Horror, History and You
A Reader-Response Analysis of the Function of History in Two Works of H.P. Lovecraft and Its Relevance for an EFL Classroom

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Abstract

In this essay, reader-response theory is used to explore the application of history in "The Rats in the Walls" and "At the Mountains of Madness" by H.P. Lovecraft. Utilizing the concepts of the informed reader and temporal reading, this essay concludes that Lovecraft used history in two distinct ways. Firstly, history is used as a means to build immersion, ambience, and explore the individual's place in history by drawing upon English cultural layers. Secondly, it functions to reflect on human history in relation to human existence and geological history by turning the history of Earth into the history of an alien species.

Furthermore, this essay concludes that Lovecraft and history could be valuable assets to an EFL classroom by relating the findings to theory on reader-response in education. Firstly, it enables students to reflect on social issues in the past and the present by looking at Lovecraft's historical settings, his antiquated prose and the casual racism he exhibits in his texts. Secondly, Lovecraft's apparent obsession with his historical identity and ancestry provides an opening for the students to contemplate their own sense of identity as it relates to culture and history. The underlying idea being that the best way to reveal Lovecraft's use of history is to consider what the individual reader brings to the reading experience.

Keywords

Lovecraft
Reader-response theory
Cultural History
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The Rats in the Walls
At the Mountains of Madness

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1 Introduction

Few subjects shaped the self-perception of Howard Phillips Lovecraft [1890-1937] like history. From an early age the seminal horror writer cultivated an obsession with his own descent from unmixed English gentry and the cultural landscape and architecture of colonial Rhode Island. Consequently, his historical obsessions filtered into his writing, where it mingled with his musings on cosmic existentialism, his outspoken racism and his fascination with astronomy and natural science, in order to produce dense backgrounds to his stories. Thus, the coupling of a meticulously detailed setting with many-eyed, frequently tentacled, cosmic entities made for some of the most textured and influential horror stories in English literature.

Thus, The elements and usage of history within the stories of H.P. Lovecraft are what this essay aims to explore. The stories to be examined in this regard are two of Lovecraft's most famous works: "The Rats in the Walls" (shorthand "Rats") and "At the Mountains of Madness" (shorthand "Mountains"). Aside from their infamy, the two stories represent two distinct modes of Lovecraft's writing. Therefore, comparing his use of history in both of them should produce interesting results. More specifically, the main focus will be on elements of cultural history. The reason for this is that the variety of facets that are included beneath the umbrella of cultural history, such as folklore, historical traditions and historical architecture, were some of the most keen interests of H.P. Lovecraft himself. As such, these aspects of cultural history left an enormous impact on his work and are the most prevalent forms of history therein.

This examination and exploration will be accomplished by utilizing reader-response theory, primarily Stanley Fish's idea of the informed reader. By using a theoretical

1 "Rats" being traditional gothic horror and "Mountains" being an experiment with science fiction.
reader who is able to detect the facets of history and examine how it is experienced, the
effects of history within Lovecraft can be revealed. The reason for this choice of
approach is twofold. Firstly, history in Lovecraft's fiction should be examined as a way
to enhance the reading for the reader. This is due to the fact that Lovecraft did not write
historical fiction as such, but rather used history as a tool to achieve other literary
effects. Therefore, consulting the response of a reader should be the optimal way to
understand this effect of history on the reading experience. Secondly, the field of theory
has been chosen for its potential to bridge the gap between Lovecraft, history and the
21st century EFL classroom. With the application of a student reader to contrast with
the informed one, the effects of history and Lovecraft in a classroom context can be
explored. Given the importance of having the students influencing their own education
(Skolverket, "Curriculum" 11), consulting the students' responses to what they are
reading should be a useful tool for the teacher to improve the teaching experience.

The merit of Lovecraft studies as a part of studies of genre fiction is substantial. His 65
stories, as well as a considerable amount of ghost writings and collaborations, has
garnered much attention not only from fans of horror but also from fellow writers and
academics. In the documentary Lovecraft: Fear of the Unknown his work is praised and
admired by influential horror writers in many fields of literature. With a list of
interviewees featuring names such as Neil Gaiman, Guillermo del Toro and John
Carpenter, the film features representation from both films, novels and comic books.
Thus, it can be concluded that Lovecraft's influence on the genre over the second half of
the 20th century and onward should be considered substantial. Alternatively, in
Gaiman's own words, "H.P. Lovecraft built the stage on which most of the last century's
horror fiction was performed" (Lovecraft, "Eldritch Tales" 1).
On the academic front, the true flag bearer of Lovecraftian scholarship is likely Sunand Tryambak Joshi (commonly referred to as S.T. Joshi). The greatness of Joshi’s work lies mostly in biography, and through his gargantuan efforts the world has been made privy to a variety of portraits, in many nuances, of the man behind the tentacles. Furthermore, Joshi’s biographies stand beyond comparison in offering an insight into Lovecraft’s psyche. Pertaining to this essay, Joshi’s most exhaustive biography, the two-volumed *I Am Providence: The Life and Times of H.P. Lovecraft* (henceforth *Providence* 1 and 2), will be used as a resource on Lovecraft’s working life, his inspirations and obsessions with, among other things, history.

