lovecraft in. The third paragraph shines a light on possible inspirational sources for the Necronomicon. The fourth paragraph will look into Lovecraft’s correspondence, considered by many as his greatest literary achievement. The last paragraph deals with other authors who have written Lovecraft Mythos. This chapter is meant to create a context in which the Necronomicon is brought into existence as unwritten classic, and is the foundation for the next chapter, where I describe how Necronomicon is called ‘into objective existence’, not so much by Lovecraft, but by some clever marketeers.

3.1 The Necronomicon in Lovecraft’s fictional work

Lovecraft wrote a total of nineteen stories in his Lovecraft Mythos cycle in which the Necronomicon or its author Abdul Alhazred plays a part. One of these stories is called History of the Necronomicon and presents a chronological representation of whatever ‘happened’ with the Necronomicon. According to many authors, among them Daniel Harms, it is filled with inaccuracies. Necronomicon apparently was translated from Greek in Latin by Olaus Wormius, or Ole Worm, in 1228. It would still take threehundred years before Ole Worm was born. In this ‘essay’ Lovecraft tells us the original Arab title of the book, Kitab Al Azif. Lovecraft has borrowed this from the notes of Samuel Henly about William Beckford’s History of the Caliph Vathek, as he wrote to Clark Ashton Smith on 27 november 1927 and Harry O’ Fischer in February 1937:

It was not until later that I took the trouble to hunt up a genuine Arabic title (Al Azif – a word which I found in Henley’s learned notes to Vathek. I use the term correctly though at second hand) for old Abdul’s original version of the Byzantinely translated Νεκρονομικον.....

It will go too far to review all the nineteen stories, so I selected four stories from four different periods in Lovecraft’s career: The Festival (1923), The Dunwich Horror (1928), The Dreams in the Witch-House (1932) and The Haunter of the Dark (1935). Through these four stories I would like to make clear how the Necronomicon developed during the evolution of his pseudo-mythology.

3.1.1 The Festival

In 1923 Lovecraft writes The Festival, officially the second story in which he uses Necronomicon as a plot idea. In The Hound (1922) the book is scarcely mentioned, in The Festival it get’s a more pivotal role. Two aspects stand out about this story: the describing, analytical mood and the total lack of dialogue. The story starts with a citation of Lactantius, the First-Century apologist: Efficiut Daemones, ut quae non sunt, sic tamen quasi sint, conspicienda hominibus
exhibeant (Demons have the ability to cause people to see things that do not exist as if they did exist). The protagonist has to come to the small town Kingsport to take part in an annual ritual performed around Christmas time. On his arrival at the house where he has to partake in the ritual, he is left in a room with a number of books. The protagonist looks at the books and lists them as he sees them:

[…] and when I sat down to read I saw that the books were hoary and mouldy, and that they included old Morryster’s wild Marvell’s of Science, the terrible Saducismus Triumphatus of Joseph Glanvil, published in 1681, the shocking Daemonolatreia of Remigius, printed in 1595 at Lyons [sic] and worst of all, the unmentionable Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, in Olaus Wormius’ forbidden translation; a book which I had never seen, but of which I heard monstrous things whispered.

This quote sees existing books being mixed with non-existing books. Strikingly enough the existing books Saducismus Triumphatus and Demonolatreia are dated, and Marvell’s of Science (a book invented by Ambrose Bierce) and Necronomicon are not. There is more information given about the Necronomicon: this is the forbidden Latin translation by Olaus Wormius. This should date the book around 1608, were it not that Lovecraft stated that Wormius lived threehundred years earlier. The Necronomicon is the most horrible book for the protagonist. He opens the book and starts to read:

So I tried to read, and soon became tremulously absorbed by something I found in that accursed Necronomicon; a thought and a legend too hideous for sanity or consciousness, but I disliked it when I fancied I heard the closing of one of the windows that the settle faced, as if it had been stealthily opened.

At the end of the story the protagonist will share what he has read. There are passages in the Necronomicon that could do damage to one’s sanity. In the two aforementioned quotes we see two other remarkable features of Lovecraft’s writing style: the much criticized use of adjectives. Mary Heijboer Barbas writes in the magazine Bres 88 from 1981:

I don’t consider Lovecraft a great writer -he suffers too much of what our eastern neighbors (Germans, W.T.) call Adjektivseligkeit. He is very keen on the use of words like ‘monstrous’, ‘abhorrent’, ‘hideous cannibals’, ‘hellish whinny’, ‘sacrilegious stench’, ‘toad-like blasphemies’ that he seems like a maddened dervish […]

Heijboer-Barbas didn’t think of this herself, according to the following quote of Colin Wilson’s The Strength to Dream:

Lovecraft hurls in the adjectives – ‘monstrous’, ‘slithering’, ‘thunder-crazed’- like a literary dervish who gibbers as he spins.

His biographer L. Sprague de Camp isn’t keen on this literary means as well:

Stuffing a narrative with adjectives and adverbs like “uncanny”, “hellish”, “weirdly”, “eldritch” and “sinister” was Lovecraft’s worst fictional vice. Such rhetorical extravagance may impress the naïve reader and cajole him into a receptive mood, but a more sophisticated one is irritated by it.
And in *The Saturday Review of Literature* of December 1949 Fletcher Pratt writes in his article *Science Fiction & Fantasy 1949* the following:

[...] not only is it a far better story as than anything Lovecraft ever produced but it goes straight as a string from beginning to destination, without any of the long passages of undigested and piled adjectives in which Lovecraft so frequently indulged.

The story of *The Festival* continues with an Old Man entering the room to collect the *Necronomicon* for use in the ritual. The protagonist follows him to a cave, with a subterranean stream. He sees the following:

At certain stages of the ritual they did grovelling obeisance, especially when he held above his head that abhorrent *Necronomicon* he had taken with him; and I shared all the obeisances because I had been summoned to this Festival by the writings of my forefathers.

When flying creatures appear, the protagonist jumps into the subterranean stream. He awakens the next day in a hospital. From this hospital he tries everything to get a glimpse of the *Necronomicon*:

I liked it there, for the doctors were broad-minded, and even lent me their influence in obtaining the carefully sheltered copy of Alhazred’s objectionable *Necronomicon* from the library of Miskatonic University.

Lovecraft reveals one of the libraries who keep the *Necronomicon* under lock and key, were it not that *Miskatonic University* is a fictional university. The protagonist reads what shook him up so badly in the University library:

The nethermost caverns [...] are not for the fathoming of eyes that see; for their marvels are strange and terrific. Cursed the ground where dead thoughts live new and oddly bodied, and evil the mind that is held by no head. Wisely did Ibn Schacabao say, that happy is the tomb where no wizard hath lain, and happy the town at night whose wizards are all ashes. For it is of old rumour that the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from this charnel clay, but fats and instructs *the very worm that gnaws*; till out of corruption horrid life springs, and the dull scavengers of earth wax craftly to vex it and swell monstrous to plague it. Great holes secretly are digged where earth’s pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl.

This story has a strong dichotomy: the logical against the non-logical. The protagonist reads in the *Necronomicon* what he observes in the cave. The non-logical meaning the supernatural evil defying all laws of reality, is the element in Lovecraft’s stories that always wins. The quote also mentions Ibn Schacabao, but this is just as a fictional author as Abdul Alhazred.

3.1.2 *The Dunwich Horror*

*The Dunwich Horror* (1928) is by far the best known story of Lovecraft. In 1945 it has been dramatized for radio airplay for the American troops in Europe and in 1970 it has been made into a movie, which has been remade in 2009. *The Dunwich Horror* starts with a quote as well,
this time from Charles Lamb’s *Witches and Other Night-Fears*. It originates from his work *Essays of Elia* from 1823 and it concerns an existing book. In *The Dunwich Horror* Lovecraft starts to play with dialogue. The dialogue is set in a rustic dialogue and it appears Lovecraft enjoys this greatly, but he thinks it can’t exist for real. Lovecraft was shocked when he heard people actually speak this dialect when visiting Vermont. The following is an example of this accent:

[… ] He see enough I tell ye, Mis’ Corey! This dun’t mean no good, an’ I think as all the men-folks ought to git up a party an’ do suthin’. I know suthin’ awful’s abaout, an’ feel my time is nigght, though only Gawd knows jest what it is.

The story plays in Dunwich, a village in the state of Massachusetts, where the average local isn’t too bright and probably are inbreds, and in Arkham, precisely at Miskatonic University. The story has an external narrator who guides the reader through the characters and situations. The most important characters are Old Wizard Whateley, his daughter Lavinia, her son Wilbur Whateley and the librarian Henry Armitage. First Lovecraft starts building a mood of secrecy around the Whateleys: at night they are often found at a strange stone circle on Sentinel Hill, a place the villagers associate with black magic. It becomes suspicious when Lavinia appeared to be pregnant. The father is unknown. She has a son, Wilbur, who grows at an exceptional rate, is very intelligent, but also has very strange goat-like features. At the age of ten Wilbur already assists his grandfather to expand the upper level of their house. Apart from that, Old Whateley buys a lot of live-stock which disappears without a trace. On his death-bed Old Whateley tells Wilbur about the *Necronomicon*:

More space Willy, more space soon. Yew grows – an’ that grows faster. It’ll be ready to sarve ye soon boy. Open up the Gates of Yog-Sothoth with the long chant that ye’ll find on page 751 of the complete edition an then put a match to the prison. Fire for airth can’t burn it nohaow.

Old Whateley appears to have an incomplete edition of the *Necronomicon*, and apparently it is a very large edition, as Old Whateley refers to page 751. The *Necronomicon* is used to open certain gates, through which Yog-Sothoth can enter our world. Shortly after her father Lavinia dies as well, but no one can retrieve her body. Wilbur, now in need of the complete incantation, starts to correspond with various institutions:

Correspondence with the Widener Library at Harvard, the Bibliotheque National in Paris, the British Museum, the University of Buenos Ayres, and the Library of Miskatonic University at Arkham had failed to get hi the loan of a book he desperately wanted [...] the hideous *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazredin Olaus Wormius’ Latin version, as printed in Spain in the seventeenth century.

This corresponds with Lovecraft’s essay *History of the Necronomicon* from 1927. He even reveals other institutions who keep the *Necronomicon* under lock and key. All these institutions are actual existing universities and libraries, save from Miskatonic. In the Miskatonic library Wilbur finally gets access to the *Necronomicon*. Librarian Henry Armitage reads along what it says on page 751. Wilbur then requests to loan the *Necronomicon*, which isn’t granted.
Armitage doesn’t trust him a bit and also warns the Widener Library of Harvard. Wilbur indeed tries to steal the *Necronomicon* from Miskatonic library, but gets killed by the watchdog. Arriving at the scene, Armitage and his co-workers discover Wilbur to be not entirely human. Then cries for help arrive from Dunwich, as something invisible has broken out of Old Whateleys home and devours cattle and locals at a high pace. Armitage and two co-workers leave for Dunwich with the *Necronomicon* and device a powder that should make the monster visible. They track the horror down by it’s sound and destruction, blow the powder and start a spell that should send the monster back to his place of origin. When they visually see the horror, it appears to have the same face as Wilbur: it was his twin brother.

The *Necronomicon* in this story isn’t the key to release evil into the world, but also the key to send it back.

