



I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H. P. Lovecraft

S.T. Joshi

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This new Kindle edition of S. T. Joshi's monumental biography of H. P. Lovecraft includes the entire two-volume print edition in one file, providing the most detailed portrait of the life, work, and thought of the dreamer from Providence ever published. An expanded and updated edition restores the 150,000 words that Joshi omitted from its original publication and, in addition, updates the texts with new findings.

I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H. P. Lovecraft Details

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From Reader Review I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H. P. Lovecraft for online ebook

Murray Ewing says

There's an amusing moment in this mammoth biography of H P Lovecraft where S T Joshi comments on a brief autobiographical essay Lovecraft once wrote: "on the whole this is an exceptionally accurate and compact account of Lovecraft's life and beliefs, and all that is required to flesh out the picture is masses of detail." And here, Joshi provides the masses of detail. Sometimes they *are* masses — I have to admit I skipped a few passages, such as the more involved details of the politics of the early-Twentieth Century amateur press movement, or the exact details of Lovecraft's many late-life trips up and down the east coast of America. But, for a book of its size and subject, it's an excellent, lively read.

Reviewing a biography, it can be tempting to review the life, not the book — which is a good sign, as it shows the biographer has done their job, getting out of the way to let their subject take the stage. Joshi has certainly done his job here. If nothing else, those "masses of detail" assembled here counter some of the myths about Lovecraft: the travels alone prove him not to have been a recluse (apart from, perhaps, in his teenage years), as do his vigorous epistolary friendships, many of which resulted in actual visits. And his presidency of both of the main amateur press associations of his day surely proves he was far more capable at the sort of tasks that would land him a job than he thought himself to be. The end of Lovecraft's life comes across as truly sad, and Joshi's last words are both true and poignant: "He was a human being like any of us—neither a lunatic nor a superman. He had his share of flaws and virtues. But he is dead now, and no amount of praise or blame will have any effect upon the course of his life. His work alone remains."

Patrick.G.P says

A fantastic and exhaustive account on the life and times of H.P.Lovecraft. Having recently read L.Sprague De Camp's fine narrative of Lovecraft's life, this work proves almost encyclopedic in comparison. Interesting to read what new facts have come to light since Camp's 1975 book. Joshi's account is somewhat dry at times but the subject matter always proves endlessly fascinating. A goldmine for Lovecraftian scholars and fans. A must!

Hugo Negron says

An exhaustively researched biography of HP Lovecraft. S.T. Joshi crafted probably the definitive bio on the weird fiction writer, who is rightly seen as a master of American horror next to Poe. This volume (part one of two) does an amazing job of bringing Lovecraft to vivid life, presenting new information as well as dispelling many myths. Yes, he was reclusive, depressed, idealizing a more "gentlemanly" 18th century past, loathing the mechanistic present, and a periwig wearing racist to boot. However, with the death of his mother (who had projected a love/hate relationship with her son) and through the many amateur writing groups of the day (which he would participate in and also lead – a very interesting piece to read about!), Lovecraft began to mature in thought and manner, developing a vast circle of friends, fans, and correspondents of such loyalty that few people of a more outgoing nature could ever match.

A recluse? He travelled throughout the East Coast, FL, and Quebec, staying with and accommodating many

a friend and correspondent, touring places of antiquarian interest, hanging out with groups of fellow writers in a variety of clubs and organizations, and even finding time to become briefly married.

An unfaltering atheist, he believed in a universe where man's insignificance was exposed to the unmentionable and uncaring horrors that lurked beyond. It's ironic in a way that a man who did not believe in God would end up creating a cosmic mythology of extraterrestrials who found their way to Earth, foolishly worshipped by humans as deities. Even back in his day, as he became a well-known writer in amateur publications and circles, he would weave such detail between realistic settings and his horrors that fans would write to him asking if his creatures were real or if the Necronomicon (a book of evil he created in his tales that could summon these monsters) actually existed!

That many persons have continued to believe so to this day would surely have made the atheist Lovecraft giggle with incredulous joy.

Warts and all, Joshi does an amazing job of detailing all that is known of Lovecraft, through many of the letters written back and forth to his fans and friends. Ever a gentleman, he would never decline a response to any letter of inquiry or request for writing aid, and some of these "lost" letters are still being discovered (the HP Lovecraft Historical Society has announced they have come across a collection of 38 letters from Lovecraft to Zealia Bishop, a client of Lovecrafts, which have never been seen, to be released in a book this year).