Thus, ingrained into future generations of horror enthusiasts and researched in academia, Lovecraft's reach has extended beyond the realms of narrative fiction to influence such a diverse set of things as role-playing games, religions and video games. His most famous fictional deity, the octopus-headed Cthulhu, is ingrained in the cultural consciousness enough to have made an appearance, although jokingly, in the sphere of politics. However, the point of this essay is not to be a comprehensive study of all of Lovecraft's work, nor to deliver a detailed portrait of the author. Rather, it is the intention of this text to look at the history at play in two of Lovecraft's stories through the lens of the informed reader. Hopefully, it shall amount to establishing a meaningful connection between Lovecraft, the history he chose to portray and the modern reader.

Employing an informed reading, as well as the method of the temporal reading experience, this essay means to demonstrate two historical modes employed by Lovecraft in his fiction writing. The first one, shown in "Rats," is one where history is intrinsically connected to ancestry and cultural layers. It is a mode whereby Lovecraft uses historical signifiers to gradually guide the reader away from the comfortable contemporary world towards a nameless past, ancient and foreign enough to lack any
familiar cultural signifiers at all. The second mode of history, exhibited in "Mountains," is one where Lovecraft constructs a pseudo-history for an alien species. Tying the fabricated history to geological events and deep time, Lovecraft then utilizes it to anthropomorphize the history of planet Earth itself, where human history is reduced to an insignificant footnote. The human history and the alien history are two distinct ways in which Lovecraft employs the concept of history within his stories. One is for the contextualizing the existence of the individual person, while the other is for contextualizing the existence of the human race.

Thenceforth, I will present a didactic reflection relating to the findings in the analysis. Based on a reader-response approach to didactics, I will relate Lovecraft and history to five reader-response perspectives on teaching literature: textual, experiential, psychological, social and cultural. Here the central question will be how the reader might experience the historical elements of Lovecraft in the context of an EFL classroom through these perspectives. It is the intention of this essay to demonstrate how the history within Lovecraft can be used to foster discussions on empathy with the alien and strange. Furthermore, this essay will conclude that Lovecraft's own place in history can be used to adress differences between contemporary society and early 20th century America with regards to issues of race and gender. Both of these topics are an important part of the current Swedish curriculum ("Curriculum" 10, 12).

Additionally, the intersection between Lovecraft and history can provide an excellent gateway to interlock the study of English literature with other subjects in the Swedish school system. For instance, the architecture and cultural layers in "Rats" can interlink with studies of cultural history in the subject of History, in particular the course History 2b, which is devoted to cultural history (Skolverket, "History" 15). Meanwhile, the concepts of geological time and human time in "Mountains" can bridge into ecological
discussions on the relationship between humans and the planet we live on. This discussion is a part of both the Swedish Curriculum (6) and the course of Biology 1 (Skolverket, "Biology" 3). The reader-response approach should provide an excellent avenue for the students to voice responses that will generate discussions on these topics.

In summary, the aim of this essay is to explore two different modes of history in two seminal works of H.P. Lovecraft via the lens of the informed reader and the temporal reading experience. In this regard, the goal is to demonstrate the depth and variety of form and function that history plays within the stories themselves. Furthermore, the essay purports to give reflections on the concerns that one should have before bringing Lovecraft into an EFL classroom, but also demonstrate its considerable potential as a vehicle to address history via the mode of literature. Namely, the individual student's relationship to history and the student's understanding of other people's relationship to history.
2 Theory and Method

The theoretical foundation for this essay is rooted in the concepts outlined by reader-response theory. The reason for this choice is the following: In order to explore the intersection between Lovecraft, history and didactics, a fruitful approach would be to explore how those elements effect the reading experience. Furthermore, the perspective of the informed reader should be helpful in this endeavour. This is due to the fact that the informed reader has the knowledge and the competence to detect the historical details in Lovecraft and use them to enrich his/her experience. Moreover, the informed reader offers a useful point of comparison to a theoretical student reader. This in turn will allow for a fruitful reflection on the didactic merit of Lovecraft's use of history.

