Title: “The Hesitation Principle in ‘The Rats in the Walls’”

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Prior to 1926 when H. P. Lovecraft first published “The Call of Cthulhu,” his finest short story is generally considered to be “The Rats in the Walls.” Contradictory evidence, however, laces this short tale. Are Lovecraft’s eponymous rats supernatural entities, or are they simply the mad ravings of an unreliable narrator? Most commentators have preferred a realistic or naturalistic framework of explanation, but I argue that the rats’ ontological status remains inherently undecidable. Using Tzvetan Todorov’s theory of the fantastic as a starting point, this article suggests that when a reader hesitates over the rats’ reality, this hesitation raises questions about the shifting boundary between real and unreal, which in turn accentuates the precarity within what I have elsewhere called Lovecraft’s moment in the international weird.

Keywords: Henry James, H.P. Lovecraft, international weird, “The Rats in the Walls,” Tzvetan Todorov

As a writer of weird fiction, H. P. Lovecraft rarely receives much credit for subtlety or understatement. In one of the earliest (and still one of the best) essays on his work, Fritz Leiber remarks that Lovecraft most often employs the “device of confirmation rather than revelation” in his endings (56), and this certainly holds true for “The Rats in the Walls,” a tale whose narrator seems fated for a terrible end the moment that he purchases Exham Priory, his long abandoned ancestral home. Still, this early story remains one of Lovecraft’s most puzzling. As Robert W. Waugh observes, it seemingly has two different plots, one about a cannibalistic family and another about rats, and neither of these plots “exist on the same level of reality” since whereas the first is realistic, the latter is “undecidable and fantastic” (149). Despite this suggestive hint, however, the secondary literature has generally preferred to see Delapore’s four-
footed companions in a realist or naturalistic way. That is to say, the narrator is insane, and his “daemon rats” stem from that insanity. In contrast, this article seeks to complicate that dominant view. With special reference to Tzvetan Todorov’s theory of the fantastic, I argue that readers must hesitate between two equally plausible explanations of the rats, natural or supernatural, and such hesitation highlights how precarious Lovecraft considered modern civilization to be—a precarity that undergirds what, elsewhere, I have called Lovecraft’s moment in the international weird, where he uses the respective histories of England and the United States to contrast what separates the Old World from the New.¹

Although some commentators have come close to my position on hesitation, the thematic implications for waver-  ing between viewing the rats as supernatural or as a madman’s horrified ravings have been left unexplored. For instance, Waugh, after noting the rats’ ambiguous ontological status, quickly changes gears into his main topic, and, similarly, David E. Schultz contents himself with remarking that readers are left to wonder if the “narrators of these ghost stories experience what they say they did” (213). Otherwise, critics have taken the dilemma by its horns—they choose either a supernatural explanation or a realistic psychological one. John Kipling Hitz champions the minority view. He considers Delapore, though clearly mad, as someone “demonically possessed by the spirits of his dead ancestors” (32), which accepts the independent existence of the rats. George T. Wetzel’s ghoul-changeling hypothesis probably falls into this category too.² The overwhelming majority of critics, however, have viewed Delapore’s rats in light of Lovecraft’s own materialist philosophy. Here, critics inspired by Jungian psychoanalysis have led the vanguard. Barton Levi St. Armand hints that the rats might well be “only the horribly diseased vision of a deranged mind” (57), and Maurice Lévy, who links the fantastic with the oneiric, sees Delapore’s architectural exploration as a symbolic
descent into the “collective unconscious” (67). P. S. Owens stakes a similar claim when he calls Exham Priory something more than a physical locale, an “extended metaphor for the states of mind the narrator descends through” (70). Likewise, S. T. Joshi confidently views “Rats” as one of Lovecraft’s two tales—the other being “The Tomb”—where the “horrors do come from the mind of the narrators” (62, n.13).

