

Tradition and Illusion: Antiquarianism, Tourism and Horror in H. P. Lovecraft

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I never can be tied to raw, new things,
For I first saw the light in an old town,
Where from my window huddled roofs sloped down
To a quaint harbor rich with visionings.
Streets with carved doorways where the sunset beams
Flooded old fanlights and small window-panes,
And Georgian steeples topped with gilded vanes—
These were the sights that shaped my childhood dreams.

— Lovecraft (“Background,” *The Ancient Track* 76)

■ It has often been noted that there were two distinct sides to the personality and interests of H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), the cosmic and the antiquarian. Although these may seem to contradict each other, they both were absolutely central to Lovecraft’s worldview. An understanding of Lovecraft’s antiquarianism, his love for heritage tourism and his profound attachment to the idea of tradition, is essential to an understanding of his philosophy of cosmicism. The tension between the antiquarian and the cosmic, between the continuity of cultural traditions and the insignificance of those traditions on a cosmic scale, is the source of Lovecraft’s worldview and of the unique power of his fiction. Although Lovecraft’s cosmicism has been explored by several scholars (Mariconda, Schultz, Joshi 1996: 480-508), much less attention has been paid to his antiquarianism, although his antiquarian travels and writings, and his passion for historic preservation, were as important to him as his fiction, on which they had a tremendous impact.

Lovecraft liked to boast of his descent from “unmixed English gentry” and was a devoted student, and defender, of his New England heritage. This led him to conduct long antiquarian tours of New England and later of the entire east coast, both urban and rural, observing and documenting various types of historic material culture, especially architecture. His research provided sources for setting and atmosphere in his fiction, but this was not their chief motive. Both his research and his fiction grew out of an antimodernist ideology¹, a horror at what he perceived as the loss of tradition and the disintegration of American culture in the face of the moral, racial and scientific chaos of the twentieth century. This ideology, influenced by the Colonial Revival Movement and, more generally, by a yearning for an authentic American culture to be found in perceived continuities with a colonial or pre-industrial, Anglo-Saxon golden age, was also evident in his passionate advocacy for historic preservation in his native Providence, Rhode Island.

Scholarship on Lovecraft has proliferated recently. Some of it (especially that which is limited to textual interpretations of the fiction) conveys an image of Lovecraft as an eccentric, reclusive visionary who rejected the “reality” around him and lived almost entirely in an inner world.² Any perusal of Lovecraft’s letters, however, reveals that he was very much engaged in the issues and controversies of his time; and, although not without prejudices, was an acute observer of American culture, especially material culture. Recently, some scholars have attempted to put his views on politics, race, science, aesthetics and other issues into historical context.³ It is my intention to examine Lovecraft’s place in the search for an authentic American culture which swept the United States in the early twentieth century.⁴

Lovecraft’s voluminous writings on historic material culture deserve to be better known, both for their observations and information, and as a case study in the politics of antiquarianism and historic preservation in the 1920s and ‘30s. These writings are detailed, informative, poetic, insightful, opinionated, humorous, racist, angry, elitist and anti-democratic. They express and comment on the most cogent issues, opinions and ideologies involved in the search for and study of authentic American traditions during Lovecraft’s lifetime. His interest in material culture was at once intellectual, emotional and imaginative; his motivation was not to preserve history *per se* but to preserve a kind of vernacular aesthetic. “The joy we take in even the ugliest and most grotesque of traditional objects,” he wrote, “is not a false one. It is. . . truly aesthetic in an indirect way; through the. . . historic and cultural symbolism of the objects. Such objects even when intrinsically unbeautiful, form an invaluable sort of springboard for the imagination” (*Selected Letters II* 303).

Ultimately, Lovecraft’s reputation rests on his fiction, and the reason for analyzing Lovecraft’s antiquarianism is to better understand his fiction. Therefore, after examining his antiquarian travel and research, his views on architecture,

and his activities in historic preservation, this essay will consider the impact that these had on his fiction, and more broadly on his 'cosmic' point of view.

As an only child raised by a single mother who was neurotically over-protective, Lovecraft compensated for a lack of close human connections through a very strong sense of place. He wrote in a letter dated 1926, "My life lies not among people but among *scenes*—my local affections are not *personal*, but topographical and architectural." From an early age, Lovecraft developed a profound attachment to and intimate knowledge of his native Providence. Always a night owl, beginning in his teens he would take long nocturnal rambles around historic parts of the city. Later in life, his architectural tours of Providence were much sought after among his acquaintances.⁵

Although he lived all but two years of his life in Providence, as Lovecraft got older his attachment to place extended to the traditional landscape and architecture of New England, and eventually to Colonial or pre-Victorian architecture in other parts of the country. He went on increasingly long trips, first around New England and New York, later to such relatively distant historic cities as Quebec, Charleston, St. Augustine and New Orleans.

Throughout his life, Lovecraft was a keen observer of the material environment, a talent that was strengthened with the gradual increase in his knowledge and self-confidence. He was particularly gifted at drawing comparisons between regions, noting differences and similarities in cultural forms from one region to another (for example, regional differences in doorways or rooflines, or shapes of tombstones). In his earlier writings he tended to compare everything to southern New England, but over time his observations became more cosmopolitan.

Living in poverty most of his life, Lovecraft traveled by bus, stayed at the cheapest accommodations he could find, and ate very little. His trips sometimes lasted for months, during which he made detailed observations on material culture, especially architecture but also including town plans, rural and urban cultural landscapes, cemeteries, furniture and other interior details, and the occasional item of oral folklore—legends, supernatural beliefs, regional dialects, street cries—which Lovecraft heard along the way and sometimes incorporated into his stories. He never owned a car and therefore was dependent on public transportation, friends with cars or his feet, but Lovecraft still managed to visit many rural areas, especially in New England, Quebec, and parts of New York and Florida. Although he had a reputation for being bashful, Lovecraft did not seem to have any reservations about knocking at the doors of interesting houses and asking to see the interiors. And all of Lovecraft's studies of specific places were works in progress. He returned over and over to nearby favorite places including many parts of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and made multiple trips to more distant locations including Quebec, Charleston, St. Augustine and Dutch settlements in New York (*Miscellaneous Writings* 407-11).

