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and the Shadow of England

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DAVID SIMMONS

H. P. Lovecraft and the Shadow of England

The Anglophile nature of the American writer H. P. Lovecraft is well known in Lovecraftian circles, the writer once remarking in a 1927 letter: 'If I could create an ideal world, it would be an England with the fire of the Elizabethans, the correct taste of the Georgians, and the refinement and pure ideals of the Victorians.'¹ However, while Lovecraft's penchant for all things English is ostensibly and *perhaps* somewhat superficially accepted by such scholars, there has been relatively little academic work undertaken concerned directly with the writer's potential integration of this affinity for anything English into his fiction. Several critics, including S. T. Joshi and Paul Cannon, have discussed Lovecraft's intense awareness of his English ancestry and proclivity for English writers, yet none have engaged in a close reading of how this partisanship may have manifested itself in Lovecraft's collection of fantastic and supernatural short stories.

In the light of this lacunary critical space, this essay will explore instances of Lovecraft's Anglophilia in, variously, his early non-fiction work, his poetry, and his later, more renowned collections of short stories. While such a penchant on Lovecraft's part is immediately discernible in his early (pre 1925) work, my primary focus will revolve around an informed but speculative textual analysis of his later short stories in which, I will argue, 'England' becomes a kind of *leitmotif*, representing antiquity, culture and aristocracy. To this end I intend to analyse four of Lovecraft's stories that explicitly consider England. I examine the following texts: 'The Street' (1919),² 'Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family' (1920), 'The Rats in the Walls' (1923), and *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* (1926–27) as representative examples of trends in Lovecraft's larger body of short fiction.³ Lovecraft's utilisation of 'England' acts as a signifier of a set of specific ideological concerns. In my reading I will deploy Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, taken from *The*