Given the dominance of this naturalistic or realist position, it is worth taking some time to examine its supporting evidence. By and large, there are two main pillars, one internal and one external to the text. The internal evidence derives from several clear textual statements that only Delapore can hear the rats. Neither Edward Norrys nor the orderlies at Hanwell, the mental asylum that eventually houses poor mad Delapore, hear the incessant rodent scurrying. The tale’s memorable ending no doubt plays a role, too, and it leaves a powerful—almost overwhelming—impression:

They must know it was the rats; the slithering, scurrying rats whose scampering will never let me sleep; the daemon rats that race behind the padding in this room and beckon me down to greater horrors than I have ever known; the rats they can never hear; the rats, the rats in the walls. (108)

The external evidence, in contrast, stems from how easily and suggestively Lovecraft’s story lends itself to psychoanalytic interpretation. With a naturalistic framework based on modern psychology in mind, critics like St. Armand and Lévy have little reason to accept any intrusion of the supernatural or the unexplainable. Lévy, for example, sees the story not as about Delapore but as about Lovecraft’s own pathological anxiety over “corrupted blood” (78). And St. Armand is clearly enchanted by the likeness between “Rats” and a dream that Jung describes where the unconscious is structured like a house: the deeper one goes, the more primal the fears one uncovers. Hence, the story’s rats are therefore the “rats in the walls of human nature itself—
creatures of appetite and craving, a link to the animal nature of man” (24).

Unfortunately for these realists, the textual evidence also leads to the opposite conclusion—i.e., the rats are quite real. A timeline for all rat-related activities can be found in Figure 1. Notably, although only one person (Delapore) can hear the rats, Exham Priory’s small cadre of cats can sense them perfectly well. In fact, they first notice a disturbance on July 22nd, a full day before the narrator. Additionally, by July 24th, during a mysterious intervention for which neither cats nor humans seem culpable, the rat traps filled with Paris green have been uniformly sprung despite “no trace remain[ing] of what had been caught and had escaped” (Lovecraft, “Rats” 98–99). Finally, there is the compelling evidence from 1610 concerning the “dramatic epic of the rats.” Three months after Walter de la Poer seals off Exham Priory, the hunger-frenzied rats somehow escape their architectural confines and rampage into the local village. Although this episode can be read symbolically, the deaths of “fowl, cats, dogs, hogs, sheep, and even two hapless human beings” (94) is a material event hard to ignore, even if over the centuries the tale has grown in the telling. Proponents of the naturalistic position must either ignore or minimize these undeniable facts. With all this in mind, Delapore seems much less mad than psychoanalytic interpreters would have us believe.

Yet between these two incommensurable positions on the rats there lies a third option: the equal plausibility of both positions, natural and supernatural. The key work for this third possibility is Tzvetan Todorov’s The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre (trans. 1973), which argues that, as a literary genre, the “fantastic” arises at the precise moment when an implied reader hesitates between natural and supernatural explanations of a story event.3 If one leans toward the natural explanation, the fantastic shades into the merely uncanny. Lean the other way, however, and the fantastic slides into the marvelous. As
Textual Evidence Relating to the Rats’ Reality

1610 – the “dramatic epic of the rats” (94).

1923 (July 16th) – narrator moves into Exham Priory.

July 22nd – narrator’s cat exceptionally alert, and the servants notice a similar restlessness among all the house’s cats (96).

July 23rd (night) – narrator has “strange dreams” (97). Cat also very alert, racing “up and down the floor by this part of the wall, clawing the fallen arras. . .” (97). Servants notice nothing unusual, except the cook who sees a cat acting strange, bolting “down the stairs” (97).

July 24th (night) – first swineherd dream; both he and his herd devoured by rats. Narrator awoken by his cat, who is made frantic by his arras. All the rat traps have been sprung. Servants noticed the panic of the cats but heard no rats in the walls.

July 25th – calls over Capt. Norrys. Both explore sub-cellar; they spend the night there. Second swineherd dream; face of Norrys seen on a fungous beast (100). Cats excited – but only they and the narrator, not Norrys, hear the rats. In a crevice between floor and altar, they discover the entrance to a secret vault deeper than Roman masonry. Cannot open it.

July 26th – decision made to finds archaeologists and scientific men from London. No further spectral incidents through the next week.

August 7th – company returns to Exham Priory; third swineherd dream.

August 8th – Sir William Brinton discovers the mechanism opening the passageway beneath the sub-cellar altar. Also notes the tunnel is “chiseled from beneath” (104). Descent into twilit grotto. Full atavism; the rats lead narrator to Nyarlathotep. He begins eating Edward Norrys; cat begins attacking.