During his trips, Lovecraft would typically spend all day traveling, observing and taking notes, and spend most of the night writing long letters based on his notes. His letters included painstaking historical and architectural details and were often voluminously illustrated with drawings. He wrote hundreds of such letters, many of them thirty or forty pages long, throughout the 1920s and '30s.⁶

From 1928 to 1931, Lovecraft drew on his correspondence, notes and local travel guides to produce his annual travelogues. Not intended for publication, and not published until the 1970s-90s, these were hand written in a mock eighteenth century (but generally very readable) style full of in-jokes directed at his friends, and were circulated among his considerable number of correspondents. Large parts of the first two travelogues were taken almost word-for-word from letters he wrote while traveling to his aunt, Lillian Clark. They cover a good deal of territory—all of Lovecraft's antiquarian travels during the calendar year, from Vermont to Virginia—and tend to focus on the standard 1920s tourist sites, although Lovecraft does supply a good deal of information on architecture, cemeteries and other sights along the way (*Miscellaneous Writings* 297-360). The 1929 travelogue describes Lovecraft's visits to Richmond and Fredericksburg, Virginia and to Dutch areas of New York in some detail, containing mini-histories of the areas and lengthy architectural descriptions. It also describes an interesting visit to Colonial Williamsburg, "one of the most impressive evocations of the Colonial past that America can display" (*Miscellaneous Writings* 335). Even in these early travelogues, Lovecraft's interest in vernacular and regional traditions (rather than "high style" architecture) is evident.

The last two travelogues are entirely different. They are detailed studies of specific places: Charleston and Quebec City (*Miscellaneous Writings* 361-406, *To Quebec and the Stars* 111-309). His work on Quebec, at 75,000 words, is his longest single piece of writing. Each work is divided into three sections: history, architecture and topography (by which he meant what contemporary scholars would call cultural landscape), and suggested walking tours. The history sections are based entirely on secondary sources; Lovecraft was well acquainted with the published literature on the areas he visited. In the earlier travelogues, the influence of locally acquired guides is evident, but in Charleston, Quebec and thereafter, most of Lovecraft's observations are based on first hand experience—what ethnographers would call "fieldwork."

Although the travelogues are impressive, they are dwarfed by the letters. Lovecraft included architectural information in a great many letters to a great many people. These include large quantities of additional material on travelogue sites such as Charleston, as well as detailed descriptions, commentary and insights on places not covered by the travelogues. In June 1926, for example, Lovecraft wrote a lengthy and detailed travel guide to Philadelphia at the request of a friend. Based almost entirely on his memories of a visit made in November 1924

(he had lost the notes made during the visit), the letter includes detailed architectural drawings and a discussion of Swedish, German and New England influences on Philadelphia architecture. Later letters include lengthy historical and architectural guides to St. Augustine, Key West, and rural parts of Florida, Savannah, New Orleans and Nantucket. In 1935-36, Lovecraft concentrated on New England. His chief focus was historic architecture in Rhode Island, but his final illness and death prevented him from producing a unified work on this topic.⁷

During Lovecraft's lifetime there was a considerable increase in car tourism and the concomitant development of historic sites, markers, museums and travel guides. Self-consciously literary travel writing, associated with writers like Mark Twain and Henry James, had been around for some time, but increased in popularity after the Civil War, and even more in the early twentieth century. Tourism was no longer the sole province of the wealthy: buses, self-guided walking tours and inexpensive motels and hostels made it possible even for low income people without automobiles (Kammen 539, Lindgren 120).

Lovecraft was a consumer of such heritage tourism. He did not collect objects on his travels, like many of his contemporaries, but instead collected observations and memories that filled his letters. He traveled to the standard tourist destinations, bought the guide books, took the walking tours and collected postcards, but in his own travel writings he transformed the guidebooks into something at once more idiosyncratic, more detailed and scholarly, and more passionate. He is comparable to such figures as Lafcadio Hearn, whose writings about the American South in the 1870s and '80s have a similar combination of ethnographic and Gothic (Hearn 2002); to Sarah Orne Jewett, whose protagonist in *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) is a tourist seeking an authentic, rural New England; or to Stephen Vincent Benet and Thomas Hart Benton, who traveled extensively in the 1910s and '20s searching for genuine American folk culture, to be used as the basis for a distinctly American art. Lovecraft's motive was not solely to find materials for literature, however, but grew out of a scholarly passion for material culture, which in turn grew out of a Colonial Revival ideology, a search for an "authentic" Colonial landscape which would transport him into an uncorrupted past.⁸

Marguerite Shaffer, in her study of tourism and travel writing from 1880 to 1940, describes the growth of "prescriptive" tourist literature, which provided tourists with a kind of official list of sites to visit, whether architecture in Charleston or geysers in Yellowstone (Shaffer 241). The broader aim of such prescriptive literature, Shaffer claims, was a celebration of national unity, the creation of a nationwide canon of tourist sites that defined America and Americans, so that tourism became a way for Americans to discover or reinforce their national identity. At the same time, the more personalized and literary genre of "touring narrative" developed. In the process of setting down their own, idiosyncratic travel narratives, writers transformed the prescriptive tour guides

according to their “personal understanding of what America represented and where tourists as individuals fit in with that America.” (241). In so doing, “tourists embraced the values of official culture expressed by prescriptive literature in their search to discover America, and they simultaneously challenged the official ideal of national unity with their own concerns, ideals and anxieties” (241). They created “alternative versions of reality.” In *The Tourist*, Dean MacCannell also describes this phenomenon: “Tourist attractions. . . beginning with ‘suggested’ or ‘recommended’ communities, regions and neighborhoods, and extending to matters of detail, setting the tourist up with a matrix which he can fill in. . .” (MacCannell 50).

