

2021

## Where the Sea Meets the Sky: A Fantasy-Theme Analysis of H.P. Lovecraft's Celephaïs

Spencer J. Burke

Collin College, spencerburke92@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/quest>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Burke, Spencer J. (2021) "Where the Sea Meets the Sky: A Fantasy-Theme Analysis of H.P. Lovecraft's Celephaïs," *Quest*: Vol. 5 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/quest/vol5/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Collin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Quest by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Collin. For more information, please contact [mtomlin@collin.edu](mailto:mtomlin@collin.edu).

# Application of Rhetorical Methodologies

*Research in progress for SPCH 1311: Introduction to Speech Communication*

Faculty Mentor: Jennifer Warren

The following essay is a rhetorical criticism written as the final project for the Collin College Honors Introduction to Speech Communication course. This student's essay utilizes Fantasy Theme Analysis to explore the rhetorical choices of H.P. Lovecraft in his short story *Celephais*. By examining the characters, settings, and actions within the narrative, both in isolation and in relation to each other, Lovecraft's rhetorical vision is elucidated. Moreover, this essay analyzes if and how group cohesiveness is achieved via a process coined by Ernest Bormann as "symbolic convergence." In this rhetorical analysis, the term "fantasy" is utilized, but not in the traditional sense. In this particular methodology, the term refers to what Sonja Foss calls a "creative and imaginative interpretation of events" by a group of people. The method used in the essay stems in part from Robert Bales' previous work on small group interaction.

The creation of this essay came after months of small group class research regarding benchmark components of more than a dozen traditional rhetorical methods including, among others, Neo-Aristotelian, Ideological, Pentadic, and Narrative analyses. Sonja Foss' *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, a seminal text for many collegiate Introduction to Rhetorical Methods courses, served as the primary text of the class. At the conclusion of the semester, students chose one of the methods and applied it to a text of their choice. The following essay is an exceptional example of the work produced in the class.

**Where the Sea Meets the Sky:  
A Fantasy-Theme Analysis of H.P. Lovecraft's *Celephaïs***

Spencer Burke

When considering the literary genres of cosmic horror and speculative fiction, the first author that often comes to mind is H.P. Lovecraft and his Cthulhu Mythos stories. Lovecraft's *Celephaïs* is a part of his lesser known but equally appreciated works collectively called his Dream Cycle. These works delve into the human psyche and toy with the premise of dreams: that the dream-world people enter as they sleep is equal in significance and potency to the world they consciously experience while awake; they simply fail to recall it accurately after waking. In *Celephaïs*, the protagonist of the story, Kuranos, uses his immense imagination as a child to create his own dream world and, as he struggles to return to it in adulthood, becomes consumed by his pursuit to the point where he can no longer discern dream from reality and ultimately perishes. This short story was chosen for analysis because it was among the first of his fictional short stories to be published professionally. Therefore, examining *Celephaïs* through a rhetorical lens rather than a literary one yields fascinating insights into how Lovecraft was able to emotionally connect with his newly acquired audience.

Fantasy-theme analysis is a form of rhetorical criticism developed by Ernest G. Bormann as he expanded upon Robert Bales' theories concerning communication within small groups (Foss, 2018). The observations by Bales, including but not limited to

tense moments of interaction within groups being resolved through laughter and lively excitement, led Bormann to postulate that the same concept of shifting rhetorical perspectives could be applied to larger works that address a wider audience than a dialogue shared within a small group (Bormann, 1972). The result of Bormann's speculation was his theory of symbolic convergence. In this theory, symbols create reality (i.e., if one were to say "water, water everywhere," it would be symbolically implied that there was "not a drop to drink"), and since people share their symbols with one another as they communicate, it is an inevitable possibility that "two or more private symbolic worlds [can] come more closely together, or even overlap during certain processes of communication" (Foss, 2018, p. 106). When this takes place, a shared rhetorical perspective develops, which is known as a fantasy (Bormann, 1972).