### 3.1.3 The Dreams in the Witch-House

In this story by Lovecraft the *Necronomicon* is no point of reference, but more a color to paint the stories decorum. The protagonist is Walter Gilman, a student ‘non-Euclidian calculus and quantum physics’, with an unhealthy interest in folklore and the occult. Soon we learn that Gilman is reading the ‘forbidden books’:

But all these precautions came late in the day, so that Gilman had some terrible hints from the dreaded *Necronomicon* of Abdul Alhazred, the fragmentary *Book of Eibon*, and the suppressed *Unaussprechliche Kulten* of Von Junzt to correlate with his abstract formulae on the properties of space and the linkage of dimension known and unknown.

Gilman’s reason for reading the *Necronomicon* is because of his studies: somehow the *Necronomicon* pairs perfectly with quantum physics. A second development in the plot is Gilman renting a room in the house of a known witch from Arkham: Keziah Mason. Keziah has been seen in the house after she died, which Gilman interprets as a manifestation of portals to other dimensions.

Connecting the *Necronomicon* to quantum physics leads Lovecraft into the genre of science fiction. His first attempt in this genre is *At the Mountains of Madness* from 1931, in which a group of scientist discover an Antarctic city of the ‘Great Old Ones’, of whom a number appear to be alive. The greater part of this expedition doesn’t survive, and the two who do survive, one gets mad because he actually read the *Necronomicon*.

In *The Dreams in the Witch-House* Lovecraft mentions the names of existing physicists like Heisenberg, Planck, Sitter and Einstein, who unwittingly are connected to the *Necronomicon*.

Gilman is plagued by dreams in which he meets the witch Keziah accompanied by a tall dark man and a creature called Brown Jenkin, a crossing between a human and a rat. When these dreams get more intense, it appears that Gilman starts to excel in math:
Toward the end of March he began to pick up in his mathematics, though the other studies bothered him increasingly. He was getting an intuitive knack for solving Riemannian equations and astonished professor Upham by his comprehension of fourth-dimensional and other problems which had floored all the rest of the class.

Gilman’s dreams intensify and he is taken by the witch and Brown Jenkin to sign his name in the book of Azathoth. Gilman remembers the name Azathoth:

What kept him from going with her and Brown Jenkin and the other to the throne of Chaos where the thin flute pipe mindlessly was the fact that he had seen the name ‘Azathoth’ in the *Necronomicon*, and knew it stood for a primal evil too horrible for description.

The other tenants in Keziah Mason’s house also see strange things. One of them, Joe Mazurewicz, is scared enough to be praying constantly and gives Gilman a crucifix to ward off the evil. Gilman on the other hand starts to develop a sharpened hearing and hears the devilish flutes of the throne of Azathoth during his waking hours. Gilman believes the house to be a nexus between his reality and places between space and time where ‘the Great Old Ones’ are hiding. This knowledge comes from the *Necronomicon* as well. Gilman might be right as he wakes one morning with an ornament in his hands he broke off from a building in his dreams, in the palace of Azathoth. Nobody can identify the ornament, and Gilman slowly realizes he is in an unescapable situation.

Gilman identifies the tall dark man, who accompanies Keziah and Brown Jenkin from the *Necronomicon*: he appears to be Nyarlathotep. This illustrious trio manages to capture Gilman and in one of his dreams Keziah starts cackling a spell:

She was intoning some croaking ritual in a language Gilman could not understand, but which seemed like something guardedly quoted in the *Necronomicon*.

The witch wants to sacrifice a child, but Gilman jumps on her and strangles her. The following morning the other tenants find Gilman dead in his bed. A hole, the size of a large rat, is in his chest on the spot where his heart used to be. Brown Jenkin killed Gilman. The owner of the house and the City Council decide to destroy the house of Keziah Mason. During the demolition workers discover many human remains, but the most disturbing find is the skeleton of an enormous rat with a human skull and four human hands.

### 3.1.4 The Haunter of the Dark

The story *The Haunter of the Dark* (1935) is written by Lovecraft as a reply to a story written by Robert Bloch, in which Bloch made Lovecraft a character who eventually gets killed. Lovecraft is eager to kill Bloch in his story. *The Haunter of the Dark* has a protagonist called Robert Blake. Blake is an author who returns to Providence, hires an appartment near Brown University, behind the John Hay Library (where nowadays a large portion of Lovecraft’s notes and letters are housed. This is an analogy to Lovecraft’s own life, as he lived in the exact same quarters in the final years of his life). Blake works well in this appartment, but his attention is always drawn to a belfry on Federal Hill, which appears strange as birds avoid this particular tower. Blake gets
fascinated by this church. To satisfy his curiosity he starts walking toward the church and discovers it is in the middle of an Italian part of the city. None of the Italians want to speak with him about the church. Blake climbs over the fences surrounding this church and makes his way to the crypt. He discovers a space with a case filled with books:

He had himself read many of them – a Latin version of the abhorred Necronomicon, the sinister Liber Ivonis, the infamous Cultes des Goules of Comte d’Erlette, the Unaussprechliche Kulten of Von Junzt, and old Ludvig Prinn’s hellish De Vermis Mysteriis. But there were others he had known merely by reputation or not at all – the Pnakotic Manuscripts, the Book of Dzyan, and a crumbling volume of wholly unidentifiable characters yet with certain symbols and diagrams shudderingly recognizable to the occult student.

This is everything Lovecraft writes about the Necronomicon in this story. Blake goes into the tower and accidentally frees a creature that can only live in darkness. This creature is psychically connected to Blake so when it gets struck by lightning during a thunderstorm, Blake gets electrocuted as well.

Returning to the quote from the story The Haunter of the Dark, it appears that most books mentioned are the fictional ones from the Lovecraft Mythos. There is however one exception: the Book of Dzyan, known as the Stanza’s of Dzyan by Helena Blavatsky. Many fans of Lovecraft’s fiction have identified this book as Lovecraft’s inspiration for the Necronomicon, but Daniel Harms already pointed out that the book exists next to the Necronomicon and can’t be the source of inspiration.

3.2 Lovecraft’s literary context

The leading Lovecraft-scholar S.T. Joshi has written much about Lovecraft’s life, his fiction and the library he inherits from his grandfather. He also writes a lot about Lovecraft’s literary inspiration, but maybe it is better to let Lovecraft himself do the talking. During his time at the UAPA and NAPA (see chapter two) he has written a number of essays about literary tradition from which we can filter his inspiration. A very important source is the famous essay Supernatural Horror in Literature (1927), showing Lovecraft with a remarkable knowledge on the development of the gothic novel:

This novel dramatic paraphernalia consisted first of all of the Gothic castle, with its awesome antiquity, vast distances and ramblings, deserted or ruined wings, damp corridors, unwholesome hidden catacombs, and galaxy of ghosts and appalling legends, as a nucleus of suspense and daemoniac fright. In addition, it included a tyrannical and malevolent nobleman as villain; the saintly, long-persecuted and generally insipid heroine who undergoes the major terror and serves as a point of view and focus for the reader’s sympathies; the valorous and immaculate hero, always of high birth but often in humble disguise; the convention of high-sounding foreign names, mostly Italian, for the characters; and the infinite array of stage properties which includes strange lights, damp trap-doors, extinguished lamps, mouldy hidden manuscripts, creaking hinges, shaking arras, and the like.

The origin of the gothic novel according to Lovecraft is Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto (1764).
The somehow compelling presence of secret manuscripts or books in Lovecraft’s stories traces to another interesting literary genre: manuscript-fiction. In the Nieuwe Taalgids of 1957 manuscript fiction is defined by W. Drop as:

The fiction, that a novel originates from some sort of manuscript or document, which the author, or better: the publisher, has obtained in a rather complicated way, is quite often used.

Lovecraft mentions in his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* the *Ossian Poems* and *The Castle of Ortranto*, both considered by Drop as prime examples of manuscript fiction. Lovecraft never claimed to have obtained a manuscript, but simply writes about a book that is often found in houses of evil repute. To Lovecraft, the book is the topos of evil.

It appears that Lovecraft had the idea of the *Necronomicon* as ‘mouldy manuscript’ from the genre *gothic novel*. And considering Lovecraft’s fiction, it certainly has some elements of the *gothic novel*, but Lovecraft gave it a twist of his own. He doesn’t work with a female protagonist, which according to Lovecraft is an important ingredient for the *gothic novel*:

[...] the saintly, long-persecuted and generally insipid heroine who undergoes major terrors and serves as a point of view and focus for the reader’s sympathies; [...]

In two of his stories a woman will play a more prominent role (*The Dunwich Horror* (1928) and *The Thing on the Doorstep* (1933)), in most of his stories women have a much smaller part. Joshi thinks it has something to do with the dominance of his mother, making him belittle women in his own world, the world of his fiction. I suspect Lovecraft’s peculiar eighteenth century aristocratic ideals are prevalent in this situation: he regards men more important than women. The role of the female protagonist in the *gothic novel* is now fulfilled by a man, who often thinks rationally and is confronted with the irrational. In some cases it is a feeble person in whom we can recognize Lovecraft, who struggled with his health his entire life. The rational men, who come in contact with for instance the *Necronomicon* can assure themselves they will meet a terrible fate.

Another feature of the *gothic novel* is the so-called *locus terribilis*, the terrible place, by Lovecraft situated in belfries, tombs or strange cyclopic cities built by alien gods who are mentioned in the *Necronomicon*. The *Necronomicon* is to be considered an index towards the *locus terribilis*. Robert Blake finds the *locus terribilis* in the belfry of the church he broke into in *The Haunter in the Dark*. In the story *The Dreams in the Witch-House* Walter Gilman reads from the *Necronomicon*, but the *locus terribilis* is located in his dreams. In *The Festival* the protagonist finds the *Necronomicon* in the waiting room, but the *locus terribilis* is located in the caverns beneath the house, where the protagonist is forced to partake in a ritual. The University libraries Lovecraft mentions where the *Necronomicon* is kept, can’t be considered as *locus terribilis*.

The *locus terribilis* in Lovecraft are populated by the ‘Great Old Ones’, the alien gods with remarkable names like Azathoth, Hastur, Nyarlathotep, Yog Sothoth and Cthulhu. These
aliens fulfill the role in Lovecraft’s version of the gothic novel of the nobleman with a terrible secret. These ‘Great Old Ones’ can influence high sensitive people to telepathically impose their will upon them, like young Wilcox in The Call of Cthulhu, who spreads the message of Cthulhu through his feverish nightmares. In some stories they are influenced in their sleep (like in The Call of Cthulhu) but more often they are summoned (like in The Dunwich Horror). It’s not only the protagonist who summons ‘The Great Old Ones’, but most of the time a middle person, who plays a part in the plot between the protagonist and the ‘Great Old Ones’, like the witch Keziah Mason and her rat-like familiar Brown Jenkin, who torment Walter Gilman in The Dreams in the Witch-House and deliver him to Nyarlathotep.

3.3 Inspiration for the Necronomicon

Lovecraft always explained that:

The name Necronomicon (necros = corpse, nomos = law, eikon = image = An Image [or picture] of the Law of the Dead) occurred to me in the course of a dream, although the etymology is perfectly sound.

L. Sprague de Camp and S.T. Joshi both point at another source: the Astronomicon by Manilius. The library of the University of Amsterdam has a print from Antwerp in 1720. It is a rhymed astrological treatise. During his teens Lovecraft writes columns about astronomy for two newspapers, in which he refers a couple of times to the Astronomicon, so it appears he knew about this book. A logical explanation is that Lovecraft replaced Astro for Necro, although there is no evidence to support this.