This is an excellent description of Lovecraft’s travelogues. Always beginning with the official, prescriptive guides and walking tours, Lovecraft developed them into his own extended studies of the localities, written in his unique style, distributed among his friends. They are good examples of the search for an “in depth” tourist experience described by Dean MacCannell, “a desire to go beyond the other ‘mere’ tourists to a more profound appreciation of society and culture” (10). Lovecraft’s descriptions of localities begin with the standard tours but go into far greater detail, and are enhanced by descriptions of people and cats met along the way, digressions on history, aesthetics, philosophy and other topics, and by their style, with its mixture of eighteenth century and Gothic elements, with occasional use of ‘lapidary’ prose in the manner of Lord Dunsany. Lovecraft’s approach to architecture evolved during his life. His earlier antiquarian writings tended to emphasize sites that had been marked as “important” by local historical markers or in guidebooks, but they do indicate an acute observer with an interest in the regional vernacular. From the start of his travels, his interest was primarily aesthetic rather than historical, focusing on architectural forms and styles rather than on famous historical events or personalities. Many of his contemporaries in the emerging historic preservation movement, such as Norman Isham and William Sumner Appleton, had a similar focus (Lindgren 104).

In his later writings, including his studies of Quebec and many of his letters, Lovecraft was interested in the description and comparison of regional traditional forms. He classified houses and other buildings by form—primarily floor plan, roofline and placement of doors, windows or chimneys and overall massing. For each form, he supplied a wealth of examples and close descriptions of materials, windows and doors, exterior decorations, and what he could determine about construction techniques. Almost always in his later antiquarian writings, he drew comparisons between regional forms based on observations and readings from various parts of North America. Although he was most interested in houses, he used a similar focus in writing about churches, barns, fences, stone walls, cemeteries, layouts of streets or fields, gardens, and many other topics. At times he could go on at great length speaking comparatively about

such topics as the shapes of roofs or gravestone carvings. He considered, but never carried out, several large scale multiregional studies, including a comparative study and history of gambrel roofs throughout the eastern United States (*Selected Letters* III 358).

Lovecraft's interest was in identifying local and regional traditions. He saw such traditions as organic growths. "Habitations of men should never be *made*—they should be sown, water'd, weeded, tended, and allowed to *grow*. . . . What makes a town really lovely and fascinating, is. . . the continuous history of its inhabitants—the marks of original settlement, slow expansion, and developments in channels and directions determin'd by the topography of the sites and aspirations and genius of the people" (*Selected Letters* I 287-88). In a letter from 1930, Lovecraft lists twelve "really indigenous architectures."⁹ Although his interest was in structures older than approximately the mid 19th century—Lovecraft looked down on most 20th century and Victorian architecture, as did contemporaries such as Norman Isham—he was observant enough to remark, in his Quebec travelogue, that some of the traditional forms were still being used in modern structures built with modern materials (*To Quebec and the Stars* 234-35).

Lovecraft also had strong opinions about twentieth century architecture. Disliking modern architecture for abandoning meaning in favor of pure functionalism, he was an advocate of Colonial and other period revival architectural styles, but he was critical of some aspects of the Colonial Revival (*Miscellaneous Writings* 190-98). He thought that such styles needed to follow local and regional traditions, a kind of vernacular revival. Viewing a recently constructed Spanish Colonial suburb near St. Augustine in 1931, Lovecraft comments "They belong to an imaginary Spain which never was and. . . never will be. . . . Architects could study the *real* types of building evolved by the Spaniards in different parts of their colonial Empire, and produce duplicates harmonizing. . . with the genuine local traditions" (Lovecraft to Lillian Clark, May 11, 1931, Lovecraft Papers). He then describes local housing traditions at length.

One of the most consistent themes running through Lovecraft's antiquarian writings was his *passion* for historic material culture. His discovery of a new historic site, or return to an old one, could at times evoke a kind of ecstasy in which he felt transported to another time or another cultural world. "I cannot *tell* it, but have to *sing* it!" Lovecraft wrote of his first visit to Marblehead, Massachusetts: "I had sojourned for a time in *the past* itself—not the past of books, but the living, breathing streets. Since then I have dreamt of nothing but Marblehead. . ." (*Selected Letters* I 234-36). All his adult life, he searched for "really old and naturally developed" towns and cultures that could transport him temporarily into the past. Ultimately, it was this search for authenticity that motivated his travels (Lovecraft to Lillian Clark, June 12, 1931, Lovecraft Papers).

Lovecraft's antiquarianism and his interest in the vernacular were the result of his upbringing, family background and personality, but were strongly

influenced by the Colonial Revival Movement and by the New England historic preservation movement of his day, as exemplified by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA) and, most notably, by the Providence architect, architectural historian and preservationist Norman Isham. Although an admirer of the SPNEA, Lovecraft never actually joined it. Likewise, he was an avid follower of Isham (whom he referred to as “the supreme architectural authority of all”) and heard him speak several times, but never introduced himself (*Miscellaneous Writings* 513).