While fantasy is a common word in many people's vocabulary, Bormann explains that rhetorically, a fantasy "consists of characters, real or fictitious, playing out a dramatic situation in a setting removed in time and space from the here-and-now transactions of the group" (Bormann, 1972, p. 397). Bales shares this definition but goes on to state that "in such moments, which occur not only in groups, but also in individual responses to works of art, one is 'transported' to a world which seems somehow even more real than the everyday world . . . one's feelings fuse with the symbols and images which carry the feeling in communication and sustain it over time" (Bales, 1970, p. 152). Just as many connect the symbols of swing sets, playgrounds, and scraped knees with childhood, groups or individuals who subscribe to a fantasy characteristically organize the chaotic events within a narrative or even events in their

daily lives into a format that is in line with that fantasy (Foss, 2018). While fantasy-theme analysis is characteristically employed to disassemble speeches, broadcasts, and other forms of spoken rhetoric, one can rarely divorce a work of literature from the rhetoric from which it is composed, and as a result, fantasy-theme analysis is effective for examining literature.

### **Background: Lovecraft's Early Life and Career**

#### **1890-1913: Lovecraft's Youth and Adolescence**

Howard Philips Lovecraft was raised primarily by his mother, his two aunts, and his affluent grandfather on an opulent Victorian estate. In the absence of his father, who was institutionalized in Butler Hospital when Lovecraft was only three years old and died before he was nine, his grandfather Whipple Van Buren Phillips became Howard's de facto father figure and introduced him to *Arabian Nights*, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey* (Joshi, 1990). The young Lovecraft adored these stories and began writing his own fictional tales as early as age six or seven (Joshi, 1990). By age thirteen, Lovecraft was already producing journals on the subject of science, *The Scientific Gazette* and *The Rhode Island Journal of Astronomy*, which he would distribute among his few, treasured friends (Joshi, 1990).

Later that same year, however, Lovecraft's beloved grandfather Whipple Van Buren Phillips passed away and "the subsequent mismanagement of his property and affairs, plunged Lovecraft's family into severe financial difficulties" (Joshi, 1990, para. 4). Forced out of their Victorian home, Lovecraft was distraught, and the combined loss of his grandfather, his family's wealth, and his birthplace drove him into a deep depression

(Joshi, 1990). As his high school graduation approached in 1908, he suffered from a nervous breakdown that resulted in his withdrawal from school before obtaining his diploma, followed by his departure from society as a whole (Joshi, 1990). His failure to graduate high school naturally compromised his academic aspirations, as his application to Brown University was subsequently rejected (Joshi, 1990). Lovecraft isolated himself from the world over the next several years, his time consumed by writing poetry, studying astronomy, and developing “an unhealthy close relationship with his mother...who developed a pathological love-hate relationship with her son” (Joshi, 1990, para. 4).

### **1913-1922: Lovecraft the Amateur Author**

Lovecraft emerged from solitude in 1913 through a series of provocative letters sent to the pulp magazine, *The Argosy*, in which he attacked the author Fred Jackson for his childish love stories, choosing to do so in the form of romantic poetic verse to mock the style that, according to Lovecraft, Jackson failed to reproduce (Joshi, 1990). As *The Argosy* began to publish these poems and a vicious literary debate engulfed its letters column, Edward F. Daas, the president of the United Amateur Press Association (UAPA), took notice and invited Lovecraft to join the organization (Joshi, 1990). When recalling this experience, Lovecraft wrote:

In 1914, when the kindly hand of amateurdom [sic] was first extended to me, I was as close to the state of vegetation as any animal well can be . . .with the advent of the United I obtained a renewal to live; a renewed sense of existence as other than a superfluous weight; and found a sphere in which I could feel that

my efforts were not wholly futile. For the first time I could imagine that my clumsy gropings after art were a little more than faint cries lost in the unlistening world.

(Joshi, 1990, para. 5)

At an amateur journalism convention in 1921, Lovecraft met his future wife Sonia Haft Greene (Joshi, 1990). In 1923, several of his short stories that had been published exclusively within amateur magazines would be accepted to the newly-formed *Weird Tales* magazine, marking Lovecraft's transition to a professional fiction writer (Joshi, 1990). According to the Internet Speculative Fantasy Database (ISFDB), *Celephaïs* was first published in 1922, the year between these two momentous events in Lovecraft's life, and the story appeared in the May edition of Sonia Greene's own magazine: *The Rainbow* (*Publication: The Rainbow*, 2006).