Later – narrator institutionalized at Hanwell: still cognizant of “the rats they can never hear” (108).
such, the fantastic is a perilously evanescent genre; it exists for only so long as the hesitation lasts, and of course few literary texts can maintain this hesitation in their entirety. One exception is Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), a touchstone for Todorov’s theory. Actually, this novella has had quite a remarkable reception history. Prior to 1934, most readers—Lovecraft no less than Henry James himself—interpreted the story as supernatural, and Lovecraft praised its “truly potent air of sinister menace; depicting the hideous influence of two dead and evil servants, Peter Quint and the governess Miss Jessel, over a small boy and girl who had been under their care” (*Annotated* 68). Yet in 1934, Edmund Wilson, a critic markedly hostile to the weird, put forth an influential realist interpretation where the “ghosts,” far from being genuine spooks, are actually psychological manifestations of the narrator’s repressed sexual yearnings and neuroses. For Todorov, the equal likelihood between both Wilson’s thesis and a supernatural explanation makes *The Turn of the Screw* a quintessential text of the fantastic.

Although Todorov’s theory has its limitations, including a paucity of qualifying texts and its exclusion of many works normally considered fantasy (J.R.R. Tolkien counts as “marvelous,” for example), a new wave of theorizing about the fantastic immediately followed in the wake of Todorov’s book, which really was the first of its kind. For my purposes, the book’s main usefulness comes from how it reinserts the category of the reader back into formal criticism. By the 1970s, New Criticism and classical structuralism had, rather infamously, forbidden readers any active role in creating textual meaning. After Todorov, however, readers gained a new generic centrality—at least within mainstream academic criticism, at any rate. This last qualification is important. In *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, of course, Lovecraft had granted readers a vital role in apprehending atmosphere, the sense of “breathless and unexplainable dread” within a text. The true test of
weird fiction, Lovecraft claims, lies in whether or not this atmosphere of dread arises, which happens most often from contact with the supernatural; notably, Lovecraft instinctively disliked horror stories that explained away the horrors by natural means (28). Todorov, incidentally, had read *Supernatural Horror in Literature* but, perhaps unsurprisingly, found little to admire in Lovecraft’s major claims. True to his structuralist heritage, Todorov seeks to contribute to a scientific taxonomy of genres, but he also recognizes how introducing real live flesh-and-blood readers can fundamentally destabilize an object of study. Lovecraft’s error, according to Todorov, lies in permitting his definition of genre to depend upon the “sang-froid of its [individual] reader” rather than on inherent structural qualities (35). As such, Todorov argues that a readerly hesitation can only apply to the text’s *implied* reader, never its actual one.

Yet, regardless of the particular type of reader posited, Todorov’s theory of the fantastic seems especially relevant to “Rats” given the story’s contradictory internal evidence. In particular, a readerly hesitation arguably contributes to the precarious underpinnings of modernity suggested by Lovecraft’s short tale. This precarity accentuates what I call Lovecraft’s *international weird*. Most critics have already recognized how the fear of atavism motivates the horror in “Rats.” Delapore’s ill-fated descent into the bowels of Exham Priory, which ends in a linguistic reversion to ancient and long-dead languages, signals Lovecraft’s quite real worry that evolutionary regress could occur at any moment. In the international weird, though, Lovecraft uses the model of the nation-state—specifically, the histories of England and the United States—to invoke early twentieth-century discourses of amateur anthropology, cultural evolution, and scientific racism. Here, England for Lovecraft represents the Old World, a land replete with horrific religions of prehistoric origin, suppressed (but not eradicated) by scientism and the European Enlightenment. In contrast, America represents the New World, a land free from such dark histories: a fresh
start, a new hope for Walter Delapore in 1610 once he crosses the Atlantic fleeing his dead cultist family. When the narrator reverses his ancestor’s transatlantic crossing in 1923, however, Delapore unwittingly and symbolically rejects a wholly modern country for a nation whose modernity lies only skin-deep. This international weird, I argue, constitutes a core theme of “Rats,” and the story suggests how easily a terrifying atavistic regression could happen despite the veneer of civilization. The onward march of progress, Lovecraft seems to say, is a chimera. All civilizations, always and eventually, will slip backwards into primitivism because all “biological” entities—cultures and families no less than individuals—are subject to decline. Such catastrophic decline certainly befalls the star-headed Old Ones from *At the Mountains of Madness* and the flying polyps in “The Shadow Out of Time,” who follow a path of degeneration first traced by the Delapores. The rise, apogee, decline, and precipitous fall of our narrator’s family is a microcosm for the historical trajectory that inevitably dooms each and every civilization.