Joshi also adds a nice mini-summary to virtually every single work of Lovecraft's, and writes the biography with such detail and clarity, the reader has to root for Lovecraft, feeling his poverty (he would list out with pride how he could get by eating only twice a day, and surviving a week on just a few cans of beans, cold soup, and the occasional piece of bread or other sundry item, sometimes old and possibly even spoiled) and his frustrations at countless story rejections from official publishing houses, while taking in his obvious enjoyment in his travels and the accolades he received from so many fellow writers and followers. There are also some funny moments, involving editorial clients that Lovecraft endured who obviously could not write a wit! The ending is sad, of course, as Lovecraft did not live past 46, and as you near it, you start to feel as if you are approaching an already known climax in a fictional story that you wish could have been avoided.

If you are a student or fan of Lovecraft's writing, this is a definitive work you cannot miss.

Christopher says

My favorite work of nonfiction and biography is 'Peter the Great: His Life and World' by Robert K Massie, a biography of almost 900 pages which I read in 2007. Considering how much nonfiction I read, being the unquestioned favorite is a very, very lofty perch. This is now my second favorite biography. Almost right up there with that one.

So let us begin. Anyone interested in not just reading Lovecraft as fiction but also as a writer with something to say has no doubt heard of S.T. Joshi. Not only the greatest and most comprehensive of Lovecraft scholars alive, but of them all, period. Joshi lets Lovecraft tell his own story through many letters, as well as letting others who have met him chime in through their impressions of the man. Naturally, as a literary critic he also adds his own exceptionally erudite commentary to also bring a contemporary perspective on these matters. All of it is handled excellently.

We are taken on a linear tour of HPL's life, with numerous asides about other developments overlapping

chapters, and thus get to see the development of a remarkable individual, ridden with high and low points which alike come together to make the man and many of his influences. I need not state the life of the man here.

Joshi's focus on his thought, evolutions in his politics philosophy featuring just as much as literary developments, really help to show where the core perspectives that make HPL so unique really came from. His condemnable racism and questionable early reactionary nature is neither brushed over nor excused, but neither is it taken out of proportion to his many virtues as a man. Most pertinent of which is just what a good and honorable friend he was to those he both new in person, and those he only knew from correspondence. Works of charity, tips and advice, and a lively social circle in which he eventually became the star. Coupled with his wide travels (for the time and his income) and vigorous efforts to go out of his way to relate them to others-the man must have been one one of the best people anyone could have had as friends, and clearly is a far cry from the obtuse recluse narrative which seems to dominate thinking about him.

If I had any quibbles with this work, the only one I can think of is very minor, and that is the dismissive way Joshi treats Howard. Granted, I agree that a significant chunk, perhaps even almost half of what Robert E Howard wrote was 'hack-work' (its still fun though), but what he really invested in (a few independent stories, Most of Conan, all of Kull, etc) I think deserves serious literary credit. Of course, its not a book about Howard so that hardly matters. I generally agreed with Joshi on Clark Ashton Smith being a good poet, a great fantasist (Zothique among the best) but that the Averoign stories are banal and forgettable. I also learned about a few authors from that period I need to check out, so that is always good.

I specifically liked Joshi's mentioning Laird Barron and Thomas Ligotti, who recently I have become quite into and agree wholeheartedly that they are amongst the contemporary vanguard of the weird tale. I would also include John Langan and Nathan Ballingrud in that list as well. I clearly have to check out more Pugmire, and will be sure to do so soon.

So, in all, a fantastic work of both scholarship and erudition (A feat I can be quite sympathetic to having just completed a doctoral thesis myself) but also of heart, soul, and passion. This book is a testament to both the man it is about and the man who wrote it.

Brown131 says

A thousand page book for a man who lived 47 years. That's about 1/2 page for every month that he lived. You would think that this much detail would be mired down in minutia, but this level of detail I found to be actually quite captivating.

Because Lovecraft was a prolific letter writer, we are able to know much about his life, from the profound to the mundane. Joshi has read thousands of Lovecraft's letters and the level of detail he wrote about Lovecraft, is able to reveal the complicated man that he was.

This books covers not only his life, but also critiques his stories, and discusses his Lovecraft's place in weird fiction. It is basically a brain-dump of a leading Lovecraft scholar who has been studying him for the last thirty or so years.

Jeff says

I spent a long time reading this massive, two-volume biography of H.P. Lovecraft, but it was time well spent. I have been a fan of Lovecraft's work since I was a teenager, and the man himself always fascinated me. This is, I believe, the definitive biography. It is the closest we can come, I think, to knowing Lovecraft as a person.