## **Methodology**

### **Fantasy-Theme Analysis**

When performing a fantasy-theme analysis, one looks to the cornerstones upon which the fantasy is constructed: the characters, actions, and settings presented (Bormann, 1972). These themes reference not only the fundamental elements of drama, but they also include the thematic characteristics that a rhetor (one who practices rhetoric) or author is ascribing to these themes to evoke a shared emotional experience with their audience (Bormann, 1972). For example, the fantasy of unrequited love present in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* appeals to those who would easily share in that fantasy, such as individuals recently entering or leaving a romantic relationship of their own. As such, the fantasy themes that accomplish the creation of this fantasy, the

actions, settings, and characters of *Romeo and Juliet*, presented through a structure abundant in metaphor, elevated language, and poetry, would trigger an emotional response in such a reader that paralleled the emotions projected by these characters. This connection between Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the impassioned reader is therefore an example of symbolic convergence. Conversely, to an individual who believes that a person is not restricted to a single star-crossed lover over the course of their romantic life, Shakespeare's fantasy would entirely miss its mark and symbolic convergence would fail to take place between the work and this audience.

As narratives with similar themes are shared with a community, a fantasy type emerges that allows an author or rhetor the luxury of referencing preestablished symbols to enforce a fantasy (Bormann, 1972). Returning to the Shakespeare example, if a modern writer of a cheap romance novel wishes to evoke a romantic emotional response from their audience, they can exploit the romance fantasy type already established by *Romeo and Juliet* by quoting this famous and preestablished work or by using settings, characters, and actions whose themes and characterizations parallel those in *Romeo and Juliet*. Since the characterization of these themes become intrinsically tied to the themes themselves as the fantasy develops, fantasy types "encourage groups to fit new events or experiences into familiar patterns" (Foss, 2018, p.108). The fantasy themes, the fantasy type, and the fantasy itself—when taken together as a whole—make up the rhetorical vision of an artifact (Bormann, 1972).

The ultimate goal of a fantasy-theme analysis is to uncover the rhetorical vision an author or artifact creator is trying to convey to their audience. As Foss explains, "the

presence of a rhetorical vision suggests that a rhetorical community has been formed that consists of participants in the vision or members who share the fantasy themes” (Foss, 2018, p. 108). To put it another way, the rhetorical vision is the common clay that pervades the symbolic landscape of a particular fantasy. This rhetorical vision can be intentionally put forward by an author to exploit their audience, though it is far more common that the authors themselves participate in this fantasy as well on a subconscious level and ascribe similar meaning to the symbols of their own reality, which subsequently bleeds into their work (Foss, 2018). To Bormann only the latter is true, as he states, “motives do not exist to be expressed in communication but rather arise in the expression itself and come to be embedded in the drama of the fantasy themes that generated and serve to sustain them” (Bormann, 1972, p. 406). Whichever the case may be, fantasy-theme analysis allows a rhetor to peer into the rhetorical vision of an artifact, even if they do not participate in the fantasy it presents (Foss, 2018).

### ***Performing a Fantasy-Theme Analysis***

First, the rhetor examines the narrative’s setting themes, taking note of any characterization or descriptions the author imbues into each setting (Foss, 2018). Once this is accomplished, the rhetor examines all the character themes within the work with the same level of scrutiny, making sure to note what setting these characters appear in (Foss, 2018). Next, the action themes are coded for and correlated to the characters who take part in them, and since these characters are in turn correlated to their setting,

the resulting network of interrelationships elucidates the fantasy type that underlies the narrative of the artifact (Foss, 2018).

Using this network, the rhetor can begin the second stage of fantasy-theme analysis: constructing the rhetorical vision of the artifact's author (Bormann, 1972). This stage can be thought of as a distillation of the data gathered in coding of the artifact into a refined product. The rhetor examines the three types of fantasy themes present and searches for patterns, discerning which are major or minor thematic elements based upon the frequency of appearance and the vividness of characterization. Next, the rhetor connects the major settings with the major characters and catalogs the actions the characters perform within their given settings (Foss, 2018). With the major fantasy themes identified and their interrelationships explicated in a list or chart, the rhetor can "creatively reconstruct the rhetorical vision from the representative fantasy" through the symbols they are sharing, the meanings these symbols seek to convey, and the emotions they are aiming to evoke from an audience that shares in this fantasy (Bormann, 1972, p. 401).