A readerly hesitation accentuates a sense of modernity’s precarity. Since such hesitation renders uncertain where, exactly, the boundary between real and unreal might lie, it creates a dizzying sense of teetering on a brink. Science and reason are two of modernity’s favored tools, and, as such, modernity wholly rejects the superstitions of ages prior—in particular, the Dionysian, unreasoning frenzy of religious ecstasy. To promote a naturalistic account of Delapore’s rats, then, is to side with modernity. An insane Delapore, we might say, is a safe Delapore. His affliction is peculiar to him alone—terrible indeed, but isolated. Yet if the rats are real, then modern positivism, much like modern evolution, suffers a fatal flaw. It might be overturned at any moment by forces outside our control. Tellingly, philosophical materialism had led some people to champion aesthetics as a replacement for lost religious faith, but philosophical materialism brings others to seek that which modernity has
otherwise suppressed and denied. For Lovecraft, these regressive few are the spiritual kin of Gilbert de la Poer and Randolph Delapore, whom Lovecraft would have loathed as someone who “went among the negroes and became a voodoo priest” (Lovecraft, “Rats” 93). If the familial rats are real, then the narrator is being dragged against his will into a retrograde spiritualism. He is becoming the unwilling acolyte of Cybele the Magna Mater, a priest for a family cult whose prehistoric origins lie, possibly, with Nyarlathotep. (More on this in a moment.) But the contradictory textual evidence provided by Lovecraft makes readers waver between a narrator who is mad and a narrator who is, horrifically, chosen. This hesitation leaves readers wondering, too, how susceptible modern humankind might be to the narrator’s situation: whether civilization and its discontents drive certain hapless individual people to madness, or whether civilization itself will be pulled down—like the last living heir of the Delapores—by daemonic ancient forces beyond our ken.

That Nyarlathotep founds the narrator’s family cult, however, seems certain, even though Lovecraft’s glancing reference has generally bewildered his story’s readers. Will Murray, for example, confesses himself mystified over the “brief evocation of Nyarlathotep” (27), and Robert M. Price dismisses it as “a mere cast-off mention and nothing more” (2). Yet we know that the family cult long predates Gilbert de la Poer in 1261 AD and even its integration into Cybele worship sometime during the reign of the Caesars. Although the cult’s first known prehistoric temple was built contemporaneously with Stonehenge, approximately four thousand years ago, Delapore wildly guesses that unthinkable events must have occurred on the site one “thousand, or two thousand, or ten thousand years ago” (Lovecraft, “Rats” 105, emphasis added). Given Nyarlathotep’s evident immortality, there is no reason to suppose that he might not have presided directly over this founding. The prose-poem “Nyarlathotep,” granted, lists him as having arisen out of
Egypt only twenty-seven (rather than one hundred) centuries ago, but Nyarlathotep’s attributes frequently shift between Lovecraft’s various tales; “Rats” might well have been an aborted early attempt at an origin story. Even more importantly, though, Sir William Brinton states unequivocally that the tunnel leading into Exham Priory has been chiseled from beneath (104). This requires something—or someone—powerful and dark. The reality of this tunnel is undeniable, and it constitutes further evidence that Delapore’s rats might be real. During his final descent below Exham Priory, we are told that the rats’ eldritch scurrying leads Delapore on “even unto those grinning caverns of earth’s centre where Nyarlathotep ... howls blindly to the piping of two amorphous idiot flute-players” (107). Out of those grinning caverns, it seems, the mad faceless god originally excavated the tunnel leading directly onto the Exham Priory site; and, as Lord of Rats, Nyarlathotep appears to psychically use his small minions to bring back his last living priest.

The Todorovian hesitation in “Rats” adds one more unique attribute to the tale’s core sense of precarity. Although the precariousness of the modern world appears in Lovecraft’s later cosmic fiction, Lovecraft also renders that precarity bleakly certain. There exists an odd comfort in such certainty. Since readers know that humanity is in dire straits, fatalism is as reasonable as madness. In “Rats,” however, our vacillation between natural and supernatural explanations removes fatalism’s bleak comfort. If the rats derive from Delapore’s own disordered imagination, a manifestation of a secret yet wholly personal flaw, we can breathe a sigh of relief. Although our civilization will probably collapse someday, we can let our great-great-grandchildren worry about that. If the rats are real, though, and they are the vehicles for a mad faceless god, then the possibility develops that civilization, right now, is under threat. Collapse will not occur after a centuries-long process of decline. There are forces currently in existence, perhaps
only awaiting release, intent on undermining everything that we know and believe about the modern world. A Sword of Damocles hangs over the head of civilization, but there is no telling when it will strike. In a way, such uncertainty might be as horrific as anything else in Lovecraft’s cosmic fiction—a subtler evocation, perhaps, of atmospheric dread. Lovecraft’s story provides just enough hope that readers, if they wish, can convince themselves that Delapore’s daemon rats are merely phantoms rather than the supernatural conduits that will inevitably bring forth dark faceless Nyarlathotep.