A number of inspirational books like the Picatrix, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Notebook and the Book of Dzyan by Madame Blavatsky are already discarded by Daniel Harms in his book The Necronomicon Files. These appear to be constructs by researchers who firmly believe that the Necronomicon is a real existing book. Harms remains skeptical and invites every researcher to show him a ‘genuine’ Necronomicon, published before 1922, the year when Lovecraft first describes this book in the story The Hound. Until now nobody has come forth with such a book.

3.4 Letters on the Necronomicon

Lovecraft received during his life many letters from people inquiring about the Necronomicon. He has been very clear on the subject: Necronomicon is a fictional book, a figment of his own imagination. On 14 August 1930 he writes to Robert E. Howard:

The Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred is likewise something which must yet be written in order to possess objective reality. [...] A few years ago I prepared a mock-erudite synopsis of Abdul’s life, and of the posthumous vicissitudes and translations of his hideous and unmentionable work Al Azif (called The Necronomicon) by the Byzantine monk Theodoras Philetas, who translated it into late Greek AD 900! – a synopsis which I shall follow in future reference to the dark and accursed thing.
To Margaret Sylvester he writes on January 13th 1934:

Regarding the *Necronomicon* – I must confess that this monstrous & abhorred volume is merely a figment of my own imagination.

To William Frederick Anger he writes on August 14th 1934:

[...] Regarding the dreaded *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred -I must confess that both the evil volume & the accursed author are fictitious creatures of my own- as are the malign entities of Azathoth, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlathotep, Shub Niggurath, &tc.

To Henry Kuttner a letter followed on January 16th 1936:

[...] Clark Ashton Smith & I frequently use each other’s hellish books and devil-gods -giving Tsathoggua & Yog-Sothoth a change of environment, as it were! Some time I’ll quote darkly from your *Book of Iod* -which I presume either antedates the human race like the Eltdown Shards and the Pnakotic Manuscripts, or repeats the most hellish secrets learnt by early man in the afshion of the *Book of Eibon*, *De Vermis Mysteriis*, the Comte d’Erlette’s *Cultes des Goules*, von Junzt’s *Unaussprechliche Kulten*, or the dreaded & abhorred *Al Azif or Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred.

To Willis Conover he writes on July 29th 1936:

Now about the “terrible and forbidden books” -I am forced to say that most of them are purely imaginary. There never was any Abdul Alhazred or *Necronomicon* for I invented these names myself. Robert Bloch devised the idea of Ludvig Prinn and his *De Vermis Mysteriis*, while the *Book of Eibon* is an invention of Clark Ashton Smith.

These five quotes state clearly that *Necronomicon* is an invention of Lovecraft to adorn his own fiction with. If Lovecraft himself denies the book exists, how is it possible people still believe that this book exists for real? The answer can be found in other letters to for instance Frank Belknap Long, but especially those to Clark Ashton Smith.

On April 23rd 1926 Lovecraft writes a somewhat enigmatic letter to Frank Belknap Long:

[...] Oozing out of various apertures and dragging themselves along the narrow lanes are shapeless forms of organic entity whose dead faces hint fiendishly of the rites and orgies and incantations in the hideous learning synagogue whose wormy, unpainted boards hold strange Eastern signs and unholy marks taken from the cabbala and the *Necronomicon*.

People might draw the conclusion from this that *Necronomicon* should be a real existing book. Those who take the time to read any further will see the following:

I shall weave all this into a tale someday.

Lovecraft also corresponds about plot ideas with Clark Ashton Smith. Sometimes they play jokes on each other in letters. The letter he sends on November 27th 1927 to Smith is a summary of his essay *History of the Necronomicon*. The ironic undertone in this letter might escape some
uncareful researchers. A great example is a letter to Clark Ashton Smith on October 3rd 1933, in which Lovecraft writes about William Lumley:

He [Lumley] is firmly convinced that all our gang – you, Two-Gun Bob [Robert E. Howard], Sonny Belknap [Frank Belknap Long], Grandpa E’ch-Pi-El [Lovecraft], and the rest- are genuine agents of unseen Powers in distributing hints too dark and profound for human conception and comprehension. We may think we’re writing fiction, and may even (absurd though!) disbelieve what we write, but at bottom we are telling the truth in spite of ourselves - serving unwittingly as mouthpieces of Tsathoggua, Crom, Cthulhu, and other pleasant Outside gentry.

William Lumley is convinced that the stories Lovecraft, Smith, Long and Howard write are actually the truth. This letter shows that Lovecraft doesn’t believe it himself, but that somebody does [in this case Lumley] is a telltale sign for the more widespread belief it will receive in the future. In the same letter to Smith Lovecraft sums up people both fictitious and historical:

I think I’ve told you about his [Lumley] claims of extensive travel in China, Nepal and all sorts of mysterious and forbidden places, and his air of familiarity with such works as the arcana of Paracelsus, Hermes Trismegistus, Albertus Magnus, Apollonius of Tyana, Eibon, von Junzt and Abdul Alhazred.

Lovecraft writes about the occult, he himself is a reductionist thinker. Everything that smells of the paranormal he considers laughable. William Lumley is not to be taken seriously by Lovecraft, although he feels bad joking about him:

He is really tremendously likeable -and with a spontaneous gratitude and generosity that are almost pathetic.

Such letters could simply lead to misunderstandings. We can read the following on the website by Dan Clore:

In yet another letter (to James Blish and William Miller, 1936), Lovecraft says: “You are fortunate in securing copies of the hellish and abhorred Necronomicon. Are they the Latin texts printed in Germany in the fifteenth century, or the Greek version printed in Italy in 1567, or the Spanish of 1623? Or do the copies represent different texts?” Note that this is not entirely consistent with the accounts given earlier.

This letter to James Blish and William Miller isn’t found in the Selected Letters by Lovecraft. An e-mail to the University library of Brown University in Providence solve the mystery. Librarian John Stanley knows this letter is from a series of three letters, partly published in Phantastique combined with The Science Fiction Critic rom March 13th 1938 and later reprinted in H.P. Lovecraft: Uncollected Letters, edited by S.T. Joshi from 1986. Unfortunately I could not locate this book, but mister Stanley was friendly enough to send me some quotes that might be important, and he knew that the legacy of James Blish is kept in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. I learned from my inquiry in Oxford that these letters aren’t in the records of Blish. The quote above is from a letter Lovecraft wrote to Blish and Miller on May 13th 1936. On May 19th another letter followed to both gentlemen:

About the Necronomicon -Bless my soul, but I thought you knew that was a strictly imaginary institution!
And on June 3rd 1936 Lovecraft writes:

Yes -it’s too bad those Hellish and Forbidden volumes exist only in the Library of Miskatonic University and kindred places, and I really wish somebody had the time and skill to write them.

It will take less than forty years before this wish of Lovecraft would come true.

3.5 The Necronomicon in Lovecraft Mythos by other authors

The circle around Lovecraft doesn’t only learn about his creations, they start to use these among each other. In turn Lovecraft borrows the creations of his friends. In two stories by Robert E. Howard (1906-1936) The Thing on the Roof (1932) and The Fire of Asshurbanipal (1936) we find references to the Necronomicon. Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961) refers at least five times to the Necronomicon. In most cases Smith does this to create a precedent for his own finding, The Book of Eibon, but in his story The Return of the Sorcerer (1931) the Necronomicon takes the lead! An expert in Semitic languages has to translate the original Arabic Necronomicon (which are all destroyed according to Lovecraft), and discovers that Olaus Wormius has left out portions of the book. The same plot is used by Robert E. Howard in The Thing on the Roof, in which he introduces the book Nameless Cults by Friedrich von Junzt in which also portions of text are left out. E. Hoffmann Price has introduced the Necronomicon in his story The Lord of Illusion. But this story appeared to be a rough version of Through the Gates of the Silver Key, which he wrote in collaboration with Lovecraft in 1933.

Richard F. Searight writes a couple of times about the Necronomicon in his story The Warder of Knowledge, and he goes about it like Lovecraft does: Necronomicon as an index to the topos of evil. Searight also uses Clark Ashton Smith’s Book of Eibon. Henry Hasse’s The Guardian of the Book also refers a couple of times to the Necronomicon, only to compare it to a book that is much more malignant than the Necronomicon. The book doesn’t have a name and during the story it has been destroyed. The protagonist concludes with:

But I don’t think I want to read the Necronomicon after all.

In Robert W. Lowndes’ The Abyss the Necronomicon is mentioned a couple of times.

Music of the Stars by Duane W. Rimel refers to the Necronomicon, as does The Horror out of Lovecraft by Donald A. Wollheim. The Book of Eibon is particularly popular next to the Necronomicon but also the Chronicle of Nath and Song of Yste, all manuscripts that actually don’t exist.

With the passing of the years and when authors of Lovecraft Mythos can’t be considered a contemporary of Lovecraft, we see the Necronomicon disappear into the background and authors giving more attention to his other creations. In Crouch End by Stephen King features Yog Sothoth and Cthulhu prominently; Nyarlathotep stars in A.A. Attanasio’s The Star Pools and Frank Belknap Long (who was a contemporary of Lovecraft) writes about Shub Niggurath and R’Lyeh (the city where Cthulhu remains). At the end of the seventies the Necronomicon starts to
vanish from so-called Mythos authors. Brian Lumley’s *The Second Wish* and T.E.D. Klein’s *Black Man with a Horn* appear to be parodies rather than being a Lovecraft Mythos story, according to a quote from the latter:

If the *Necronomicon* actually existed, it would be out in Bantam paperback with a preface by Lin Carter.

Lin Carter is an author of science fiction and fantasy stories. Carter is also the mastermind of one of the many *Necronomicon*-editions that engulfed the market since 1973.

Another author who can be associated with parodies is Colin Wilson, who is responsible for the preface of the so-called *Hay-Necronomicon*. He is also responsible for three *Lovecraft Mythos* stories, for instance *The Philosophers Stone* and *The Return of the Lloigor*. In the latter Wilson connects the *Necronomicon* to the *Voynich Manuscript*, a code-manuscript that still remains not translated and is kept in the library of Yale University. Wilson uses the same method in the *Hay-Necronomicon*, which will be the subject of the next chapter.

It appears that most information on the *Necronomicon* is supplied by Lovecraft, and authors coming after him use it mainly to emphasize the ‘horror’ in their stories. An exception is Colin Wilson who connects the fictitious *Necronomicon* to the actual existing *Voynich Manuskript*, and does exactly the same Lovecraft always did: mixing fiction with fact. The reason why people still believe in the existence of the *Necronomicon* can be found in the fiction of Lovecraft (and in some way Wilson) or in the ways of thinking of people who started to meddle with the *Necronomicon*. 
The Witch-House in Salem, Massachusetts, which in fact posed as the blue-print for the Witch-House in the story of Lovecraft. It is believed that Salem was the example Lovecraft built his fictional city Arkham from.