### ***Applying Fantasy-Theme Analysis to Celephaïs***

In the application of fantasy-theme analysis to Lovecraft's short story *Celephaïs*, an understanding must first be reached of how he constructs his narrative. In *Celephaïs*, Lovecraft relies heavily on setting themes to immerse his audience and action themes to flesh out his characters as they progress through the linear story. As a result, many of his character themes are in fact actions, aside from when the characters are initially introduced. This interesting approach to characterization creates an initial framework or

outline of a character whose traits and personalities become clear only upon reading further and observing how characters react to their setting and environment. Since *Celephaïs* follows the actions of a single protagonist throughout the entire short story, fantasy-theme analysis is a prime candidate for tapping into Lovecraft's rhetorical vision as the events of Kuran's life and death play out. Due to length constraints, the complete data for fantasy themes is omitted from this paper, but coded major themes can be found in *Table 1: Outline of Major Themes in Celephaïs*.

**Coding for Fantasy Themes.** As mentioned above, the first stage of a fantasy-theme analysis is coding for the themes which create the shared fantasy within the tale's narrative. First, an examination of the settings themes of *Celephaïs* and the characteristics Lovecraft attributes to them is performed, which will aid in later revealing what Lovecraft's fantasy type might be. Next, character themes and their features are analyzed, with each of their relationships to setting noted. Finally, the actions these characters perform throughout the narrative is considered and subsequently tied into the setting and character themes as they are established.

**Setting Themes.** Within *Celephaïs*, there are many setting themes that undergo an extensive amount of characterization. Each setting exists either in the narrative's reality or within the dreams of Kuran (Lovecraft, 1922). The setting themes of his fantasy are revealed by categorizing these settings as "dream" or "reality" and then correlating those settings with the features and characterization Lovecraft attributes to them.

Examples:

[*Dream*] *Village*. “long white road,” “very old,” “eaten away at the edge,” “hid sleep or death,” “asleep or dead,” “in the dim dawn” (Lovecraft, 1922, paras. 3, 5, 10).

[*Reality*] *London, London Garret*. “indifferent millions of,” “One summer day” (Lovecraft, 1922, paras. 1, 9).

In broad terms, it is clear that settings within dreams bear the most thematic characterization, while settings within reality are neglected nearly to the point that they are thematically destitute.

**Character Themes.** There are not many characters explicitly named in *Celephais*, and even fewer remain for longer than a paragraph. That being said, this stage of fantasy-theme analysis requires that all of these named characters, including objects that undergo personification, be taken into account as their character themes may still be crucial in uncovering the symbolic convergence of Lovecraft’s fantasy. As mentioned previously, Lovecraft prefers to use a character’s actions to create their characterization, and these action themes will be examined more closely under their appropriate headings below. As for the coding format for character themes, the heading will contain the character’s name, the subsequent sections will include quotes Lovecraft uses to characterize or describe them, and if a setting or setting theme is explicitly involved, it will be included in brackets after each quote.

Example:

[*Dream*] *The Houses of the Village*. “peaked roofs,” “window panes [sic],” “asleep or dead” [Dream; Night], “alive now” [Dream; Day] (Lovecraft, 1922, paras. 3, 5, 10).

Even with a cursory glance at the data, it is immediately apparent that Kuranos is integral to the fantasy presented throughout *Celephaïs*, as the vast majority of character themes are directly attributed to him.

**Action Themes.** As with any work of literature, action themes pervade the entirety of *Celephaïs*. However, the tone of these themes shifts significantly depending upon their setting, and to a certain extent upon the characters performing them. Action themes are organized under a heading indicative of the character who performs them along with its appropriate setting in brackets, which will serve as an orderly framework for organizing the many action themes of the narrative. If an additional character is involved in the action, they are listed in brackets alongside the setting theme associated with the action.

Example:

*[Reality] They / Others.* “strove to strip from life its embroidered robes of myth, and to shew in naked ugliness the foul thing that is reality” [London], “found him” [Kuranos] [[Reality] Village], “waked [sic] him” [Kuranos] [[Reality] Village], “carried him home” [Kuranos] [[Reality] Village] (Lovecraft, 1922, paras. 1, 4).

As was the case with character themes, action themes also center around Kuranos for a vast majority of the short story, indicative of his central role in the narrative.

**Constructing the Rhetorical Vision.** The second stage of fantasy-theme analysis involves the refining of copious coded artifacts so that only major themes that are frequently or significantly featured are considered. These themes will serve as the

building blocks of Lovecraft's rhetorical vision that he shares with his audience.

Evidence of symbolic convergence becomes evident in this stage, for without the following major themes, the narrative and the fantasy itself fall apart.