Like Isham and William Sumner Appleton (founder of the SPNEA), Lovecraft adopted an ideology that romanticized preindustrial folklife. Lovecraft’s ideal was a vision of 18th century New England, a land of small rural villages, traditional crafts, and farmers from a “pure Yankee stock.” In a letter from 1927 he wrote:

Familiar forces and symbols—the hills, the woods, and the seasons—become less and less intertwined with our daily lives as brick and stone horizons and snow-shoveled streets and artificial heating replace them, and the quaintly loveable little ways of small places die of inanition as easy transportation fuses all the surface of a great country into one standardized mold. Craftsmanship and local production are dead—no one man completely makes anything, and no one region subsists to any great extent on its own products either material or intellectual. Quantity and distribution are the watchwords in an age where factories. . . reign supreme; and all sectional manners and modes of thought are obliterated. . . . (*Selected Letters* II 131)

If the anti-modernist ideology expressed here shows hints of John Ruskin, with its critique of capitalism, mass production and urbanization, another common theme was a disdain for immigrants. Lovecraft’s early story “The Street” (1920) traces the history of a street in an unnamed New England town, founded in Colonial times by British settlers, as the buildings gradually decay or are hidden under modern additions, “swarthy and sinister” immigrants move in and the area turns into a slum (*Dagon and other Macabre Tales* 343-49). Eventually an anarchist plot is hatched on the street and the buildings all self-destruct in a thunderous climax, taking the inhabitants with them. The link made here between immigration and urban decay, and by implication between historic preservation and anti-immigrant sentiment, runs through Lovecraft’s writings. In numerous essays, letters, and stories such as “The Horror at Red Hook” (1925), Lovecraft decried what he saw as the decline of American (and especially New England) civilization by the invasion of immigrants who were creating a “mongrel” American (244-65). His travel writings commonly linked the survival of historic character in regions he visited with the percentage of the population that was “pure American.” Although Lovecraft celebrated the diversity of regional cultures, he saw recently arrived immigrants and African-Americans (at least, those unwilling to be subservient to whites) as a

threat, and retained a lifelong concern about miscegenation (*Miscellaneous Writings* 325).

In fairness to Lovecraft, his opinions were in keeping with those of a good many New England intellectuals, politicians and preservationists of the time, from Henry Cabot Lodge to Henry James and Thomas Bailey Aldrich (Higham 141-42, Solomon 88, Lindgren 31, 37). Nativism was commonly linked to historic preservation. The antiquarian, folklorist and preservationist Samuel Adams Drake, prominent SPNEA member whose writings were well known to Lovecraft, despised immigrants and saw them as a threat to preservation; William Sumner Appleton linked historic preservation to the preservation of Anglo-Saxon culture in New England (Lindgren 37, 70). Several commentators have linked Lovecraft to early twentieth century American advocates of eugenics and scientific racism, such as Madison Grant and Kimball Young (Lovett-Graff 183-84); although Lovecraft was conversant with such theories, New England Brahmin politics and the emerging historic preservation movement were at least as influential in the shaping of his ideas.

Lovecraft moderated his racism somewhat toward the end of his life. Partly this was due to his ever-increasing circle of friends and correspondents, which included people from many cultural backgrounds. His exposure to French, Spanish and other cultural traditions during his antiquarian travels was also a factor: his work on Quebec, for example, includes eloquent statements of the value of French Canadian and Native American cultural traditions (*To Quebec and the Stars* 133-34, 138-39). He was even willing to concede the value of immigrant cultures in Providence; in a 1930 letter, he praises Providence's "splendidly impressive" Italian Catholic churches, although he also set a horror story, "The Haunter of the Dark," in one of them (Lovecraft to August Derleth, 1930, no month or day given, Derleth Papers).

Lovecraft's correspondence is full of laments for the destruction of historic architecture; for example, he was "mortified" to discover, in 1927, that the seventeenth century neighborhood of Boston's North End in which he set the story "Pickman's Model" (1926) had been largely demolished. Lovecraft's activism, however, was reserved for his native city (*Selected Letters* II 170).

In 1926, Lovecraft's passion for Providence was renewed by a return to his hometown after two unhappy years in New York City. "I am Providence, and Providence is myself," he wrote, together, indissolubly as one, we stand thro' the ages. . ." (*Selected Letters* II 51). Lovecraft thought Providence was threatened by the same forces that made New York a "dead city without connexion [sic] with American life": urban decay, development, immigration and commercialism (*Selected Letters* II 45). Lovecraft emerged as an articulate protector of the historic buildings and neighborhoods of Providence with frequent letters in local newspapers. In a 1926 letter to the *Providence Sunday Journal*, he advocated a city funded rehabilitation program for historic structures, especially the rows of

Colonial and Federal houses along North Benefit Street (a slum during Lovecraft's lifetime) and zoning laws which would protect historic neighborhoods from destruction, and would regulate new buildings so they were compatible with the historic fabric of the city. Such views, while not unique, were on the cutting edge of historic preservation in 1926 (*Selected Letters II* 73).

Lovecraft expressed outrage over many threats to historic structures in Providence, including the destruction of several colonial buildings on College Street between Main and Benefit Streets in 1935, to make way for an expanded Rhode Island School of Design. The height of his activities as a preservationist was an unsuccessful campaign to save "Brick Row," a row of 1816 brick warehouses and commercial buildings fronting on Water Street and the Providence River between College and Planet Streets, currently the site of Gardner Jackson Park and the Providence Washington Plaza. This row was a particular favorite of Lovecraft, to whom it was a romantic reminder of Providence's former importance as a center of maritime commerce. He refers to it in several stories, most notably in his novel written in 1927, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (*At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels* 114-15). In 1927, with the construction of a new County Courthouse across from Brick Row on South Main, the city and county jointly proposed razing the warehouses to construct a Hall of Records. Lovecraft reacted to this with an intensive letter writing campaign. He also urged everyone he knew to write letters, to the point of sending acquaintances letters he wrote himself to sign and mail to the *Providence Journal*.¹⁰

Lovecraft's definitive statement about Brick Row is contained in a letter (really an essay) published in the *Providence Sunday Journal* on March 24, 1929. He advocated saving the warehouses by converting them into a Hall of Records, a process which would involve gutting their interiors and replacing them with modern, fireproof materials. His campaign was, however, virtually the only opposition to the razing. Ironically, after the buildings were destroyed the Depression started, the city and county decided they could not afford a new Hall of Records, and the site was used as a parking lot during the remainder of Lovecraft's life (*Miscellaneous Writings* 511-15).