Reader-response stresses the importance of the encounter between a reader and a text in order for a piece of literature to have meaning. That is to say, any intention of, say, the author is irrelevant if a reader does not detect that meaning in the text. Instead, the reader's interpretation of the text has the authority over its meaning. In general, reader-response saw its inception in the 1960s in the structuralist Anglo-American response to New Criticism. Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* can be regarded as a defining early work of reader-response thinking, by way of spending its first half situating itself against structuralist predecessors and its second half by outlining facets of the theoretical reader's relationship to literature. Thus, surfing on the wave of structuralism, reader-response theory became a staple school of American literary criticism (Freund 69-70).

Consequently, the response to reader-response theory has been enormous and divided since the waning of structuralism and the rise of post-structuralist ideas on literary criticism. In "The Ideal Reader: A Critical Fiction" Robert DeMaria jr. provides a broad
review of the notions of the reader as have been held by critics throughout history. Although he presents some reservation towards notions of a constructed reader, DeMaria concludes that, from Johnson's blank slate to the elitist pluralism of Dryden, "the sheer volume of material devoted to analyzing readers and demonstrating their value argues their essential formal importance in the total language of criticism" (DeMaria 473).

This article in turn was met with criticism from Robert Markley, who contended that DeMaria's conclusions were symptomatic of "the nature and limitations of a critical approach that concentrates on the responses and competences of 'the' reader". Markley deconstructs the notions of theorized readers by positing that beneath the pretentions "each reader, critic, and author tends to create consciously or not 'the' reader in his or her own image" (Markley 147). Markley's point is, of course, a valid one. It ought to be the consideration of any critic utilizing a theoretical reader where his/her notions of the reader come from in the first place. If all a critic is doing is creating a straw man built to be a reflection of him/herself, then it has no merit or importance or weight to whatever point the critic wishes to make in the first place.

However, that is not to say that this danger should dissuade or discourage the use of reader and response in the field of literary criticism. Rather, it should encourage introspection, critical thought and care within the critic. In turn, the introspection should be an asset to assist in identifying when a distortion of the reader's identity has occurred. Self-awareness on the part of the critic should be the key to understand when the theoretical reader is a useful representation of a reading experience.

More concretely, I will bear this warning in mind, both in my analysis of Lovecraft and my didactic contemplations: Neither the informed, nor the readers as students in an EFL classroom, should be a pale reflection of me. Rather, it should fall to me to construct
these readers to be more valuable to realistic reflection. My theoretical reader should be able to assume understandings and hold considerations that I may not have. Additionally, my reader as a student should be a reflection of contemporary multicultural classroom environments and regardless of how informed I may perceive myself, the informed reader will always possess a catalogue of knowledge on a different range of topics than I do.

The parts of reader-response theory that will be of importance for this thesis are two ideas outlined by Stanley Fish in his book *Is there a Text in this Class?:* the concept of the informed reader and the method of the temporal reading experience. Briefly put, the concept of the informed reader is the notion that a person reading a text can understand all references and connotations that the author loaded into the text (Fish 48).

Conversely, the temporal reading experience involves an examination of the function of individual words or phrases as it pertains to the reader's response (Fish 27). Both of these ideas are adapted from concepts originally outlined by Wolfgang Iser. Applying these two concepts will form the bulk of the analysis of "Rats" as well as "Mountains."

2.1 The Informed Reader and the Temporal Reading Experience

Fish defines the informed reader as a theoretical construct that has a set of criteria. These criteria are then for the critic to adhere to when using the informed reader as a means of analyzing a text. The criteria are the following:

The informed reader is someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built; (2) is in full position of "the semantic knowledge that a mature... listener brings to his task of comprehension," including the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and a comprehender) of lexical sets, collocation probabilities,
idioms, professional and other dialects, and so on; and (3) has *literary* competence. That is, he is sufficiently experienced as a reader to have internalized the properties of literary discourses, including everything from the most local of devices (figures of speech, and so on) to whole genres. (Fish 48)

To summarize, Fish's construction of a reader is required to not only comprehend the language in both its formal and vernacular modes (as well as written and spoken), but is also required to possess a broad catalogue of knowledge about smaller facets of the language within which the piece of literature has been produced. As a final trial the informed reader is equally aware of the position of the language of literature within the language of communication. Consequently, the informed reader has a vast understanding of literary conventions and connotations in order to build his/her understanding of a piece of literature. In an example cited by Fish, a reader will enjoy Milton's *Paradise Lost* less, should he/she not share Milton's ardent protestant disposition (Fish 50).