***Major Setting and Character Themes.*** As settings' themes are distilled, the heavily characterized locations within the dreams of Kuraner are clearly integral to the fantasy Lovecraft is creating. These include Celephaïs, Serannian, the horizon, the cliff and adjacent abyss, and the village as it appears within his dreams. The only characters who inhabit these settings and are repeated across multiple paragraphs are Kuraner and the houses within the village that are personified. Kuraner dwells within these settings exclusively at night until paragraph 6, when Kuraner finally enters Celephaïs, the timeless city of his childhood where it is always day, and in paragraph 10 as Kuraner takes his final journey with the knights of Celephaïs where day becomes night, and then, day once again as they travel back through time and enter the dream-village of his childhood (Lovecraft, 1922).

Although less characterized, the settings that exist within reality are equally integral to the fantasy. Once distilled, the only remaining settings of this sort include the city of London, Kuraner's London garret, and the village as it exists in reality. In discerning which of the characters in these settings should be considered major, a focus was placed on how the fantasy type would be constructed and which in-groups (those who subscribe to a particular fantasy put forward by a fantasy type and its themes) were directly addressed by Lovecraft outside of the narrative. Lovecraft addresses the audience directly as "we," as he elucidates how reality and time wear down the in-

group's ability to "look back through the ivory gates into that world of wonder which was ours before we were wise and unhappy" (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 2). Asides to the audience such as this provide fantastic insight into how the in-group's preexisting symbols, and those symbols Lovecraft puts forward in *Celephaïs* are intended to converge. Likewise, outsiders of this in-group, "Others/They," are also presented as outsiders to Kuran's in the story and present themselves only in settings that are thematically linked to the narrative's reality. "They" serve as an antagonist if the reader experiences symbolic convergence as Lovecraft intends, while Kuran's appears to be his own antagonist if the reader does not share in the fantasy.

Therefore, the major settings would need to be those within Kuran's dreams, those within Kuran's reality, and most importantly those that exist in between these two realms. Distinct fantasy types emerge out of these settings as well. The urban city of London is a familiar setting to many and full of preestablished symbols. This allows Lovecraft to merely mention London by name for the audience to recall those themes typically associated with the city: crowded, foggy, polluted, and so on. Alternatively, Lovecraft relies less on preestablished symbols within stereotypical locales when lavishly characterizing Kuran's dream settings, as these landscapes of wonder share no similar themes with the existing in-groups of his day. If the selected major character themes are limited to those which appear multiple times throughout multiple settings and paragraphs, Kuran's, "They/Others," the knights of *Celephaïs*, the personification of reality/life and the personified houses remain, and the inclusion of the character 'we'

from Lovecraft's aside immensely enriches the reader's understanding of Lovecraft's target audience.

***Major Characters and Their Actions.*** Now that the setting themes and character themes have been refined, the next phase of analysis narrows down the character themes further by closely examining their actions and the action themes associated with them. The actions Kuranos takes are plentiful, and many of these actions characterize him and his role in the narrative, serving as excellent action themes. "They/Others," the outsiders of the narrative, are also worth including beyond this stage of scrutiny, since they are not only characterized by their actions, but are also integral to understanding the position of the out-group in Lovecraft's rhetorical vision. The flip-side to this scenario is the character "We/Us." While they are only present for a single paragraph, the insight into the in-group that this character represents remains crucial to decoding how symbolic convergence takes place. While the knights of Celephaïs do indeed appear multiple times across multiple paragraphs, their action themes are almost exclusively shared with Kuranos, so it would be redundant to count them as a major character theme since Kuranos is already being coded for in this case. The personification of life and reality present in the early paragraphs of this short story are fantastic points of insight; however, since they perform no actions whatsoever, their coding beyond this stage is an impossibility, although the purpose behind their characterization will be discussed within this paper's conclusion. This leaves the following major characters: Kuranos, the personified village houses, "They/Others," and "We/Us."

**Charting of Major Themes.** To truly grasp the interplay between major themes of settings, characters, and their actions, Foss recommends creating a structured visual representation of these elements (Foss, 2018). Table 1 fully enumerates these literary elements in a straight-forward, easily-interpreted fashion.