In an era when historic preservation generally was applied to national landmarks, high style architectural treasures or the houses of prominent people, Lovecraft's advocacy for a warehouse district put him well ahead of his time.¹¹ His interest in districts grew out of his life-long emphasis on landscapes rather than isolated buildings, which in turn led him to emphasize the historic character of neighborhoods and whole towns or rural communities, including lay-outs of streets and gardens, and rural landscapes including fields, trees, hedges, fences and so on. It was in the preservation of landscape that the local traditions so loved by Lovecraft, and so crucial in retaining the character and distinctiveness of Providence or any other town, would be preserved. This is expressed by an excerpt from Lovecraft's poem, "Brick Row," in which he defends the warehouse district:

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They fit the place so well-as much a part
As hill or sky. They almost seem to be
Growths of that nature, wiser than all art,
Which gives us flowers, mountains and the sea.

They store the charm that years build, cell by cell
Like coral from our lives, our past, our land. . . .

So if at last a callous age must tear
These jewels from the old town's quiet dress,
I think the harbor streets will always wear
A puzzled look of wistful emptiness. (*The Ancient Track* 307-08)

Lovecraft's lifelong passion for historic preservation, and the elitist and exclusive political connotations which it had for him, was expressed in a letter from 1923:

"Our modern worship of empty ideals is ludicrous. . . . 'Equality' is a joke -but a great abbey or cathedral. . . is a poignant reality. It is for us to safeguard and preserve the conditions which produce great abbeys, and palaces, and picturesque walled towns, and vivid sky-lines of steeples and domes. . . *these are all there is of life*; take them away and we have nothing which a man of taste and spirit would care to live for" (*Selected Letters* I, 207-09).

Although, in the 1930s, Lovecraft's politics changed from conservative to Socialist, he always saw historic preservation as a way to preserve the old colonial cultures of North America in the face of industrial capitalism, immigration, commercialism and other forces that threatened the traditions that gave meaning to his life.

The Colonial Revival, the historic preservation movement and the emergence of heritage tourism and travel literature, were closely linked at this time in America generally and in Lovecraft's life and thought. The most obvious direct models for Lovecraft's travel writings were patrician New England writers associated with the Colonial revival, such as Samuel Adams Drake. Such books as *Nooks and Corners of the New England Coast* (1875) and *Old Landmarks and Historic Personages of Boston* (1873) have clear parallels to Lovecraft in style, structure and ideology. Drake typically organized his books as walking tours through the places he was describing. Along the way, he went into lengthy digressions about history, architecture, crafts and occupations, local dialects, legends and beliefs, street cries, literature and similar topics—the very topics Lovecraft focused on. Although Drake's writing style is less Gothic and more sentimental than Lovecraft's, it is full of similar political, cultural and aesthetic observations: love of Colonial architecture and landscapes and their association with vanishing Anglo-Saxon virtues, a passion for historic preservation, a disdain for Victorian

architecture, an interest in folklore, and fear and contempt for immigrants.¹² Drake is perhaps the greatest exemplar of Colonial Revival travel writing, but it pervades many of the popular books that focused on New England or Colonial sites during this era, including Wilfred Munro's *Picturesque Rhode Island* (1881), Robert Shackleton's *The Book of Boston* (1916), and Annie H. Thwing's *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of Boston* (1920). By the 1920s, such books as Clara Walker Whiteside's *Touring New England on the Trail of the Yankee* (1926) are oriented to automobile tourism rather than walking tours, but they still retain the goal of searching for an authentic, Colonial America. Many passages from Whiteside's book could almost have been written by Lovecraft: the celebration of small town and rural "Colonial" landscapes, the search for "true Americans" from the "old stock," contempt for foreigners who have moved into old houses. She even shared Lovecraft's horror at hearing foreign languages spoken in old "Colonial" settings (Shaffer 235-36).

Lovecraft's passion for finding entire landscapes that would make him feel immersed in a colonial past was common in the Colonial Revival movement. During his lifetime, this was manifested in the attempts to recreate Colonial villages for tourists in such places as Litchfield, Connecticut, Old York, Maine, Colonial Williamsburg, and to some extent in Salem, Massachusetts, the model for Lovecraft's Arkham (Conforti 234-62, Butler). The goal of such villages was to immerse the tourist in an imagined Colonial landscape. Arkham and Innsmouth are literary parallels to such invented villages. They immerse the contemporary traveler (and reader) in a Colonial landscape imagined by Lovecraft. The difference, of course, is that in Lovecraft's landscape the immersion is terrifying. Travelers don't find their way back. Authentic experience, that unobtainable goal of tourists, is obtained, and it either destroys or utterly transforms the seeker. Lovecraft created an intensity of experience beyond anything at Colonial Williamsburg.

Lovecraft's antiquarianism and travel writings influenced his fiction in several ways. For one thing, his stories very often are about travel; many of them are about architectural walking tours. In addition, Lovecraft made extensive fictional use of his experiences with Colonial and New England traditions in creating background and atmosphere.

Parallels between Lovecraft's travel writings and his fiction are numerous. Many of his earlier stories, such as "The Picture in the House" (1920), "The Festival" (1923) and "He" (1925) begin with protagonists who, conducting Lovecraft style walking tours, literally walk into the past, or into ghostly survivals of the past in the present. These stories typically begin with an outsider entering an area, describing its landscape in picturesque terms, and then exploring its history and character in greater depth, a quintessentially touristic experience.