Thus, Fish envisions a reader whose literary competence, originally a concept outlined by reader-response theorist Jonathan Culler (132), is theoretically endless. In practice, the limit of the informed reader's literary competence is only the literary competence of the critic applying the theory. An informed reader should via his/her considerable literary competence generate a response that speaks of the various facets that history brings to the experience of reading Lovecraft.

Moving on, Fish also creates a close reading-method for literary analysis referred to as a temporal reading experience. He outlines this method as "the rigorous and disinterested asking of the question, what does this word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, novel, play, poem, *do?*" (Fish 26-27). That is to say, rather than the approach of asking for a
reader's response once the entirety of a text has been digested and comprehended, Fish prefers to ask the question after every single word or phrase. How does a reader's response fluctuate with the information given over the course of a sentence, or a paragraph? Given this minute and exhaustive outlook on reader-response it should perhaps not be surprising that the demands Fish places on a reader to earn the title of "informed" are quite steep. Nevertheless, it is a method apt for examining detailed elements of a text.

The reason for this choice of theory is twofold. Firstly, Lovecraft packed his texts with no small degree of elements rooted in history: architecture, pseudo-historical chronologies, genealogy, and others. An informed reader, who is familiar with the same subjects, offers a response that would illuminate these facets of the text and what they mean for the reading experience in the greatest detail. Secondly, the temporal experience of reading, as brought forward by Fish, offers a greater opportunity to examine the effects of Lovecraft's implementation of these subjects. By exploring the experience of the reader discovering Lovecraft's historical world building, the functions of that world building should become clearer.

2.2 Reader-Response and Teaching

In order to open up a dialogue between reader-response didactics and the concept of the informed reader, it is important to ask the following question: How does the relationship between the critic and the informed reader differ between the relationship between a teacher and the theoretical student reader? In summary, the differences lie in the literary competence of the two theoretical readers and their usefulness for the teacher or critic. Regarding the differences between the readers, it is to do with their respective literary competences. An informed reader is assumed to have the highest amount of literary competence the critic can imagine, while the theoretical student reader has a literary
competence representative of the student body of the Swedish school system. Regarding their application, the critic would regard the informed reader as a means to highlight experiential facets of a text, such as the usage of history in Lovecraft. The teacher, on the other hand, would consider the theoretical student reader as a tool for helping develop literary and linguistic competences for actual students of English, via didactic considerations. These disparities will be further addressed as they become relevant in the didactic analysis.

Under what circumstances would one utilize the writings of H.P. Lovecraft when teaching within the Swedish school system? The obvious answer should be the subject of English. Even though Lovecraft's themes pertaining to history, science, etc. offer a potential for work across different subjects, his writing presents a challenge for EFL learners. Therefore, the texts should be taught in English but potentially crossing over into different subjects.

To specify the appropriate place for Lovecraft within the subject of English, one should turn to the English syllabus. In the Swedish upper secondary school system, English education is divided into three courses: English 5, English 6, and English 7. All of these courses contain suggestions to use literature as part of the course's core content. However, it is my belief that the course best suited for Lovecraft's work is English 7, roughly equivalent to proficiency level B2.2 in the CEFR (Skolverket, "Om ämnet Engelska" 5), because it is in English 7 that it is first suggested that students be exposed to both contemporary as well as older literature (Skolverket, "English" 11). Therefore, Lovecraft's style, which was considered archaic even by early 20th century standards, should be a useful example of older literature, as well as a writer deliberately holding on to an older form of language already considered outdated by many of his own contemporaries.
In *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories* Richard Beach outlines five theoretical approaches to reader-response in a didactic context. The first one is textual, where the most important aspect has to do with the reader's knowledge of context, exemplified by Beach's and a student's different readings of the same poem based on differing knowledge of poetic conventions (Beach 18). More specifically, Beach describes four main categories for textually bound theories of knowledge: Narrative conventions, genre conventions, rhetorical theory, and semiotics. The thrust of the argument is that, according to textual reader-response theory, the reader possessing knowledge of different kinds of convention causes different responses from the reader.