Derek Pegritz says

When S. T. Joshi's *H. P. Lovecraft: A Life* came out in the late 1990s, I was one of the first folks to get a copy, and I *devoured* it, frequently marveling at how much Lovecraft's early life paralleled my own...and gratefully reading about how HPL wasn't the social misfit and recluse that so many falsely believe him to be. Unfortunately, said volume quickly dropped out of print--

But now it has returned, in a greatly expanded, updated, and much handsome two-volume version. This is *the* definitive biography and critical survey of HPL and his works. The end. S. T. Joshi is the Big Papa of Lovecraft studies for a reason, and considering the sheer volume of primary source materials that Joshi has read through and catalogued in researching this work...well, you've got to give the man Major Props.

This is a volume which NO serious Lovecraft scholar can lack. And most fans of his fiction should probably check it out, anyway, if only to see that Grandpa Theobald was actually a pretty funny guy...when he wasn't being a racist jackass--but hey, no one's perfect.

Carol Leibiger says

H.P. Lovecraft is a fascinating character and exceptional author, and no one knows his life and work like S.T. Joshi. However, I wish there were less Joshi in this book. At times the author obsesses about points, questions, or issues that are important for him, but they interrupt the flow of the book. A book devoted more to Lovecraft and less to Joshi's views and musings would be also be welcome because it would be shorter than this 500+ page tome that only covers HPL's life through 1924.

V says

It definitely is a very comprehensive biography of H P Lovecraft. Joshi whallops the reader with a lot of detail, which might be considered a positive if you are particularly interested in Lovecraft's life, his letters, and the time he attempted to sample every flavour of ice-cream in an ice-cream shop together with his friends.

This was interesting for the most part--I particularly liked the details about his amateur writing--but dear god, I was struggling by the end.

Benjamin Hare says

Meticulous, well reasoned, readable, astute, haunting, sad, and illuminating. I can only heap praise upon the head of S. T. Joshi for gracing the world with this work. Within the first five pages I was drawn into the pathos of Lovecraft's history, having only the most vague concept of what I was getting myself into. Mentally, I was unprepared for the depth to which STJ delved into his subject matter. At first overwhelmed, I soon became entranced.

The book is a beast, not only in size, but in the varied analysis STJ brings to bear upon the facts. There is a wealth of literary history and critical analysis included, revealing treasures of pulp fiction history I knew nothing of. Joshi talks economics, philosophy, culture, and science as he lays open the written record of Lovecraft's life. Upon finishing the first book my immediate reaction was to reach for the second volume.

Highly recommended for serious fans of Lovecraft's work.

Ann says

Best Lovecraft biography available.

David says

If the idea of reading an exhaustive 1000 page biography about a particular cult writer who lived a short and relatively uneventful life does not appeal to you I recommend you don't bother with this book- if the idea of a 1000 page biography about HP Lovecraft makes you go 'oooh!' however, then I definitely recommend this book as I cannot even conceive of a more authoritative or enjoyable edition.

Mike says

It has taken me almost a year to complete the two volumes which make up this book. Over a thousand pages of dense information from an author who obviously has huge respect for and knowledge and understanding of, his subject.

I feel I will spend the next ten years of my life just working through the authors and supplementary information listed throughout.

This is a stunning piece of work, incredibly thorough and detailed from the start to finish of Lovecraft's life. Joshi does not shy away from some of the more difficult aspects of that life such as the poor treatment of Sonia, HPL's wife, and the now widely publicised prejudices, and while I have come away from this not necessarily liking HPL as a person I feel I understand the issues better and can empathise in SOME regards. This has in no way reduced my enjoyment of Lovecraft's art, but if anything has deepened my understanding of his life, his dedication to certain "causes" and the times in which he lived.

G.R. Yeates says

A fascinating account with an incredible and staggering amount of detail. I do not think I have ever read a biography so minutely researched. This does mean that I Am Providence is strictly for Lovecraft scholars and admirers but, as one myself, this is no real criticism because S.T. Joshi has set the standard so high for other biographies I read from this point on. I seriously doubt they will be as informative and as entertaining as this account of the Old Gent from Providence, Rhode Island.

Oliver Holm says

An astoundingly scrupulous piece of biographical work, containing myriads of trivia, however notably marred by the author's much too categorical 'best'/'mediocre'/'poor' evaluation of the various pieces of fiction that make up Lovecraft's collective authorship.