The Fleur-de-Lyse House in Providence, which inspired Lovecraft to write the story *The Call of Cthulhu*
The doorstep to 598 Angell Street in Providence, where Lovecraft and his mother moved to in 1904. At the location where his grandfather’s house used to be is now a Starbucks coffee shop.
The location where the church on Federal Hill used to be which inspired Lovecraft to write *The Haunter of the Dark*

Ladd Observatory, where young Lovecraft was allowed to look at the stars and where he decided he wanted to be an astronomer. His early observations might have been an influence to his later cosmic horror stories.
The memorial plaque for Lovecraft in front of the John Hay Library in Providence, the phrase is from his poem *The Fungi from Yuggoth.*
During the seventies and eighties of the Twentieth Century a number of books appear, calling themselves *Necronomicon* and all claim to be the genuine article. Some stories also appear, clearly fulfilling the wish of Lovecraft to see *Necronomicon* get written and not making any claims on authenticity. We can distinguish between two types of *Necronomicon*: one of which the publisher claims to be the real deal, and a *Necronomicon* written to honor the memory of Lovecraft. In the first paragraph I owe much to the research of Harms and Gonce, whose *The Necronomicon Files* represents their ideas. In this chapter I will discuss five *Necronomicons*. The choice for these five books has three reasons:

1. A Pragmatic reason: these books are sold through regular channels
2. These five *Necronomicon’s* are well known
3. Most *Necronomicons* published in German or Italian appear to be the translation of one of the English versions.

In Paragraph 4.1 I will introduce these five *Necronomicons*, and each *Necronomicon* will have a paragraph of their own.

### 4.1 Different Necronomicons: will the real one stand up?

A study by Daniel Harms and John Wisdom Gonce III appears in 1998 entitled *The Necronomicon Files* (York Beach, 2003), in which both authors present us the final verdict on the *Necronomicon*: the book does not exist. Harms, an anthropologist, included in his part of the book an oversight of all published *Necronomicon’s*. Some are not a book in the true sense of the word: the *Faraday-review* is a review in the *Bradford Review and East Haven News*, and published somewhere around 1934 (there is no exact date known), and appears to be a joke by Donald A. Wollheim, but is attributed by Lovecraft to Robert Bloch, about whom Lovecraft refers in his letter to James Blish and William Miller of May 19th 1936:

The paragraph about it’s being for sale at $ 1.49 was a joke – I don’t know who wrote it, but I suspect young Bloch.

Harms also names a couple of books that have nothing to do with Lovecraft, and it’s my firm opinion that the *Necronomicon* should at least be connected to Lovecraft. The books who don’t relate to Lovecraft are left out of this thesis. Harms sums up the following tomes:

1. *Al Azif* by Lyon Sprague de Camp. This is an alleged facsimile edition of a book Sprague de Camp bought during a visit to the Middle East.
3. *The Necronomicon: The Book of Dead Names* edited by George Hay. This is the British version of the *Necronomicon* based on the *Book of Enoch* by Dr. John Dee.
4. *The Necronomicon* by Robert M. Price. This is an anthology of short stories on the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, the *Necronomicon* and some ‘erudite’ essays on the
The Necronomicon. Price also included some Necronomicon’s in the book, knowing: those of Pelton, Culp and Carter: Cultus Maleficarum (The Sussex Manuscript) by Fred L. Pelton. There is little known about Pelton, but his writing-style shows a deep respect for Lovecraft, according to Harms. The Sussex Manuscript is a so-called translation of the Necronomicon from Latin by Baron Frederic I of Sussex in 1598. In fact it is a great calligraphy job by Pelton, bound in leather. August Derleth of Arkham Publishing House receives this version of Pelton and is enthusiastic enough to publish it as the Necronomicon, but his partner Donald Wandrei had his reservations. The manuscript is shelved. The Necronomicon by Robert C. Culp is a stencilled version of the Necronomicon, written by Robert Culp, a member of a fanclub of Lovecraft called Esoteric Order of Dagon, consisting of people who write Lovecraft Mythos and publish these in a fanclub periodical. The Culp-Necronomicon can be acquired through antiquarians in photostat. The Necronomicon by Lin Carter was a work in progress, which he never completed due to his untimely passing in 1988. The Necronomicon by Donald Tyson. This book wasn’t published when I wrote my thesis, but it has been met with critical acclaim and is the closest to the work of Lovecraft of all Necronomicon editions.

There are a few Italian Necronomicon’s which are very hard to get, and are in Italian, a language I don’t master. For that reason I don’t include these in my thesis:

6. La Magia Estalar: El verdadero Necronomicon by Frank G. Ripel from 1989, based on the book Sauthenerom, which was lost during the destruction of Atlantis [sic]
7. Necronomicon by Pietro Pizzari, according to the author transcribed from a manuscript in the Vatican Library.
8. Necronomicon by publishing house Fanucci, an Italian translation of the Simon-Necronomicon, with extra additions. A sequel to the book called The Tomb of Alhazred is filled with material found in the tomb of the mad Arab in Yemen.

On the internet there are a few websites claiming to feature the genuine Necronomicon, but when the Necronomicon isn’t genuine on paper or parchment, a website can be much further from the truth. These Necronomicon’s are not included in this thesis.

4.2 Al Azif by L. Sprague de Camp

Through Olswick Press a facsimile-edition of the manuscript Al Azif (the Necronomicon) by Abdul Alhazred is published in 1973, with a preface by L. Sprague de Camp. Sprague de Camp claims to have bought the manuscript through a friend in Lebanon whose name he rather not mentions. The Manuscript is written in the language of Duriac, a small town in Northern Iraq. Apparently the manuscript has been reviewed by Dr. Ja’afar Babili, who dates the book before 760 AD and who disappears after a few weeks of translation work. His successor Ahmad Ibn-Yahya continues the translation and disappears after two weeks. His landlady claims to have heard screams from his appartment. The next scholar who works with the manuscript is professor Yuni Abdalmajid, whose colleagues called him ‘slightly eccentric’. After three days
work on the manuscript he disappears as well. Sprague de Camp suspects the Iraqi government wants this manuscript out of the country and regarding the tensions in the Middle East considers the book a great weapon to send to the United States. Sprague de Camp also knows what fate these scientists have suffered: subconsciously they uttered the spells they were translating, unwittingly calling forth the abominations of the *Necronomicon*.

Lyon Sprague de Camp at a Science Fiction and Fantasy meeting around 1980

The front cover of the *Al Azif* and a page from the so-called manuscript. It appears the language is Persian and it is not a magical text.
This story is dubious to say the least. Not in the first place because Sprague de Camp keeps his friend in Lebanon anonymous, but most of all since he wrote an article in 1947 in the Saturday Review of Literature, claiming the Necronomicon to be an ‘unwritten classic’, a non-existing book reaching the status of a classic. In 1975 he writes a biography on Lovecraft in which he denies the existence of the Necronomicon. Harms describes Al Azif in his book The Necronomicon Files, and discovered that sixteen pages are duplicated and placed back into the manuscript on various pages. Apparently the manuscript needed to be longer, and this trick was played on the unsuspecting buyer. Former staff of Olswick Press explained to Harms that the book was an elaborate joke.

The facsimile pages don’t look like a facsimile print. You can always see something of the original page, an edge or a stain on the original paper. The Sprague de Camp Necronomicon shows us immaculate pages with an Arabian like calligraphy. The language of Duriac is unknown. Professor W. van Bekkum of the Institute of Semitic languages of the Groningen University, states that the language is Persian and discovers a shocking detail not discovered prior to this thesis: the pages are in mirror-image. The book appeared to be printed in a western way, we read from left to right, while most Semitic languages are read from right to left. Nowadays Al Azif is printed by Wildside Press, and their president John Bettancourt doesn’t want to disclose how many copies he sells, but apparently still a couple of hundreds a year.

4.3 The Necronomicon by Simon

This is by far the most well-known Necronomicon. Published for the first time in 1977 bound in leather and a paperback edition by Schlangekraft, in 1980 Avon Books acquires the publishing rights and releases the book as a paperback in an enormous edition. The preface gives us most information on this Necronomicon. It tells the story of L.K. Barnes, a publisher of this Necronomicon who is lured inside the ‘Magickal Childe shop’ by an ‘incarnated thoughtform’ and is confronted with the driven owner Herman Slater, who shows him the manuscript of the Necronomicon. Slater is a liaison between Barnes and a character named ‘Simon’. His surname is unknown. Simon dresses in black suits, sells F-104 fighter jets to the government of Luxembourg (!) and fears for more reasons than the Necronomicon for his life. A remarkable co-worker on the Necronomicon is James Wasserman of Studio 31, who died in Guyana in the mass suicide of Jim Jones’ People’s Temple cult, but with the aid of the Necronomicon and the Philosophers Stone he can finish his work as a living being. These kind of ‘facts’ which are hard to believe can be found in all Necronomicon’s. The Simon-Necronomicon is responsible for popularizing some myths concerning Lovecraft. They connect the English magician Aleister Crowley with H.P. Lovecraft, since Crowley predicted the coming of the Necronomicon in his Liber Al Vel Legis (the Book of the Law). The authors apparently based themselves on a quote from the story The Thing on the Doorstep from 1933:
In mid-September Derby was away for a week, and some of the decadent college set talked knowingly about the matter – hinting at the meeting with a notorious cult-leader, lately expelled from England, who had established headquarters in New York.

An acquaintance of Crowley, Kenneth Grant, suspected that both Lovecraft and Crowley tapped into the same supernatural source, which Crowley translated into rituals and Lovecraft into stories. He published this ‘suspicion’ in 1947. The authors of the preface make a mistake when they try to connect the Lovecraft Mythos to the magick of Crowley:

Lovecraft depicted a kind of Christian Myth of the struggle between opposing forces of Light and Darkness, between God and Satan, in the Cthulhu-Mythos.

Lovecraft never created a Christian myth of a struggle between light and darkness. He followed the procedure of a rational protagonist who is confronted with evil indifferent supernatural beings, and who more than once loses their sanity or, in the worst case, their lives. The good versus evil version of the Lovecraft Mythos originates with August Derleth who complements the pseudo-mythology of Lovecraft with a pantheon of Elder Gods, who aid mankind in their struggle agains the Great Old Ones.

The authors of the preface continue with their assumptions to stage a meeting between Lovecraft and Crowley in ancient Sumeria. The name Miskatonic from the Lovecraft Mythos gets a very special origin story:

Lovecraft’s mythos deals with what are known as chthonic deities, that is, underworld gods and goddesses, much like the Leviathan of the Old Testament. The pronunciation of chthonic is ‘katonic’, which explains Lovecraft’s famous Miskatonic river and Miskatonic University, not to mention the chief deity of his pantheon, Cthulhu, a sea monster who lies, “not dead, but dreaming” below the world; an Ancient One and supposed enemy of mankind and the intelligent race. [sic]

The authors also refer to the Enuma Elish, the Mesopotamian tale of creation, in which gods of the Lovecraft pantheon are present, only with different names. Azathoth should be known as Azag-Thoth, Cthulhu as Kutulu, Shub-Niggurath as Ishnigarrab and Yog-Sothoth seems to be the only one whose name is unchanged. This is mixed with the names of the gods of Sumerian tradition like Tiamat, Kingu, Enki and Enlil. The addition of Marduk is in fact anachronistic: Marduk is the Lord Protector of Babylon, a civilization of a later date than the Sumerian.

The publishers claim to have received the manuscript from a priest who stole it from the library of his Order, then they spend a few pages on comparisons between Lovecraft, Crowley and the Necronomicon and the pronunciation of certain words and spells. The preface is concluded with the announcement that the original manuscript can’t be consulted by third parties. The publishers claim they have no choice, as possession of such a manuscript is dangerous business. So they end with:

Therefore, as a matter of policy, we cannot honor any requests to see the Necronomicon in it’s original state.
The *Necronomicon* is divided in texts which have little to do with Lovecraft. In the first place there are all these names of Sumerian gods, in the second place there are no citations from the stories *The Festival* and *The Dunwich Horror* included in this *Necronomicon*. On the other hand are there no Sumerian deities to be found in Lovecraft’s fiction. A fine source for this is the book *Myths from Mesopotamia. Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh and others*, translated by Stephanie Dalley (Oxford, 1989). The translations from the tomes of clay in cuneiform writing do not feature names which show kinship with the names of Lovecraft’s pseudo-mythology.

