

Architectures of Madness: Lovecraft's R'lyeh as a modernist dystopia)

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Abstract

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) was one of the most influential horror writers of the XXth Century, with a strong stylistic and thematic impact on numerous other writers of the genre but also on literary fiction and on film and videogames. And architecture was one of his preferred tools to create atmospheres of dread and infuse in the reader a sense of alienation and loneliness. Most of his short stories and novelettes are filled with architectural descriptions and details. Either of the traditional architecture of his beloved New England, or of what he called "Cyclopean architecture", a name usually identified with Mycenaean historical architecture, but which Lovecraft used to qualify the architecture built by his alien races and gods.

This Cyclopean architecture seems to have much in common with the Modernist architecture which Lovecraft detested and that in his time was on the rise.

In this paper, I propose to analyze the most well-known example of such architectonic fantasy locations: the sunken "corpse-city" of R'lyeh, also called Arlyeh or Urilia, in Southern Pacific, which figures prominently in his short story «The Call of Cthulhu».

I will try to determine which architectural features Lovecraft imbued in the "Cyclopean Architecture" to create his unsettling

atmospheres and especially investigate de barrenness of references - historical, geometrical, geographical - that seem to permeate the buildings and cities dreamt by Lovecraft to make them existential distopias.

Keywords: Modernist Architecture, Howard Philips Lovecraft, R'Lyeh, Imaginary Places