The protagonist of "The Festival" comes to the Massachusetts coastal town of Kingsport to discover his ancestral New England roots, a good Colonial Revival

tourist agenda. “Beyond the hills’ crest I saw Kingsport outspread frostily. . . snowy Kingsport with its ancient vanes and steeples, ridgepoles and chimney-pots, wharves and small bridges, willow-trees and graveyards; . . . ceaseless mazes of colonial houses piled and scattered at all angles and levels. . .” (*Dagon and Other Macabre Tales* 209). His explorations lead him to witness a terrifying rite literally under the town, from which he flees. Returning later, he finds a town “in which only about one in five [houses] was ancient, and the sounds of trolleys and motors. . .” (216). This story is a fairly direct transformation of Lovecraft’s explorations of Marblehead, in which he felt he had “sojourned for a time in the past.” It is typical of Lovecraft that the ecstasy produced by his own antiquarian explorations is transmuted into horror. The experiences which were his greatest source of pleasure are transformed into a source of despair, as rottenness is uncovered at the core of tradition.

“The Music of Erich Zann” (1921) also involves an historic neighborhood which is a touch point for a meeting with the cosmic, and which the protagonist is later unable to find. Many other stories are about walking, which is a central metaphor throughout Lovecraft’s fiction. Such stories as “The Outsider” (1921) and “The Haunter of the Dark” (1935) are about characters who leave their secure homes driven by curiosity, going for walks that reveal horrific truths that make their homes inaccessible or insecure.

Characters in later stories travel by automobile (“The Whisperer in Darkness,” 1930), bus (“The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” 1931), and even airplane (*At the Mountains of Madness*, 1931). The opening of “The Dunwich Horror” reads very much like a travelogue: “When a traveler in north central Massachusetts takes the wrong corner at the junction of Aylesbury Pike just beyond Dean’s Corner he comes upon a lonely and curious country” (*The Dunwich Horror and Others* 155-56). By taking the *wrong* turn, the traveler leaves behind the prescriptive tourist route and visits a “back region” (in Dean MacCannell’s terms) unknown to most tourists, a region at once authentic and threatening.

Lovecraft’s ultimate transformation of travelogue into horror story is “The Shadow Over Innsmouth.” The protagonist, an antiquarian very much like the author, arrives in the decayed colonial town of Innsmouth by bus, checks his bags into the one, seedy hotel, and embarks on a “systematic though half bewildered” architectural walking tour (324). Like Dunwich, the town is virtually unknown to outsiders, and its lack of prosperity has preserved its colonial landscape. Much of the story is an exploration of the architecture and history of the town; the physical description is based on Lovecraft’s explorations of Newburyport and other economically depressed communities on the north shore of Massachusetts Bay. Discovering that the town is populated by the semi-human offspring of miscegenation between New Englanders and monsters from the sea (a fantastic recasting of the theme of “The Street”), the protagonist flees. Lovecraft drew abundantly in his fiction not only on the forms of his travel

writing, but also on the specific antiquarian details. Lengthy descriptions of the New England cultural landscape abound in his stories. In *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* (1927), the autobiographical protagonist spends much of his youth on antiquarian rambles through Providence, allowing for some quite detailed accounts of architecture and the cultural landscape of the town. “The Whisperer in Darkness” (1930) contains a long description of the folklorist-hero’s drive from Brattleboro, Vermont into the Green Mountains, which draws heavily on Lovecraft’s account of his own drive along the same route in 1927 (*Miscellaneous Writings* 293-96). The drive ends at a New England connected farmstead, a folk form characteristic of the region, which becomes the site of a meeting with extraterrestrials (*The Dunwich Horror and Others* 248-49).

Perhaps most compelling, however, are Lovecraft’s invented New England towns: Innsmouth, Kingsport, Dunwich and especially Arkham. These were composites of towns that Lovecraft visited and knew well. While Kingsport was loosely based on Marblehead, Arkham on Salem, Innsmouth on Newburyport, and so on, these really were dream cities, in which elements from all over New England were reshaped by Lovecraft’s visionary imagination. This is nicely expressed at the conclusion to *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* (1927). The hero, Randolph Carter, dreams of a “marvelous sunset city,” which he is unable to find again. Questing through Dreamland, he eventually meets the god Nyarlathotep, who tells him:

“. . . your gold & marble city of wonder is only the sum of what you have seen & loved in youth. It is the glory of Boston’s hillside roofs and western windows aflame with sunset. . . antique Salem with its brooding years, and spectral Marblehead scaling its rocky precipices into past centuries. . . Providence quaint and lordly on its seven hills over the blue harbour. . . New England bore you, and into your soul she poured a liquid loveliness which cannot die.” (*At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels* 379-80)

If there is a lovely side to Lovecraft’s vision of New England, however, there is also a dark side. Arkham, Innsmouth and Dunwich have changed little since Colonial times; in these towns, the weight of the past is not a pleasure but a burden. Decaying houses symbolize ruined lives; deals have been struck with dark forces, and closed shutters hide monstrosities. Poverty and isolation have allowed neighborhoods and entire towns to survive intact from the colonial era, but have also brought about ignorance, superstition, inbreeding and miscegenation (to Lovecraft, the worst horror of all).