The only Lovecraftian elements in this *Necronomicon* are both *Testimonies of the Mad Arab*, clearly referring to Abdul Alhazred and the *Urilia Text*, referring to *R’Lyeh*, the underwater resting place of Cthulhu.

The truth had to come out about this falsification. Through the internet a couple of people have come forward who confessed to have worked on this forgery. Khem Caigan, who designed all the sigils, discloses on his website his participation in the *Simon-Necronomicon*. Caigan was annoyed that none of the Lovecraft quotes or quotes from other authors are included in this *Necronomicon*:

And not much Lovecraft was in evidence, either – except for a pretty lame intro & ending. I’d made up a concordance of all the ‘Necronomicon’ quotes from HPL & his circle of Mythos contributors, but they weren’t interested.

Another source is *The Doom that came to Chelsea*, an article written by Alan Cabal and is published online. Cabal identifies the character Simon with Peter Levenda, an author of dubious books on nazi-occultism. Levenda played the mysterious editor of the *Necronomicon*. Cabal knew about the origin story of the *Necronomicon* through his wife, who sold jewellery in the Magickal Childe store, and came in contact with it’s owner Herman Slater. He learned that Slater was involved in the ghost-edition of the *Necronomicon*. The motives for this production are described by Cabal:

Herman [Slater] had vigorously encouraged and supported the creation of the Schlangekraft *Necronomicon* by “Simon”. No doubt he’d grown weary of explaining to customers that H.P. Lovecraft’s fabled forbidden tome was a fiction, a plot device for great horror stories and nothing more. He was savvy enough to sell leftover chicken bones as human finger bones to wannabe necromancers, so he surely knew that the market for a “genuine” *Necronomicon* could be huge – with the right packaging.

The *Simon-Necronomicon* hasn’t waivered in popularity in thirty years, according to the American Book Center who still sell 75 copies annually, mostly to lovers of heavy metal music.

### 4.4 The Necronomicon: the Book of Dead Names by George Hay

In 1978 the book *Necronomicon: the Book of Dead Names* appears, edited by George Hay. In this book we can read pseudo-erudite essays by Colin Wilson, Robert Turner, Davvid Langford, L.
Sprague de Camp, Christopher Frayling and Angela Carter, and a few excerpts of the *Necronomicon*.

The first edition of the *Simon-Necronomicon* bound in leather, also called the *Schlangenkraft edition*. 
The cover of the paperback edition by Avon Books

To the left Herman Slater, owner of the Magickal Childe shop in Brooklyn. To the right Peter Levenda, aka Simon
Khem Caigan, the designer of the sigils and gates of the *Simon-Necronomicon*. Caigan wasn’t too pleased with the eventual published *Simon-Necronomicon*

The cover of the Hay-Necronomicon. On the right author Colin Wilson, who would later admit the Hay-Necronomicon to be a spoof.
This *Necronomicon* manages to create some new myths around Lovecraft. His father Winfield Lovecraft was supposed to be a member of Egyptian freemasons, who had access to a copy of the *Necronomicon*. Lovecraft learned about the existence of the *Necronomicon* from his father, according to this myth. The source of this information is a certain Dr. Stanislaus Hinterstoisser, an Austrian researcher from the Salzburg Institute for the Study of Magic and Occult Phenomena. Some searching on the internet came up empty on this institute, except for a large number of *Necronomicon*-related websites. There is no Salzburg Institute for the Study of Magic and Occult Phenomena, and the title ‘doctor’ makes me think that Hinterstoisser might have published a number of articles. This is not the case. The name *Hinterstoisser* is another source of worries. A befriended German linguist tells me that *Hinterstoisser* is another word for a homosexual man. Eventually it becomes clear that Hinterstoisser is a creation of the author Colin Wilson, who wrote the preface to the *Hay-Necronomicon*.

In their respective contributions Robert Turner and David Langford tell about their find of the *Necronomicon* in the manuscript department of the British Library. Through unclear research they eventually find the *Book of Enoch* by dr. John Dee. John Dee has been portrayed as the English translator of the *Necronomicon* in a story by Frank Belknap Long, which Lovecraft used in his *History of the Necronomicon*. The *Book of Enoch* is also known as the *Liber Mysteriozum sextus et sanctus* or *Liber Logaeth*. It is a manuscript from the Sloane collection, bought by the British Museum and passed on to the British Library. The manuscript has been copied. The handwriting is not from John Dee himself, but from his assistant Edward Kelley. The manuscript starts with:

The Book of Enoch revealed to dr. John Dee by the Angels.

Then 35 verses follow, dictated in the presumed language of Enochian, the language God taught to Adam. This language can be compared to the hard to pronounce lines Lovecraft uses in his fiction. A transcript of verse 17 is given:

Angésel oscapácad onz adg ochádah ólzah vor náh orpogógraphel al sa gem na ca pi’coh al da da pók sah donsa’ vous urbans lab a’bn zaph aigadef loh gem vorta’os amph ahoha za baxorza leph oxor neoh ah ba ib na ca pi ca lodox axd nah.

After 35 verses we see 63 tables with various measures: 49 by 49 cells, 36 by 36 cells, 72 by 36 cells. In all cells are letters. What Kelley is writing here, isn’t clear, there are no logical connections, mostly because it has been noted in the language of Adam. With two tables we find quotes in Latin, respectively table 26 (*Soli deo Ians, et sonor sempiternus* = *The semblance of God alone, and the everlasting sound*) and table 32 (which is quite unreadable). Turner and Langford only mention the tables as the *Book of Enoch*. Langford has, advised by Turner, designed a computer program to translate these tables. By cracking the code of Dee and Kelley, they discovered a translation of the *Necronomicon* in English. Langford doesn’t provide us the translation key, so we can’t verify the translation. In Lovecraft Mythos there is mention of a translation by Dr. John Dee in *English* and not a second translation into *Enochian*. The Latin
quotes in the sidelines of table 26 and 32 refer to an all knowing God, *nos deus omnipotens*, not something you would expect in the book *Necronomicon*.

In 1984 Colin Wilson writes an article for the magazine *Crypt of Cthulhu* in which he explains that the *Hay-Necronomicon* was an elaborate joke. The co-workers on the *Necronomicon* did not become rich from their endeavors, but they had a good deal of fun, as he writes in the article *The Origin of a Spoof*:

Ever since the publication of the *Necronomicon* in 1978, I have been receiving letters from readers who take it perfectly seriously, and who want further details about its magical procedures. I suppose that is a kind of compliment to its spurious air of authenticity. An even greater compliment was an indignant article by Gerald Suster, himself a curious student of magic, in a London ‘underground’ newspaper, denouncing the book as a cynical piece of commercial opportunism. The fact that he found it necessary to denounce such an obvious spoof indicates that we succeeded beyond my original expectations. In fact, anyone with the slightest knowledge of Latin will instantly recognize it for a fake, it is subtitled ‘The book of dead names’, when the word *Necronomicon* actually means the book of dead laws.

Wilson apparently forgot that Lovecraft got the name from ancient Greek. In the nineties a sequel is published on the *Necronomicon: the book of dead names* called *The R’Lyeh Text*, for which Colin Wilson, strange enough, writes a preface.

**4.6 The *Necronomicon* by Robert M. Price**

Contrary to the previous three *Necronomicon*’s, the Price-Necronomicon doesn’t pretend to be genuine. In various prefaces Price convinces us that *Necronomicon* does not exist, but he included a number of *Necronomicon*’s to present the reader with a ‘complete collection’. Price writes two essays for the book in which he portrays himself as a scholar with an expertise on the *Necronomicon* (in reality Price is an expert in the field of the New Testament). The book further consists of a number of stories about Abdul Alhazred or the *Necronomicon*. Price included a few *Necronomicon*’s which are hard to come by for the fans: the *Carter-Necronomicon*, the *Culp-Necronomicon* and *The Sussex Manuscript*.
The *Carter-Necronomicon* is the work of the American science fiction and fantasy author Lin Carter. Carter’s *Necрономicon* is the translation of John Dee, as he states in the title: *The Necronomicon: the Dee translation*. However he tries to make his *Necronomicon* genuine by the use of notes, Carter never denied the fictional character of his *Necronomicon*. Like Robert M. Price states in his introduction to the *Carter-Necronomicon*:

While researching his *Lovecraft: A look behind the Cthulhu Mythos*, Carter began writing up some of the mad Arab’s adventures just for fun and then started adding them some years later once he began to contribute regularly to *Crypt of Cthulhu*.

The *Carter-Necronomicon* is divided in four books: *The Book of Episodes*, in which the life of Abdul Alhazred has been described and through which travels he came to the knowledge contained in the *Necronomicon*; *the Book of Preparations*, in which he explains what is important for the magician to know and to obtain; *the Book of the Gates* which tells about the worlds beyond our known reality, what to expect and how to travel and finally *The Book of Dismissals*, in which you receive instructions how to send away summoned demons. This final book hasn’t been completed due to Carter’s passing in 1988.

A second important *Necronomicon* included in the *Price-Necronomicon* is the so-called *Sussex Manuscript* by Fred L. Pelton. Price tells in his preface how Pelton wrote the manuscript and how a Lovecraft scholar by the name of Edward P. Berglund came across the *Sussex Manuscript*. Pelton calligraphed the book personally and bound it in leather. August Derleth, a friend of Lovecraft and owner of publishing house *Arkham House*, thinks publication of the *Sussex Manuscript* is viable and starts referring to it in his own stories. His partner Donald Wandrei is against publication. Price sees the *Sussex Manuscript* as a tribute to Lovecraft by Pelton, but thinks the transcription of the original manuscript can satisfy the reader to a certain point until someone will publish a facsimile edition of Pelton’s fascinating calligraphy.

The Sussex Manuscript on the title page of the magazine *Crypt of Cthulhu*
The Sussex Manuscript is divided in four books, like the Carter-Necronomicon. The manuscript is ‘translated’ by Baron Frederic I of Sussex. He does not appear in the stories of Lovecraft, and I suspect Frederic I to be Fred Pelton himself. Pelton is well-informed on Lovecraft, just like Carter, as he writes that Frederic I has translated the book from the Latin version of Olaus Wormius and introduced the names of Azathoth and Cthulhu in the first paragraph, while in the Carter version these names are featured in book two. Pelton managed to write his book in archaic looking English by the use of words like ‘ye’, ‘thy’ and ‘thou’, or replacing the vowel I by y, as you can read in the following excerpt:

And in their turn waer made ye universe and ye stars and that whych men calleth Yuggoth and al ye worlde, ye sacred isles, and greate Sothoth came downe amonge ye stars and made ye Old Ones and they saw hym and calleth hym Master, and there came among ye Great Ones chieftayns whych ye scribes account to be Gods, and of these ye shall know of Yog-Sothoth, Ulthar, Tsathoggua, Ithaqua, ye Lloigor, Shub-Nyggurath, Hastur, Gantha, Cthuga, Nyarlathotepe.

Each book is divided in diverse capituli and some fragments are represented in Latin. Substantially it doesn’t deter from Lovecraft’s fiction and even the citations from The Festival and The Dunwich Horror are included in The Sussex Manuscript, be it not in the same order. The pseudo-old English makes this Necronomicon harder to read.