Yet a few words of caution should be offered about this principle of hesitation. Years ago, back when I first read “Rats,” the ontological status of Delapore’s rats struck me as entirely undecidable. Now, somewhat ironically, the physical evidence—the sprung rat traps, the chiseled upward strokes in the tunnel—strongly incline me to a supernatural explanation—although my students, let me add, themselves often continue to hesitate when I teach this story. Still, the Todorovian fantastic relies not on real readers but on implied ones, and the internal evidence remains stubbornly contradictory. The secondary literature, after all, still considers the naturalistic explanation most probable. So the question arises: did Lovecraft deliberately imbue his tale with a hesitation between two equally plausible yet incompatible explanations? Somehow I rather doubt it. For one thing, Lovecraft partly mocks gothic tropes in “Rats” by gleefully doubling down on such tropes. The tale is filled to the brim with narrative clichés such as bloody bones and secret murder. Likewise, Lovecraft also faintly satirizes several standard gothic conventions. There is the tongue-in-cheek reference, for example, to a character who “croaked the hackneyed [phrase] ‘My God!’” when first seeing the main horror (105, emphasis added), and Delapore’s cat is “like the inevitable dog in the ghost story, which always growls before his master sees the sheeted figure” (96). Such elements of parody, mild though they are, suggest a young
author enjoying the pulpishness of his genre more than someone seriously trying to evoke atmospheric dread. But as we saw from the reception history for *The Turn of the Screw*, an author’s original intention need not affect the Todorovian fantastic. The principle of hesitation still applies.

Similarly, the contradictory evidence in “Rats” might simply arise from Lovecraft’s relative nonchalance over staying consistent with known facts. His best-known instance in “Rats,” of course, is that Delapore speaks Gaelic rather than Cymric during his final linguistic descent into atavism. When Robert E. Howard later questioned the language matter in a letter to Lovecraft (incidentally their first correspondence), Lovecraft admitted to thinking that no one would notice. As with anthropology, he jokingly writes, “details don’t count” (Lovecraft, *Selected Letters* 258). Two other noteworthy minor inconsistencies also appear. The first is why, during the dramatic epic of the rats in 1610, the rodent hoard—rather than bursting free from Exham Priory all at once three months later—did not simply escape through various openings in the limestone cliff leading into the desolate valley below. These openings certainly exist; they allow fresh air into the grotto. And, historically, that route had permitted at least one successful escape attempt. The narrator recounts an old story about a “squealing white thing on which Sir John Clave’s horse had trod one night in a lonely field” (Lovecraft, “Rats” 94), and this squealing white creature seems like a quadruped thing who had freed itself, presumably through the limestone cliff, from the de la Poers’ subterranean pens. The second inconsistency has never been previously noticed by Lovecraft critics—namely, why Delapore blames *Federal* troops for burning his Virginian home at Carfax. In 1865, it was actually Confederate troops, not Yankees run amok, who, hoping to cover their retreat on Evacuation Sunday, started the blaze that spiraled out of control and soon enveloped half of Richmond. Either Lovecraft misremembered his history or, just as likely, could not resist the opportunity to link Carfax’s
destruction with the capture of the Confederacy’s capitol, an event that symbolized the downfall of Lovecraft’s beloved Old South.⁷