In Lovecraft’s fiction, architecture has a central role in creating atmosphere, as it does in much horror literature, but he rarely used the medieval castles and abbeys of the Gothic writers. In architectural terms, Lovecraft was not so much a “Gothic” writer as a “Colonial Revival” writer. In “The Shadow Over

Innsmouth,” lengthy descriptions of decayed Colonial houses and churches prefigure the protagonist’s discovery of the decay and corruption of the people who live in them. In “The Picture in the House” (1920), “The Shunned House” (1924) and “The Dreams in the Witch House” (1932), the action takes place almost entirely within a single house which is described in detail. “The Shunned House,” set in a 1763 house on Benefit Street, Providence, intertwines the actual history of the house with an invented history based on a ghost legend collected by the folklorist Charles M. Skinner (Skinner 76-77). In “Dreams in the Witch House,” based on the so-called “witch house” of Salem, the protagonist is literally drawn into another dimension by the architectural form of the house. His explorations of other dimensions are paralleled by somnambulistic walks through the streets of Arkham. There are *many* other examples where architecture has a defining role in the story.¹³

Lovecraft used material culture in his stories in two interrelated ways: to create a sense of place, and to evoke the past. Setting is so crucial in most of his stories that it cannot be separated from character, and it was from his travels that Lovecraft picked up the details of setting. Lovecraft saw place, or groundedness, as the center of his own identity, and as the basis for any true art or civilization. This groundedness must be based on history and tradition. He states this repeatedly in his correspondence and in many of his essays. “All genuine art,” he wrote, “is local and rooted in the soil. . . creative artistic force is always provincial and nationalistic.” Of himself, he says, “That ethereal sense of identity with my own native & hereditary soil & institutions is the one essential condition of intellectual life” (*Selected Letters* II 131).

This profound dualism—nostalgia and terror, beauty and disgust—runs through Lovecraft’s attitude toward New England, toward tradition, and toward his own heritage, and it also runs through his stories. In “The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” the hero’s antiquarian travels and genealogical research lead him first to uncover the terrible secrets of the town of Innsmouth, and then the even more terrible secrets of his own ancestry, which eventually transforms him into a monster. This parallels Lovecraft’s own life: proud of his Puritan New England ancestors, he could not forget that both his parents died in psychiatric hospitals.

Lovecraft’s concern with the preservation of tradition grew out of the New England Brahmin politics of his youth, but it evolved into a concern with 20th century alienation that was, in many respects, surprisingly modern. An avid amateur follower of astronomy and physics (he wrote astronomy columns for local papers for several years), Lovecraft maintained that scientific discoveries were revealing the complete insignificance of humans, and the irrelevance of human cultures, traditions, and religions, when set against the incomprehensible vastness of the cosmos (Joshi 1999, 207-08). He thought that Relativity and the Uncertainty Principle meant that humans could never ultimately know anything,

that science would overturn all our accepted ideas about the nature of humans and of the universe. This is an important theme in much of his fiction, and it led him to a modernist reformulation of the concepts of tradition and preservation.

For Lovecraft, tradition was an illusion. Traditions give meaning to our lives—but they have no meaning in a cosmic or scientific sense, only such meaning as we choose to give them. They won't protect us from an indifferent cosmos or from the evil within ourselves.

In Lovecraft's contradictions—his simultaneous love for and horror of the old and traditional, his pride in the greatness of American (and New England) civilization and his conviction that 20th century science and technology had doomed this civilization—he expressed the anxieties of many artists and intellectuals of his time, and did so with a power and vividness that has made him one of the most influential horror writers of the 20th century. If Lovecraft's love for the past and disdain for such trends as mechanization and immigration were anti-modernist, his fictional depictions of irruptions of the past into the present, and the concomitant irruptions of the cosmic into the mundane, were embodiments of the characteristically twentieth century fear that the "solidarity of modernity" will break down into irrationality and chaos (MacCannell 83).

It could be said that the hopeful, optimistic side of Lovecraft's personality was expressed in his antiquarianism, and his dark side was expressed in his fiction. Although the latter is what he is primarily known for, his antiquarianism consumed more of his life, especially after about 1925, if judged by time put in or pages written. If the fiction expresses despair and hopelessness brought on by the loss of the "comfortable illusions" of tradition and the insubstantial quality of 20th century life (what could be more frightening to an antiquarian than the thought that traditions are meaningless, and the past is monstrous?), Lovecraft's antiquarianism expresses a kind of existential attempt to preserve meaning in a meaningless universe by affirming tradition and by documenting and preserving the physical evidence of tradition in the built environment. It would not be going too far to say that, for Lovecraft, antiquarianism and historic preservation were the answer to the crisis of modernity. In some of his most passionate writing he conveys a kind of architectural sublime, in which the vernacular landscape provides a glimpse of a timeless and infinite cosmos. From his 1929 sonnet, "Continuity:"

It moves me most when slanting sunbeams glow
 On old farm buildings set against a hill,
 And paint with life the shapes which linger still
 From centuries less a dream than these we know.
 In that strange light I feel I am not far
 From the fixt mass whose sides the ages are (*The Ancient Track* 79).

Notes

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1. 'Anti-modernism' refers a complex ideology or group of ideologies that emerged in Europe and the United States during the nineteenth century, as a protest against industrial capitalism. Reacting to such factors as the breakdown of traditional communities and human alienation from work and from nature, anti-modernists advocated a return to perceived communities of the past, which often meant a revival of pre-industrial crafts, architecture, religion or social structure. Anti-modernists were diverse, from the British socialist and craftsman William Morris to the American writer Henry Adams and the poet T. S. Eliot. In the words of T. J. Jackson Lears, "all these disparate pilgrims sought authentic alternatives to the apparent unreality of modern existence; all have spawned descendants down to our own time" (Lears 5).
2. For example, Airaksinen.
3. Most notably, the work of leading Lovecraft scholar S. T. Joshi.
4. See Kammen, Lears, Lindgren, and others.
5. Lovecraft's letters contain many descriptions of architectural rambles around Providence. A good example is a tour given to James F. Morton, C. M. Eddy and Lovecraft's aunt, Lillian Clark, described in a letter to Samuel Loveman dated January 5, 1924 (*Lovecraft, Letters to Samuel Loveman and Vincent Starrett* 23). Lovecraft never wrote a unified, longer historical/architectural work about Providence as he did about Charleston and Quebec City.
6. Lovecraft was, in terms of quantity at least, one of the great letter writers of all time. S. T. Joshi has estimated that Lovecraft may have written as many as 75,000 letters during his short life, including many over thirty pages, a few well over one hundred. They contain lengthy discussions of literature, politics, philosophy, history and many other topics. The main repository of Lovecraft's unpublished letters and manuscripts is the John Hay Library at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. Smaller collections also exist at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison; the New York Public Library; and elsewhere. Lovecraft's *Selected Letters*, most of them heavily edited, have been published in five volumes. S. T. Joshi's *An Index to the Selected Letters of H. P. Lovecraft* is indispensable for the use of these volumes. In addition, at least nine volumes of letters to specific correspondents have been published, as well as *Lord of a Visible World: An Autobiography in Letters*. All of these publications together still only include a small fraction of Lovecraft's correspondence. The editors of the *Selected Letters*, unfortunately, tended to leave out the architectural and antiquarian materials in favor of literary, philosophical and personal matters. In addition, a good many letters have been lost or remain in private hands.
7. For a later visit to Charleston, Lovecraft to Helen Sully, April 30, 1934. For