The same goes for the Culp-Necronomicon. This one is created in the seventies by Robert C. Culp for the periodical of a fanclub called The Esoteric Order of Dagon, of which Culp is a member. This club consists of fans of Lovecraft’s fiction, and they publish stories by members who are influenced by Lovecraft. Two fragments of his Necronomicon appear in issues 13 and 14 of the periodical of the Esoteric Order of Dagon. With twelve pages it is by far the shortest Necronomicon I have read. Culp’s Necronomicon is more of an origin story how the mad Arab came by his knowledge, with a sporadical hint to his magic, by means of a sigil or spell. Culp also tried to manage a tone of old English in his Necronomicon by using words as ‘thou’ and ‘thy’, but not in the way Fred Pelton did.

Next to these three Necronomicon’s the Price-Necronomicon contains a few Lovecraft myths dealing with the life of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. The Price-Necronomicon is in a way an anthology of authors who have written about the Necronomicon or tried to write a Necronomicon themselves. Fact remains that this book is published in the series Call of Cthulhu Fiction of Chaosium Inc. and it proves the authors see their work as pure fiction, and not like a book being rediscovered like with the other editions of the Necronomicon.

4.7 The Necronomicon by Donald Tyson

Around the time I was writing my Master’s thesis, this book of Donald Tyson wasn’t published yet: it was published months after I graduated. Tyson’s book was published in 2004 through Llewellyn and his version of the book is the closest to Lovecraft. Some of the scarce quotes Lovecraft published in his fiction are collected in this book. Although it doesn’t resemble a large
book (*Necronomicon* should have been somewhere around 1000 pages), with the subtitle *The Wanderings of Alhazred* you might get an idea what this book is about.

The *Tyson Necronomicon* deals with a lot of the Lovecraftian scenery, pseudo-mythology and ‘occult methods’. The method of extracting the essential salts is explained in detail. There is a reason for that. Donald Tyson was planning a *trilogy* of works concerning the *Necronomicon*. In 2006 he published a pseudo-biography of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, simply titled *Alhazred* and in 2007 he designed a Tarot Deck based on his *Necronomicon*. Tyson never tries to convince the buyer that his *Necronomicon* is genuine, as he wrote himself in an article:

A very clear distinction must be made between the underlying mythic current that lends Lovecraft’s stories their intuited sense of plausibility, and the actual details contained in the stories, most of which are completely fictional and had no existence outside of Lovecraft’s fertile imagination. The actual names and characteristics of the Great Old Ones are fictional. The places associated with them, such as the Plateau of Leng, are fictional. The book the *Necronomicon* is *fictional*.

So we have a *biography* on Abdul Alhazred, the book he wrote after he got *mad* and a Tarot deck that could drive one mad. The tarot cards are designed beautifully and there is a small book that accompanies the deck. The way the cards are used don’t differ too much from other tarot decks, the various cards may have different meanings, which can be consulted in the booklet.

Concerning the mad Arab, Tyson had little to go on. There were a few authors who published short stories about the Mad Arab (some of them featured in the *Necronomicon* by Chaosium), but the original source of the Arab, Lovecraft himself, actually told little to nothing about Alhazred. Tyson had the freedom to describe the process that drove Abdul mad, his travels that deepened his insanity and his untimely death on a market square in Damascus. According to Tyson, Alhazred lived at the courts of the King in Yemen, and fell in love with the daughter of the king. The king discovered their affair and severely punished Alhazred and disfigured his face. Alhazred was banished and left for dead. He gained his strength again and went into the desert, where he came across the *Nameless City*, where he learnt about the previous inhabitants and found a room with portals to various loci terribilis: the Plateau of Leng, the sunken city of R’Lyeh, the city on Antarctica and so on. In all these places Alhazred learned something about the forbidden knowledge he would write down in the *Necronomicon*. He travelled far and wide, into West Africa, into the ancient city of Memphis, Egypt, along the banks of the Euphrates river, many times playing a fool to make himself less suspicious. He even travelled to the valley of Eden, now well hidden, but still the place from where Adam and Eve were expelled.

Although Tyson admits his *Necronomicon* is fictional, he still tries to place it into an occult tradition: he supplies the reader a historical context during which the Mad Arab lived; he designs the *grimoire* the *Necronomicon* is supposed to be, staying close to the main source of this book: H.P. Lovecraft; furthermore he designs a tarot deck which originates from the *grimoire* he wrote and with that he designed something for the *future* of the *Necronomicon*. From all hoax-editions of the forbidden tome, the Tyson-Necronomicon is most revered, especially for him staying true to the spirit of Lovecraft.
Donald Tyson on the left, and the front cover of his *Necronomicon* can be seen on the right.
CHAPTER FIVE

FACT OR FICTION: DISCUSSION ON THE NECRONOMICON

In this chapter I will present you a short overview of the historical context concerning the publication of the *Necronomicon*’s, as a framework for the opinions of later researchers. Among those researchers are people we can qualify as ‘pseudo-scientists’. Then I will discuss how the *Necronomicon* gained such a remarkable status with fans of the horror-genre. In the third paragraph we will look at researchers who dealt with the *Necronomicon* and how libraries look on this phenomenon. The final paragraph is an introduction to the next chapter in which I will present my conclusions.

5.1 The occult decade: the seventies

During the sixties we see countermovements rise against the establishment: hippies, provos and ‘nozems’ (-punks, a hard word to translate). These countermovements create a matrix in which ideas of occultists like Aleister Crowley and Gerald Gardner can settle, and generate an overwhelming interest in the occult. We can measure this in the cultural development of the large number of *supernatural movies* that appear to be made, for example the *Hammer Horror* movies from the sixties and the so-called ‘Devil’s thrillers’ like *Rosemary’s Baby, The Exorcist* and *The Omen*.

It may not come as a surprise that during these years the interest in the stories of Lovecraft and especially the *Necronomicon* resurfaces. A surprising development is that the idea of alien gods who visited the Earth millions of years ago and left their traces behind will become a widespread phenomenon. In 1968 the book *Chariots of the Gods* by Erich von Däniken is published, which embodies the same idea. Von Däniken wasn’t the originator of this hypothesis. He clearly borrowed this idea from the Belgians Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, whose *Dawn of the Magicians* was published in 1962 and already displayed the ancient astronaut hypothesis. And what are the odds: Jacques Bergier appeared to be a fan of Lovecraft: in various articles for the magazine *Bres* he quotes Lovecraft. During the start of the seventies he writes a series of articles for *Bres*, entitled *Encursed Books*. In an article about the *Monas Hieroglyphica* by John Dee, Bergier writes:

Now we speak of it, let us finish with another legend, JOHN DEE never translated the cursed book the *Necronomicon* by ABDUL AL AZRED and for the definitive reason that this book never existed. But as LIN CARTER justified, if the *Necronomicon* had existed, DEE would have been the only person with the capacity to obtain and translate it. The *Necronomicon* is unfortunately chapter by chapter an invention by LOVECRAFT who confirmed this to me personally in a letter. Pity.

Bergier doesn’t tell us when he received this letter from Lovecraft, but S.T. Joshi never found any correspondence from Bergier to Lovecraft, and considers this story apocryphal. Bergier uses Lovecraft in many articles for *Bres*, as seen in his article *The Prehistoric Fair*:

LOVECRAFT thought of libraries and subterranean caverns, furnished and abandoned by visitors of alien origin.
The article deals with the possibility of alien visitors to our world in a distant past. Did Bergier get his idea from Lovecraft? This remains unclear.

Lovecraft becomes popular again after the publication of *Chariots of the Gods*. Possibly people recognize the ideas of Lovecraft in the theories of Von Däniken, who eventually causes a storm in a teacup. It would take until 1973 before the first *Necronomicon* would hit the bookstores.

### 5.2 Sources for the debate on the *Necronomicon*

In the eighties a number of magazines are founded, published by fans of Lovecraft. The best known is *Crypt of Cthulhu* and it’s academic counterpart *Lovecraft Studies*. Development was going faster with the arrival of the internet. Through websites and bulletin boards people are able to inform anyone interested about the *Necronomicon*. There are an enormous number of websites, to give you an idea:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search engine</th>
<th>Number of hits for ‘Necronomicon’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Google</td>
<td>87 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altavista</td>
<td>33 260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo</td>
<td>99 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lycos</td>
<td>175 341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the Web</td>
<td>120 593</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Numbers of hits for the *Necronomicon* with five randomly chosen search engines on the internet

The sources for most of these websites appear to be the *Necronomicon’s* of chapter four, with the *Hay-Necronomicon* being the most popular. The webmasters apparently take the ‘research’ of Hay, Turner, Langford and Wilson seriously. The *Necronomicon*-part of the book is often copied and integrally represented on the website. Other myths are concocted, like a letter exchange between Lovecraft and Aleister Crowley. According to the H.P. Lovecraft Archives-website, this myth can be solely attributed to the *Necronomicon anti-FAQ* by Colin Low. Other website copy these data and the myth starts to lead a life of its own. According to Low, Lovecraft and Crowley met through their acquaintance with Sonia Haft Greene, who attended a reading of Crowley in 1918, who had literary ambitions next to his magickal ones. Sonia tells Lovecraft about the *Necronomicon*, which he uses as a plot device in *The Hound* in 1922. According to The Lovecraft-Archives there is no evidence supporting this correspondence, not in Lovecraft’s letters nor in Sonia Haft Greene’s.

A very important source for the status of the *Necronomicon* are the bulletin boards, news groups and forums. The most influential groups, measured by the number of participants and responses are *alt.horror.cthulhu* and *alt.horror.necronomicon*. The latter sees the *Necronomicon* being detached from it’s inventor; the messages in which *Necronomicon* is considered to be real are moving away from Lovecraft’s fiction in a high pace, as can be seen in an entry by a person with the nickname Morpheus:
It was being kept carefully guarded in the main library of Baghdad […] The current whereabouts of the original Necronomicon is unknown although rumours speak of it being quietly offered for sale on the black market […] Other rumours speak of it and other arcane artifacts from the museum vanishing to Area 51 where it has become the focus of research.

Someone named Al Smith responds:

The *Necronomicon* is being used as the heart of new weapons project that relies on magical force to power it’s weapons. This force, known as mana, can be created from the aether by using the incantations and pentacles in the *Necronomicon*. Once fueled with mana, the new weapons are rumored to be unstoppable.

These contributions are purely subjective and can’t be verified. There are also some biblical terms in use, as it appears, mana being the ‘heavenly bread’ Moses receives in the desert. Here it changes meaning.