Still, as before, such inconsistencies have little impact on the Todorovian fantastic. What we have, overall, is a text that permits its reader to view the rats as either figments of Delapore’s deluded ravings, the psychological manifestation of a deeper neurosis, or as genuine supernatural entities who guide the narrator down into a terrible doom. Real readers need not actually hesitate between these alternate explanations; the concept of “implied reader” has always, in truth, depended upon a hypothetical ideal reader, and it remains an open question whether flesh-and-blood readers, except in formal academic criticism, have ever been ideal readers in this sense. For those who accept Todorov’s hesitation principle, however, the principle deepens the thematic precarity intimated by the story, its sense that modern scientism and positivism may—or may not—be the sum total of life in the post-Enlightenment 20th century. As such, “The Rats in the Walls” creates an aesthetic effect absent from Lovecraft’s cosmic fiction. In cosmic horror, atmospheric dread depends on the known inconsequentiality of human existence within the shadow of a vastly indifferent cosmos. Here, though, hesitation adds an important accent on H. P. Lovecraft’s moment within the international weird, not to mention an element rare to Lovecraft—literary subtlety. Although few critics see Lovecraft’s short tale as among his masterpieces, it is nonetheless a much more complex and suggestive story than previously supposed.

Notes
1. The international weird is described in more detail in an essay forthcoming from Gothic Studies (vol. 23, no. 1, March 2021): “Just like Henry James (Except with Cannibalism): The International Weird in H.P. Lovecraft’s ‘The Rats in the Walls.’”
2. In short, Wetzel somewhat dubiously attempts to integrate “Rats” into the Mythos by combining the story with
“Pickman’s Model,” and he concludes that the narrator and his entire family are, in effect, ghoul-changelings.

3. Although Maurice Lévy, intriguingly, approvingly cites Todorov and Eric Rabkin, the earliest two structuralists to study the fantastic, he still prefers a Jungian approach. In contrast, St. Armand, who focuses on horror rather than fantasy, more wholly rejects Todorov. For example, St. Armand lends barely any credence to a supernatural explanation when he writes that the rats are only “perhaps endowed with supernatural power by the forceful catalyst of Delapore’s too-vivid dreams” (24, emphasis mine). Thus, even if the supernatural does somehow exist, St. Armand determinedly surordinates it to real human psychology.

4. Wayne Booth coined “implied reader” in 1961 as a way to mediate New Critical strictures against mixing the subjective reader with an objective text. Needless to say, post-classical approaches to narrative theory, not to mention poststructuralist methodologies, have exploded New Criticism’s distinction between an “inside” and an “outside” to a text, thus—ironically—making Lovecraft’s own heavy reliance on reader response remarkably prescient. Reader response theory has also informed the work of another well-known critic on Lovecraft, Stephen J. Mariconda, although Mariconda employs the more recent version of reader response advanced by Stanley Fish. According to Mariconda, Lovecraft scholars should view the Mythos—given the Mythos’s lack of systematic coherence—as a mutual creation between Lovecraft and the interpretative communities that engage his work, particularly the original readership of Weird Tales.

5. Besides Margaret Murray’s quasi-anthropological—and now discredited—The Witch-Cult in Western Europe (1921), which argued that pagan cults of witches have existed covertly throughout the last two millennia of European civilization, a major source of Lovecraft’s racialized views stems from an American nativism inspired by Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909). According to Brooks E. Hefner, Lombroso’s eugenic epistemology “underscores the ability to read the criminal body as an eminently legible text,” which means that the racial features of minority groups are coded as inherently
criminal (656); as such, pulp “writers like Lovecraft transformed their own nativist sentiments into phantasmagoric nightmares” (657). In “Rats,” this tendency in Lovecraft’s work is combined with the notion of evolutionary regression—i.e., atavism.

6. Tellingly, while the gothic past of New England appears in two tales written nearly simultaneously with “Rats,” “The Unnamable” and “The Festival,” such gothic horrors are absent from Delapore’s New England. In fact, I have argued that all three stories, written in rapid succession, form something of an unofficial witch-cult trilogy. Their main inspiration comes from a book that Lovecraft had read just one year previously, Margaret Murray’s The Witch-Cult in Western Europe. In “Rats,” though, Lovecraft chooses to instead situate Walter Delapore into an idealized Old South, and he moves the family north only after New England has been sufficiently infused by a Gilded Age bourgeois materi-alism. This allows Lovecraft to retain the image of America as a fresh new world free from lingering suspicions of witchcraft.

7. The Confederacy lost Richmond exactly one week before General Robert E. Lee formally surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse. Actually, Federal troops threatened Richmond twice, once in 1865, another time in late spring 1862 during General George B. McClellan’s failed Peninsula Campaign. The later date, though, is more tempting given how it resonates with the rise and fall of the Delapore family fortunes in America.

Works Cited


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