- Philadelphia, Lovecraft to James F. Morton, June 9, 1926. For St. Augustine, Lovecraft to Lillian Clark, May 11, 1931. For Key West, Lovecraft to Lillian Clark, June 12, 1931. For Savannah, Lovecraft to Lillian Clark, June 24, 1931. For Nantucket, Lovecraft to R. H. Barlow, August 2, 1934; and to Helen Sully, September 2, 1934. For Rhode Island, Lovecraft to E. Hoffman Price, May 30, 1934; to Helen Sully, July 26, 1936; and to R. H. Barlow, November 30, 1936. All of the above are in the Lovecraft Papers, John Hay Library. For New Orleans, Lovecraft to August Derleth, June 2, 1932, and June 6, 1932, August Derleth Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
8. Jewett and other New England local color writers such as Mary Wilkins Freeman also had a “Gothic” side, producing numerous stories of the supernatural. Lovecraft was a fan of Wilkins Freeman (and of Lafcadio Hearn); although there is no record that he ever read Jewett.
 9. The regions are French Canadian, English (Maine to New York), Dutch New York, English (Mid Atlantic), Pennsylvania German, Welsh in Pennsylvania, Swedish in Delaware, English in Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia, Spanish in Florida, French in Louisiana, and the Spanish southwest. Lovecraft to August Derleth, 1930 (no month or day given), Derleth Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. Since his focus was European settlement, Lovecraft did not consider African-American or Native American cultures.
 10. For example, a letter on Brick Row by James F. Morton (*Providence Sunday Journal*, December 22, 1929:A5), was actually written by Lovecraft, as stated in a letter from Lovecraft to Morton dated November 1929 (*Selected Letters III* 55-56). A letter exists from Morton to Lovecraft confirming that he signed and mailed the letter (Morton to Lovecraft, December 16, 1929, Lovecraft Papers).
 11. Charleston set up a historic district controlled by zoning ordinances, the first in the United States, in 1931. Hosmer 238-42.
 12. Lovecraft owned several of Drake’s books and recommended them to his friends. In a letter to Richard Searight, Lovecraft described Drake: “This writer—although not wholly exempt from Victorian unctuousness and floridity—is really admirably interesting and accurate” (*Letters to Richard F. Searight* 21-22).
 13. For example, “The Rats in the Walls” (1923), which uses architecture as a symbol of degeneration and madness, and “The Haunter of the Dark” (1935), which describes an evil force lurking in an actual Providence Catholic church, St. John’s on top of Federal Hill, since destroyed. Lovecraft’s stories about extraterrestrials also rely heavily on architecture. Lengthy descriptions of non-human architecture are used to create an atmosphere of cosmic alienage in such stories as “The Call of Cthulhu” (1926), “At the Mountains of Madness” (1931), and “The Shadow Out of Time” (1935).

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There is here involved a psychological pattern or tradition as real and as deeply grounded in mental experience as any other pattern or tradition of mankind; coeval with the religious feeling and closely related to many aspects of it, and too much a part of our inmost biological heritage to lose keen potency over a very important, though not numerically great, minority of our species. Man's first instincts and emotions formed his response to the environment in which he found himself. Definite feelings based on pleasure and pain grew up around the phenomena whose causes and effects he understood. HP Lovecraft. *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* is, in many ways, a masterpiece. A young man is compelled to visit a remote New England fishing town for reasons he cannot entirely comprehend. The unravelling of Lovecraft's reputation as an author and a person continues to gather momentum. But Cthulhu will live for ever. Lovecraft Country begins on Sky Atlantic Monday, August 17th, at 9pm. *The Horror at Red Hook*. 3. *The Call of Cthulhu*. 24. *The Colour out of Space*. 53. *The Dunwich Horror*. 80. *The* (ebook - occult) HP Lovecraft - *Call of Cthulhu* - a Dark Lore. 325 Pages 2001 1.4 MB 715 Downloads. *The Call of Cthulhu* by H. P. Lovecraft. On the heels of his widely successful trilogy of works honoring H. P. Lovecraft, Donald Tyson now unveils a true grimoir *The Dark Lord: H.P. Lovecraft, Kenneth Grant, and the Typhonian Tradition in Magic*. 274 Pages 2013 1.83 MB 4,329 Downloads New! One of the most famous - yet least understood - manifestations of Thelemic thought has been the works of Kenneth Grant, Load more similar PDF files. PDF Drive investigated dozens of problems and listed the biggest global issues facing the world today. American horror writer H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) was dedicated to the concept of tradition, including its documentation, preservation, use in literature, and reinvention as an adaptation to changing times. His changing attitude toward tradition presaged the broader twentieth-century transformation of this concept, from a static and vanishing embodiment of the past to a dynamic phenomenon that must be self-consciously manipulated to give meaning to the present. Secondly, I show that Lovecraft uses techniques from ethnography and antiquarianism to produce both a model of culture and a fantastic universe that draws its claims to verisimilitude by means of a strategic practice of citation.