A more hopeful contribution comes from a participant who uses the enigmatic nickname Tyrtix:

Do you know that some of the manuscripts of Galileo Galilei (originals) speak about that book, the *Necronomicon*? Maybe someone knows this book a little first than H.P. Lovecraft [sic]

This is too good to be true. Galilei is a well-known name, and mentioning a document from before 1922 will turn everything we know about the *Necronomicon* upside down. There are some sceptical replies, to which Tyrtix answers the following:

Ehmmm, im’ Italian, maybe I know somethingh about Galileo Galilei.. there are 2 pages in wich he wrote somethingh about the *Necronomicon*… H.P. cannot be the father of this legend, it’s too much radicated in so many different cultures [sic]

Saying you know something about Galilei because you’re Italian is the same as saying you know something about Newton because you’re British. There appears to be no known connection between Galilei and the *Necronomicon*. Tyrtix eventually starts to doubt himself:

I remember I’ve read this on a book, there are 2 pages of a manuscript written by Galileo Galilei (or maybe Leonardo da Vinci, I can’t remember clearly now); these pages describes the book from legends that Galilei had heard, and some ideas on where it could (obviously) be found [sic]

But connecting the *Necronomicon* to Galilei or Da Vinci doesn’t provide us with further evidence. Possibly Tyrtix thought of this himself to have something to tell. In New Age circles it isn’t customary to do source research. Based on faulty evidence conclusions are drawn on UFO’s, paranormal phenomena et cetera. Evidence is not needed, according to New Age thinkers, you know the truth instinctively. You only need to believe. The bulletin boards are therefore a bad source of information, because everyone uses nicknames and more often they don’t reveal their sources.
Another debate about the *Necronomicon* concerns the so-called *Voynich-Manuscript*, which is kept in the Beinecke Rare Book Library of the Yale-University. The manuscript is called that way because of the bookmerchant Wilfrid M. Voynich, who discovered the manuscript in a cabinet of the trainingsinstitute for Jesuits in Villa Mondragone in Frascati, Italy. It appears to be a *code-manuscript*. Voynich takes it with him to the United States and sends copies around to experts who might be able to decipher it. Voynich suspects the book to hide important information. Professor William Romaine Newbold claims in 1921 to have deciphered the manuscript successfully. According to Newbold the manuscript is written by Roger Bacon, the thirteenth century empiricist. The ‘discovery’ published by Newbold caused doubts concerning the deciphering process. John M. Manly states the method Newbold used was ambiguous and can lead to many interpretations, it doesn’t become clear which method Newbold used. Many researchers attempt to decipher the manuscript, which led Robert Brumbaugh to the conviction the manuscript was a fraud. Leo Levitov thought the manuscript to be a manifest of the Cathars, a thirteenth century cult being brutally slaughtered. After the passing of Voynich in 1930 the manuscript lands in the hands of bookseller Hans P. Kraus who offers it for sale for a hundred and sixty thousand dollars. When no one wants to buy it he donates it to the Beinecke Rare Books Library of Yale University.

The book has a rich history. It appears for the first time at the court of Rudolf II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. It has been attributed to Roger Bacon, but the code appears too complicated for a thirteenth century code. Pictures of plants which grow on American soil make it hard to prove that Bacon is responsible for the manuscript. Another candidate is John Dee who wrote the manuscript, but there is also a suspicion Edward Kelley fabricated the manuscript to try to gain funds from Rudolf II, who was known to be a gullible man. Dee and Kelley have been at the courts of Rudolf II.

Many believers think that the Voynich-manuscript is in fact a coded version of the *Necronomicon*. We can trace this thought to the author Colin Wilson, who wrote three Lovecraft myths and is responsible for the preface of the *Hay-Necronomicon* and it’s sequel *The R’Lyeh Text*. In his stories *The Philosophers Stone* and *Return of the Lloigor* Wilson connects the Voynich-manuscript to the *Necronomicon*. This connection becomes known among the believers in the *Necronomicon*, which according to Daniel Harms has two reasons:

1. *The Return of the Lloigor* first appears in *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*, one of the most influential magazines on Lovecraft Myths and
2. Wilson, like Lovecraft, is very crafted in mixing fact with fiction.

Harms considers the second reason most important. With Wilson being a driving force behind the *Hay-Necronomicon*, in which another code-manuscript plays an important part, the *Book of Enoch* by John Dee; the same John Dee who is suspected to have written the Voynich-manuscript. Wilson does take responsibility by telling the reader that the Voynich Manuscript actually exists, but remains untranslated.

Jacques Bergier writes in *Bres* about the Voynich-Manuscript, but loses himself in uncontrolled speculation:
The Book of Solomon, which was in possession of ROGER BACON and was burned in 1350, was undoubtedly something else. Certainly this work was, like some others, ‘unknown and forbidden knowledge’ like LOVECRAFT calls it, translated by ROGER BACON into an unknown language and later decoded into a secret cypher.

Bergier doesn’t name a source, and how Bacon got hold of the Book of Solomon, remains a mystery.

Roughly we can distinguish between two kinds of people who occupy themselves with the Necronomicon: believers and skeptics. About the believers Daniel Harms says in The Necronomicon Files:

Yet there are thousands of people who believe that the Necronomicon has existed for centuries, that it’s existence has been hidden even by those who speak of it (!), and that anyone who finds it will be able to call Lovecraft’s “Old Ones” back into existence.

Harms looks into the reasons given by believers when they are confronted with the fictional character of the Necronomicon:

- Read Lovecraft; since he wrote about it with such force, the Necronomicon must be real;
- You can tell the Necronomicon is real if you read between the lines of Lovecraft’s writing
- Lovecraft kept the book’s existence a secret because he knew it was dangerous
- Lovecraft saw the book once, but was traumatized by the experience and forgot that it existed – but he wrote about it anyway
- A cult spirited away all copies of the Necronomicon so that no one could find it; You can’t prove that it doesn’t exist.

These arguments are not very convincing: reading between the lines isn’t a trustworthy method, and not everyone will read the same thing between the lines. Stating that Lovecraft saw the book once, got traumatized and yet writes about it is a contradiction: forgetting something due to traumatization is highly improbable, but writing about something you forgot is even more improbable. In Lovecraft’s legacy is more than enough evidence to support the claim that Necronomicon doesn’t exist, taking the correspondence of Lovecraft about Necronomicon in consideration.

5.3 Science on the Necronomicon

There are not many serious scientists who have spoken out on the Necronomicon. S.T. Joshi calls the book repeatedly a fictitious title and in his book An H.P. Lovecraft Encyclopedia he writes:

How HPL came up with the idea of the Necronomicon is unclear. [...] but recall that among the “infinite array of stage properties” that HPL in “Supernatural Horror in Literature” identifies in the standard Gothic Novel were “mouldy hidden manuscripts”.

And further:
When asked late in life by James Blish why he did not write the *Necronomicon* himself, HPL noted that in “The Dunwich Horror” he had cited from page 751 of the work, making the writing of such a book a very extensive undertaking. He wisely added: “...One can never *produce* anything even a tenth as terrible and impressive as one can awesomely *hint* about. If anyone were to *write* the *Necronomicon*, it would disappoint all those who have shuddered at cryptic references to it”. This has not stopped several individuals over the past twenty-five years from producing books bearing the title *Necronomicon*, some of which are indeed clever hoaxes but surely very far from HPL’s own conception of the work.

Another academic who seriously thinks about the *Necronomicon* is the aforementioned Daniel Harms. In the literary-scientific part of *The Necronomicon Files* he writes:

Although perhaps tempted to ignore these correspondences [those who wrote HPL about the *Necronomicon*] or lead them on, Lovecraft’s letters show that he gave each a careful and conscientious answer. At the same time, the steady stream of these requests made him realize that he had started something that was now beyond his control, and that the rumors of his creation would grow faster than he could contain them. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that a few hoaxes, or even a fake volume, appeared. The reality of the situation, however, is that *Necronomicon* hoaxes cropped up often, and almost a dozen books entitled *Necronomicon* appeared. The transition from the figment of an author’s imagination to an actual volume took less than thirty years, and the trend has grown since then, creating a fan’s dream and a bibliographer’s nightmare.

Harms is convinced that Lovecraft was *aware* that the *Necronomicon* was leading a life of it’s own. On the internet we can find some researchers who have spoken out on the *Necronomicon*. Veronique Campion-Vincent of the *Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, Paris, France* writes the following about the *Necronomicon*:

The *Necronomicon*, H.P. Lovecraft’s best-known fictional manuscript, started to exist in the 1960s as a fictitious library catalog reference (located at Miskatonic University), then developed when hoax editions began appearing in the 1970s. Soon video games and web pages complicated and expanded the picture. Thus in July 2001, a wide “Necronomicon” web search (using Google) gave around 40 000 web pages, reduced to 9000 with the exclusion of games, limitation to English and recent (one year) updating (see http://www.hplovecraft.com/creation/necron/). National Libraries such as Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Library of Congress, and the British Library each keep about four or five of these hoax books. Most of them are still on sale. Can the *Necronomicon* still be considered not to exist in 2001?

More scientists have spoken out on the *Necronomicon*, but these materials are hard to come by.

5.4 Libraries about the *Necronomicon*

My visit to the British Library in London on October 22nd 2003 created a new perspective. During the time I had to wait for my library card, the employee reads the letter of recommendation by the University. With a smile he explains that *Necronomicon* does not exist. I explain I study the history behind the book and consider it a falsification of history. Two people travelled from Rome the month before to view the *Necronomicon*. In the Manuscript Reading Room they received a stencil with information concerning the *Necronomicon*, that it’s a creation by Lovecraft and it is unclear why so many people believe it exists. During the wait before the *Book
of Enoch is presented at my table, I study the stencil. The librarian explains that they receive hundreds of requests to view the ‘original manuscript of the Necronomicon’.

Where do these people get the information that apparently there seems to be a copy of the Necronomicon in the British Library? It appears to be Lovecraft himself, as can be read in ‘The Dunwich Horror’:

Correspondence with the Widener Library at Harvard, the Bibliothèque National in Paris, the British Museum, the University of Buenos Ayres, and the Library of Miskatonic University at Arkham had failed to get him the loan of a book he desperately wanted; so at length he set out in person, shabby, dirty, bearded and uncouth of dialect, to consult the copy at Miskatonic, which was the nearest to him geographically.

Wilbur Whateley indeed goes to the fictitious Library of Miskatonic University in the fictitious city of Arkham. But the other Libraries are real. The Manuscript collection of the British Museum are transferred to the British Library. That leaves us with Harvard, Paris and Buenos Ayres. A mail to the Widener Library results in the following response:

We do get inquiries about the Necronomicon periodically. When we do, we explain that it does not exist.

Librarian Deborah Kelley -Milburn sends people an e-mail with the following text:

There is no Necronomicon, the 17th century book written about by H.P. Lovecraft. It is an idea of fiction, Lovecraft’s invention. Several hoax editions exist, however, one of which is held in the Widener Library.

The hoax edition held in the Widener Library is the Simon-Necronomicon.

The Library of the University of Buenos Ayres directs me to the webmaster of Philosophy and Literature. A further reply never arrived. The same goes for the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, who doesn’t even bother to answer. I also inquired at Brown University in Providence with the same question, reasoning that some fans of Lovecraft might think a Necronomicon could be hidden in the literary legacy of Lovecraft, but they haven’t answered my inquiry as well. And so an incomplete picture exists of the influence Lovecraft had on his readers, and how many requests are send to various libraries.

5.5 From fiction to belief

In retrospect I can say that the Necronomicon serves a wide audience. The believers of the book are unable to produce valid arguments with the necessary proof. One of the most recent responses on alt.horror.necronomicon is that the book Necronomicon does exist, but comes nowhere near to what Lovecraft writes. Believers appear to wriggle in every direction to get their point ‘proven’.

Necronomicon being a fictitious book has not waivered under all the arguments presented by the believers. Not even the photographs you can find on the internet of the title-pages and frontispieces of the Necronomicon, which are very clever hoaxes. What did strike me
is that *Necronomicon* has evolved with time: now it is an original manuscript kept in the Library of Baghdad and the Second Gulf War is a smokescreen operation to obtain the book for a special weapons program in the United States. And thus the *Necronomicon* enters the field of the New Age and the Conspiracy Theory, making people believe that a shadow government called the Illuminati controls everything in the world (through lower institutions like the Trilateral Committee and the Bilderberg-Group), exposes the world population to dangerous chemicals, makes secret deals with extra-terrestrials and more fantastic stories.