**Emerging Patterns.** The setting themes bear a clear distinction between what is real and what Kuranos imagines. The settings of Kuranos' garret and the city of London are both nearly devoid of features and characterization aside from its people being "indifferent" (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 1). Meanwhile, each of the settings from his dreams and childhood bear detailed descriptions of their features, especially Celephaïs. This difference exhibits evidence that a symbolic convergence is meant to take place. Lovecraft intends the audience to recall familiar symbols associated with the city of London and its fantasy type, while also having the settings within Kuranos' dreams explicitly characterized for them and thus drawing their attention to these settings instead. This indicates that the setting themes support the fantasy, positing that the world of dreams is more substantial than reality.

A clear dichotomy emerges when examining in closer detail the action themes of Kuranos within these two realms and the verbs Lovecraft uses to describe his actions. In dreams, verbs such as "rested," "gazed," "wished," and "beheld" are attributed to his actions, while in the reality of London, verbs like "withdrew," "had been," "ceased," and "sought" are used (Lovecraft, 1922, paras. 1, 5-6). In fact, the only instances Kuranos saw, watched, or beheld anything were while he was in a dream setting. The segregation of youthful dreams and wizened reality is clearly taking place within the

narrative, and Lovecraft is careful to include both sides of this coin as he directly addresses his audience. In this aside, Lovecraft asserts that “there are not many persons who know what wonders are opened to them in the stories and visions of their youth; for when as children we listen and dream, we think but half-formed thoughts, and when as men we try to remember, we are dulled and prosaic with the poison of life” (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 2). He continues by claiming that this dream-world of wonder “was ours before we were wise and unhappy,” further encouraging symbolic convergence with an audience dissatisfied with the affairs of reality. On the other hand, “They/Others” try to remove Kuranos from his dreams in one way or another, regardless of their current settings.

## **Conclusion**

### **Realists Versus Dreamers: Lovecraft’s Rhetorical Vision**

To reconstruct the rhetorical vision of Lovecraft through *Celephaïs*, an examination of its components is necessary. An initial interpretation of the fantasy Lovecraft creates for his audience suggests that the world of dreams is more fantastic than the world of reality. While it is Kuranos’ pursuit of Celephaïs that ultimately leads to his death, he only dies in reality while he “will reign happily forever” within his dreams (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 11). Further evidence of this fantasy can be found when Lovecraft personifies reality and life itself. In the opening paragraphs, he describes life as being “cloaked in the embroidered robes of myth” and that when it is stripped of this myth, the “foul thing that is reality” is shown in “naked ugliness” (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 1). He then drives this point home as he asserts that we, the reading audience, grow

“dull and prosaic with the poison of life” as we age, and that we “listen and dream” more as children (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 2). The protagonist, Kuranès, embodies this fantasy and takes it to another level. As an adult, he is far more invested in reclaiming the world of his childhood dreams than he is in participating in reality; he is unable to even recall what his birth name was and goes only by his dream name, Kuranès, throughout the story instead (Lovecraft, 1922).

Lovecraft thematically ties this fantasy to summer throughout the narrative. It is in his first glimpse of Celephaïs as an adult that Kuranès “had stolen out into the fragrant summer night” to approach the moonlit village (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 3). It was “one summer afternoon” that Kuranès as a child had “slipt away from his nurse” and “dwelt all the eternity of an hour” in Celephaïs, sleeping by the cliffs in the real village of his childhood (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 4). Lastly, it was “one summer day” that Kuranès had “drifted over a bridge to a place where the houses grew thinner and thinner,” which is the implied village of his childhood as it stands now, before he is spirited away by the knights of Celephaïs (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 10). Summer is clearly symbolic of Kuranès’ desire to escape to timeless Celephaïs, and, through symbolic convergence, summer is meant to evoke the same desire to return to the fantasies of childhood within the in-group. But does this fantasy constitute Lovecraft’s own rhetorical vision as he wrote Celephaïs?

Reevaluating the events of Lovecraft’s life up until the publication of *Celephaïs*, it appears as though he subscribes to this fantasy as well. Multiple parallels can be drawn between the character Kuranès and Lovecraft. Both Lovecraft and Kuranès were deeply