One of the participants on alt.horror.necronomicon makes the bold statement that the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq was because of their possession of the *Necronomicon*, but that Iraq didn’t have the right magicians to control this magic. This is a small indication how far believers will go in their speculation. For none of these arguments exists a shred of evidence.
Frontispiece of the *Astronomicon* by Manilius. Presumably this was the main inspiration for Lovecraft to construct his *Necronomicon*.

The Codex Seraphinianus, with graphics that might seem reminiscent of Lovecraft’s descriptions of the *Necronomicon*.
A page of the Voynich Manuscript. These plants appear to be mandrakes. The code still isn’t deciphered.
A ‘discovered page of the *Necronomicon*’, retrieved by a US Marine. Note that the page has eerily similarities with the *Necronomicon* from Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead* movies, and that some of the symbolics are pseudo Arabic mixed with sigils from the Simon-Necronomicon. Clearly a hoax.

The Widener Library at Harvard, according to Lovecraft one of the Libraries keeping a copy of the *Necronomicon* under lock and key.4
The British Library in London receives hundreds of requests to view the ‘Necronomicon’ in its original state. They even distribute a pamphlet explaining the book is not real.
CHAPTER 6  CONCLUSION

In this chapter I make an inventory of the responsible parties for the belief in the existence of the *Necronomicon*. How much can be ascribed to Lovecraft and his followers? Accordingly I present a few explanations for the stubborn belief in this book. Finally I will answer the hypothesis.

6.1 Are Lovecraft and his followers responsible for the belief in the existence of the *Necronomicon*?

Considering the aforementioned information, I can state that Lovecraft is *partially* responsible for the belief in the existence of the *Necronomicon*. A few aspects in his work might have contributed to that:

1. Lovecraft’s *writing style* might have given people a reason to believe *Necronomicon* really exists: the lack of dialogue, the semi-scientific descriptions and the mixing of fact with fiction.
2. The *lack* of information in most stories. Lovecraft only quotes twice in his entire body of work from the *Necronomicon* and a few enigmatic spells, the *Necronomicon* serves more as a plot device and an index to the locus terribilis
3. Naming historical figures as people who were involved with the *Necronomicon*, like John Dee and Ole Worm.
4. Naming the *Necronomicon* alongside existing works like the *Saducismus Triumphatus* by Glanvil, the *Demonolatreia* by Nicolas Rémy or the *Stanzas of Dzyan* by Madame Blavatsky.
5. The *Necronomicon* appeared to be kept in real existing libraries.
6. Lovecraft’s spoofing and fooling around with Clark Ashton Smith and Frank Belknap Long, pretending the *Necronomicon* did exist.

Lovecraft should not be held accountable for the final point, because I think the interpreter of the letters makes the wrong assumptions. Just for the record.

On the other side I would like to point out that Lovecraft, like Harms wrote in *The Necronomicon Files*, always takes the responsibility to respond to inquiries concerning the *Necronomicon*. In Paragraph four of Chapter three we have read that Lovecraft always writes back to people who are convinced of the authenticity of the *Necronomicon*, but as well with people who claim to have actually seen the *Necronomicon* and held the book in their hands. Lovecraft always emphasized the fictitious nature of the *Necronomicon* and her author.

Can authors who followed Lovecraft be held responsible for the belief in the authenticity of the *Necronomicon*? Some authors like Frank Belknap Long, Clark Ashton Smith, Robert Bloch, Henry Kuttner, Manly Wade Wellmann and August Derleth have added elements to the *Necronomicon*, but never abandoned the spirit of Lovecraft. Authors who weren’t contemporaries of Lovecraft have strayed from Lovecraft’s original idea. The only one who didn’t was the English author Colin Wilson, who like Lovecraft mixes fact with fiction and in that
way fooled many of his readers, making thousands believe that the *Voynich-manuscript* is in fact the *Necronomicon*. So next to Lovecraft I hold Colin Wilson responsible for keeping the myth in place.

6.2 What maintains the belief in the *Necronomicon*

There is a multitude of variables that maintain a belief in the *Necronomicon*. A psychological aspect is the power the *Necronomicon* represents. The *Necronomicon* isn’t only the index to evil, it also controls it: you can summon the demons and you can send them away. If the book is as terrible as they say, and you are able to control this magic, you are one of the most powerful people in the world. And many people seek power, or try to gain it in this particular way. During the seventies, when belief in occult powers reaches a new peak, a smart marketing-move made of the *Necronomicon* an objectively existing book.

Another aspect keeping the belief in the *Necronomicon* alive is wishful thinking. People concoct all kinds of evidence for the existence of the book. I would like to remind you of the response by Tyrtix on alt.horror.necronomicon, in which a nameless work is mentioned by Galileo Galilei, being evidence for the existence of the *Necronomicon*. Tyrtix can’t tell us which book it was and starts doubting himself about the author: was it Galilei or was it Da Vinci? Some of these arguments seem to have no ground at all (like the claim that the original manuscript of the *Necronomicon* was held in the Library of Baghdad) and can’t be taken seriously.

Following this we can see that *Necronomicon* also represents an explanation for certain events, like both Gulf Wars, notwithstanding the real reasons why these wars are waged. This is very close to wishful thinking.

Another influence is of more recent date: the use of *Necronomicon* as a source of inspiration for movies, lyrics by heavy metal bands and the publication of the hoax editions of the book. It creates a demand for the book, and the publishers will supply. Many are convinced that none of the paperback editions in circulation are authentic, there remain people who hope the original manuscript will one day surface.

What can we say about the people who believe in this book? An employee of the American Book Center in Amsterdam sells the book mainly to teenagers. In an e-mail they explain to me:

Mostly fans of heavy metal music buy the *Necronomicon*, but that might be slightly short sighted. However, the average buyer mostly appreciates seering guitars, a dark occultism/pseudo-satanism... Is mostly adolescent and comes most of the time from the eastern provinces. They are most of the time very polite.

Here is the danger of stereotyping the average reader. Most of the people on the bulletin boards are anonymous and supply us with little to no background information. If we are dealing with adolescents here, the belief in the *Necronomicon* is easily explained: it has become a matter of pedagogy. There are people on the other hand who are well into their adulthood and still believe the *Necronomicon* is real. How many of these people are out there is hard, if not impossible, to find out.
6.3 Is there a literary tradition for the *Necronomicon*?

The *Necronomicon*’s spoken of in this thesis can be described as ordinary fiction. Two of these publications fit into the tradition of *manuscript-fiction*. These are *Al Azif* by L. Sprague de Camp and the *Simon-Necronomicon*. Both publications were incited by a mysterious manuscript which came into the publishers hands. In the case of *Al Azif* it has been said that Sprague de Camp bought it in Lebanon, in case of the *Simon-Necronomicon* the manuscript was handed over by an anonymous monk. The respective publishers both decided to publish the manuscripts, the first not translated, the second one in English translation. The *Hay-Necronomicon* can’t be categorized as manuscript-fiction, because this manuscript wasn’t handed over to the publisher, but found by a couple of researchers in the collection Sloane of the British Library: the *Book of Enoch* is a real manuscript. The *Necronomicon*’s published in the *Price-Necronomicon* aren’t supported by the claim of having received an unknown manuscript, but more written because of the wish of a deceased author: these *Necronomicon*’s are best considered a tribute to Lovecraft, not a way to deceive people.

Manuscript-fiction apparently still exists in the seventies. Manuscript-fiction apparently is close to falsification of history, considering the Ossian Poems. Another extraordinary fact is that there is no ideological reason to commit falsification of history/manuscript-fiction, the reason is more economic in nature. I further discovered, but this is outside the scope of my thesis, that manuscript-fiction still manifests itself in conspiracy theories. An ‘English researcher’ received a peculiar manuscript and after translation it appeared to be the *Protocols of the Wise men of Zion*. The translation and publication were a threat to his life. Like I can interpret this, it is exactly what manuscript-fiction is all about.

6.4 Answering the hypothesis

My hypothesis was:

*In what way have sources, writings and explanations by Lovecraft and others played a role in the maintenance of the idea that Necronomicon is a real existing book?*

Lovecraft’s introduction to the *Necronomicon*, with all the given repositories, naming of historical figures who had something to do with the *Necronomicon*, the citations taken from the ‘work’ and speaking of the *Necronomicon* next to real existing books, have contributed to maintaining that the *Necronomicon* is a real existing book. Especially the repositories of the book have been a clear point of reference in answering my hypothesis: some of the libraries Lovecraft mentioned indeed get requests of people who want to see the original *Necronomicon*.

Considering the *explanations* of Lovecraft and others, it is clear that those don’t maintain this idea. Lovecraft always explained that the book is his own creation, and that it is not for sale and cannot be found. Lovecraft wishes to find the energy and inspiration to write the book himself, but he considers himself not capable.

Considering the *sources* of Lovecraft, we can be short: he never revealed the source which inspired him for the *Necronomicon*. He *dreamt* the book, although other authors point out the phonetic and semantic resemblance with the *Astronomicon* by Manilius. Who did reveal sources are the authors of the various *Necronomicon*’s. L. Sprague de Camp tells us it’s a
manuscript, written in an imaginary language which appeared to be Persian, and of which a facsimile-edition is published, in which sixteen pages are repeated and which is printed in mirror image. Eventually it is hard to believe.

The writers of the Simon-Necronomicon base themselves upon a manuscript coming from a priest, stolen from a library, which is actually quite vague. And as a researcher you aren’t allowed access to the original manuscript.

The authors of the Hay-Necronomicon are more careful in the choice of their source. They choose a so-called code-manuscript, of which no one can establish the true contents. By claiming the manuscript to be deciphered with a computer and not providing the translation key, they can go a long way. But the 35 verses in Enochian at the beginning of the manuscript are not mentioned. And don’t forget the manuscript is revealed to John Dee by the angels and two small quotes on the side which mention ‘God’.

When we compare the Necronomicons with what Lovecraft wrote about this book, it becomes clear that Lovecraft speaks of an enormous book: Necronomicon should have approximately a thousand pages. None of the Necronomicon’s comes close to that number. Al Azif counts 195 pages, the Simon-Necronomicon barely 218 pages, the Hay-Necronomicon counts 28 pages and the three Necronomicons in the Price-Necronomicon come nowhere near such numbers: Carter-Necronomicon counts 101 pages (but this one is never completed, we don’t know if Carter could have managed to reach the 1000 pages), the Culp-Necronomicon counts 12 pages and the Sussex Manuscript comes down to 47 pages.

The sources of the believers in the Necronomicon are so vague that I will not discuss these in the conclusion.

It appears that Lovecraft’s fiction is mainly responsible for maintaining the belief in the Necronomicon. The book has gathered a large following and has started to lead a life of it’s own. People hear something about the Necronomicon from a movie or a CD by Morbid Angel, and start looking for the book, without knowing where it came from. Inquisitive readers might come back to Lovecraft. But people who know the Necronomicon from Lovecraft, or read one of the hoax-editions still think of numerous explanations to objectify the Necronomicon. The fact that they don’t use valid arguments is more reason to take Necronomicon not too serious.

The development of these fake Necronomicon’s has a positive effect as well, like we can read in the Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology:

Meanwhile librarians need no longer be embarrassed by requests of this elusive work.
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