involved in fantasy in their youth: Lovecraft created short works of fiction, and Kuranès created the Valley of Ooth-Nargai where Celephaïs lies. Both Lovecraft and Kuranès lost their ancestral home: Lovecraft and his family were forced out of his Victorian estate, and Kuranès' home was purchased by a "a notably fat and especially offensive millionaire brewer [who] enjoys the purchased atmosphere of extinct nobility" (Lovecraft, 1922, para. 11). Both Lovecraft and Kuranès grew disillusioned with reality when they were forced to move: Lovecraft to his "cramped quarters at 598 Angell Street" and Kuranès to his London garret (Joshi, 1990, para. 4). Lastly, both Lovecraft and Kuranès sought to return to their childhood fantasies: Lovecraft began creating fictions again, "writing 'The Tomb' and 'Dagon' in quick succession in the *summer* [emphasis added] of 1917," and Kuranès spends multiple summers, including his last, dreaming of Celephaïs, the timeless city of his childhood (Joshi, 1990, para. 6). However, this is where the similarities end, and it is within the disparities between Kuranès and Lovecraft that his rhetorical vision reveals itself as a warning. After Lovecraft suffered a nervous breakdown and isolated himself from others in 1908, the real-world consequences of failing to graduate high school and being rejected by Brown University "were sources of great shame to Lovecraft in later years, in spite of the fact that he was one of the most formidable autodidacts of his time" (Joshi, 1990, para. 4). Yet, he chose to reemerge in 1913 through writing letters to *The Argosy*, which garnered him recognition by the UAPA and allowed him to achieve his real-world goals through a previously unseen path (Joshi, 1990). Kuranès, on the other hand, invested himself entirely to dreaming

while isolated in his London garret and let himself deteriorate further into the reality of the narrative until his dreams completely consumed him, resulting in his death.

Kuranes' demise ultimately stems from two causes, his isolation from society and his potent imagination. When the demands and expectations of society loom large, introverted individuals are especially susceptible to solitude's siren song. During such a withdrawal, it is natural to seek refuge in a creative outlet or another form of entertainment to soothe the mounting pressure of everyday life. By embodying the extremes of these two behaviors, Kuranes serves as a grisly example of overindulgence. Imagination, fiction, and fantasy offer an opportunity for individuals to escape the chaotic and uncaring world of reality; however, it is made clear in the extreme case of Kuranes that this pairing of seclusion and fancy can lead to a reluctance to face reality at all. If all one does is daydream, watch their favorite movies, or read their favorite books in effective isolation, the challenges and opportunities that life presents will inevitably slip through their unprepared fingers.

With this fantasy and its themes fully understood, the actual rhetorical vision of Lovecraft as he wrote *Celephaïs* becomes evident. While Lovecraft is clearly reaching out to fellow dreamers seeking to reclaim their childhoods and those who invest most of their time in fiction, he is simultaneously warning them of the repercussions of such a lifestyle on their reality. Considering how the hardships of Lovecraft's life so closely parallel the challenges faced by Kuranes, perhaps the writing of *Celephaïs* was a cathartic expression of a life nearly wasted; it was a mirror through which Lovecraft was able truly see himself, evaluate his lack of action during his isolation, and convince

himself to immerse. Perhaps it was written in retrospect after Lovecraft returned to the public sphere in 1914, as his rapid climb from submitting snide poems to *The Argosy* to publishing his own essays and newspapers in less than two years made him recognize the missed opportunities of his seclusion. Whatever the case may be, a careful literary dissection through fantasy theme analysis elucidates the mechanisms that forecast his rhetorical vision. Lovecraft employs symbols and fantasy themes that collectively encourage convergence with an in-group of dreamers and fantasy-weavers. When this symbolic convergence occurs and the audience is swept away by the fantastic dream settings (reading of the wonder and awe Kuran's experiences within them), their fantastic expectations are built up so high that the shocking twist of the last few sentences empowers the hard truth of reality to cut deep and warn this in-group of the dangers of overindulgence. The circumstances of Kuran's demise ground these ambitions and serve as a cautionary tale of what might happen if an individual unambiguously chooses the comfort of imagination over the harsh objectivity of reality.

## References

- Bales, Robert. (1970). *Personality and interpersonal behavior*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Bormann, E. G. (1972). Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58(4), 396-407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335637209383138>
- Foss, S. K. (2018). *Rhetorical criticism: Exploration and practice* (5th ed.). Waveland Press.
- Joshi, S. T. (1990). "Howard Phillips Lovecraft: The life of a gentleman of providence." In *H.P. Lovecraft centennial guidebook*. Montilla Publications. In D.K. Loucks (ed.), The H.P. Lovecraft Archive. <http://www.hplovecraft.com/life/biograph.aspx>
- Lovecraft, H.P. (1922). *Celephaïs*. In D.K. Loucks (ed.), The H.P. Lovecraft Archive. <http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/c.aspx>
- Publication: The Rainbow, May 1922.* (April, 2006). Internet Speculative Fiction Database. <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/pl.cgi?706965>

## Tables

**Table 1**

*Outline of Major Themes in Celephaïs*

Setting	Character	Action
In a Dream	Kuranes	Saw
(General)		Came by his name of Kuranes
		Sought
		Found
		Came to
		Beheld
		Created Ooth-Nargai
		Appointed its chief god
Serannian (Dream)	Kuranes	Holds court
		Reigns there still
		Will reign happily forever
Celephaïs (Dream)	Kuranes	Saw the city
		Knew
		Dwelt all the eternity of an hour
		About to sail
		Found his city
		Beheld minarets
		Saw graceful galleys

Setting	Character	Action
		Was not snatched away
		Settled gradually down
		Rested gently
		Had come back
		Carved his name
		Need not tremble
		Had never been away
		Walked
		Stayed long
		Gazing out over the harbor
		Gazed upon Mount Aran
		Wished to sail
		Rowed to a galley
		Sailed out into the sea
		Held his court
		Reigns there still
		Will reign happily forever
Horizon, Where the Sea Meets the Sky (Dream)	Kuranes	Finally came Paused not at all Floated easily

Setting	Character	Action
		Could see strange lands below
		Would soon enter
		Sail out towards
Cliff & The Abyss (Dream)	Kuranes	Had come to the end of things
		Urged by faith
		Floated down
		Saw the city
		Float silently
		Previously entered only at night
		Galloped up precipice
		Wondered
		Watched
		Plunged over
		Floated gently
Village (Dream) (Night)	Houses	Seemed very old
		Eaten away
		Hid sleep or death
		(windows) Were broken or firmly staring
		Was asleep or dead
		Fell abruptly

Setting	Character	Action
	Kuranes	<p>Wondered</p> <p>Had not lingered</p> <p>Plodded on as though summoned</p> <p>Dared not disobey</p> <p>Drawn down</p> <p>Had seen dead or sleeping</p> <p>Turned off into the lane</p>
Village (Dream) (Day)	Houses	Were alive now
	Kuranes	<p>Came upon</p> <p>Clattered down the street</p> <p>Turned off into a lane</p>
Village (Reality) (Day)	Kuranes (as a child)	<p>Watched the clouds</p> <p>Had seen [the village] alive</p> <p>Protested</p> <p>Aroused</p>
	Kuranes (adult)	<p>Fulfillment came</p> <p>Mistook knights for an army</p> <p>All rode majestically</p> <p>Stumbled through</p>

Setting	Character	Action
	Houses	Alive in Kuranés' childhood Grew thinner and thinner
	They / Others	Had found him Waked [sic] him Carried him home
Summer (Night) (Dream)	Kuranés	Had stolen out...to the village
Summer (Day and Afternoon) (Reality)	Kuranés (as a child) Kuranés (adult)	Slipped away Let the warm sea-breeze lull him to sleep Turned out of his garret Wandered aimlessly Drifting
In Reality (General)	We/ Us          They / Others	Listen (as children) Dream (as children) Think half-formed thoughts (as children) Try to remember (as men) Are dulled and prosaic (as men) Awake [sic] in the night (as men) Strove to

Setting	Character	Action
		Strip from life
		Shew [sic] in naked ugliness
		Found him
		Waked [sic] him
		Carried him home
London (Reality)	They / Others	(No one to) speak to him
		Remind him
		Laughed at
	Kuranes	Called by another name
	(Nameless)	Was the last of his family
		Was alone
		Had been
		Were gone
		Did not care
		Preferred to dream and write
		Kept his writings to himself
		Ceased to write
		Withdrew
		Was not modern
		Did not think like others
		Sought for beauty alone

Setting	Character	Action
		Found it
		Had been dreaming
		Had awaked [sic]
		Was resentful of awaking
		Dreamed
		Awaked [sic]
		Sought in vain
		Sought fruitlessly
		Grew impatient
		Began buying drugs...to increase his periods of sleep
		Was very anxious to return [to Celephaïs]
		Increased his doses
		Had no money
		Turned out of his garret
		Wandered aimlessly
		Drifted over
		Rode Majestically with knights

---

*Note.* Each column represents a different type of fantasy theme and each row indicates where and when these themes converge in *Celephaïs*.