The second theory brought forward is the experiential one. Primarily referring to Louise Rosenblatt, Beach describes experiential theory as a sharp reaction to the tradition of teaching literature instruction "on inferring 'correct answers'" (Beach 50). Following this, Beach lists five different experiential responses to a piece of literature. These are *engaging* (emotional investment in a story), *constructing* (the reader building the storyworld), *imaging* (generating visual images), *connecting* (the reader relating its own set of experiences to the text) and *evaluating/reflecting* (judging one's own overarching experience with the text) (Beach 52).

The third theory of response is to do with psychology. Put plainly, the theory posits that the reader's response is partially related to the reader's own psychological condition and development, as well as cognitive capabilities (Beach 71). A concrete way of describing this line of theory is by the reader's understanding of metaphors by cognitively connecting them to metaphors the reader is presumed to already be aware of. To illustrate this, Beach notes that "readers may draw on the conceptual metaphor of 'life as a journey' to understand a character's utterance, 'I'm getting nowhere'" (Beach 93).
The fourth theory of response concerns social factors and elements, the central thesis being that much of the way a reader formulates and expresses a response to a piece of literature is to do with the social contexts and connotations present when those responses are made (Beach 103). Thereafter, Beach relates these theories to Fish's notion of interpretive communities, noting that "it is often the case that certain ways of responding are privileged in certain classrooms, schools, or even countries" (Beach 108). This relates to what Borscheim-Black describes as "reading with the text" (124). This is examplified by students' being motivated to read *Of Mice and Men* because of its author's acclaim, the work's popularity and its established precense in the literary canon (Borscheim-Black 125).

The fifth and final branch of response theory covered in the book is cultural theory. In short, it resembles the social aspect of reader-response but on a larger scale. Beach states that "students' responses reflect and display negotiated membership in a number of different social groups" (Beach 133). To exemplify this, he refers to a study of two broad cultural categories of students where their cultural belonging, middle-class and working-class, had a meaningful impact on their responses to texts (133).

The multicultural and multiethnic angle is also demanding of attention just as much in Swedish schools in the present day of 2018 as it was in the American school system of 1972, if not more. It calls for caution when introducing a writer so heavily steeped in Anglo-American culture, as well as with a severe streak of racism, to the inherently pluralistic and ethnically diverse student body of modern day education. Furthermore, given Lovecraft's relation to history, an equally pertinent concern is that a student is left with the impression that their history is insignificant, overlooked, or in some cases wrongfully appropriated. How does, for instance, a student from Saudi-Arabia respond to the concept of "the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred" as an entity of cultural appropriation
in Lovecraft's work? Students with different dispositions on the subject could respond with indifference, anger, amusement or indignation. Naturally, any of these would be correct, which would in turn magnify the importance of a teacher clarifying the relevant social and historical contexts of Lovecraft's writing, as prescribed by Borscheim-Black (128). Moreover, it stresses the value of the response of the reader to unveil these concerns.

Another topic where the cultural context of modern students of English impact the experience of Lovecraft and history are notions of genre. For example, the modern student of English would likely have a certain knowledge of genre conventions surrounding horror and science fiction. However, these conventions have probably changed since they were used by Lovecraft in the 1920s and 30s. Thus, the student reader possesses a literary competence that recontextualizes the genre conventions in Lovecraft's work with the genre fiction that came about after the author's death.

These five modes of looking at reader-response will form the basic structure of the didactic reflection in this essay. By examining Lovecraft and history in the Swedish upper secondary school via these five lenses of reader-response the intent is to achieve as holistic of a view as possible over its applications and pitfalls.

2.3 Theory on Lovecraft and Cultural History

Lovecraft's usage of history in general, and cultural history in particular, is the subject matter of the essay titled "A Last Defense against the Dark: Folklore, Horror, and the Uses of Tradition in the Works of H. P. Lovecraft" by Timothy H. Evans. The conceit of the essay is that horror literature, and the fears portrayed therein, is largely founded "upon feelings of insecurity brought about by cultural change" (Evans 100). However,
most of the essay itself is devoted to chronicling Lovecraft’s personal relationship to folklore, tradition and architecture by reviewing his antiquarian travels.

Evans describes how Lovecraft gathered his notes on cultural history in travelogues that would eventually fuel ideas for his writing. Initially, these journeys were limited to New England in general, and Providence in particular, but later would extend to slightly more far-flung places, namely Charleston and Quebec City. Moving on, Evans describes Lovecraft’s relationship to heritage tourism, the Colonial Revival Movement, and historic preservation as a concept, before finally diving into greater detail on how these elements play out in Lovecraft’s work.

Of particular interest to this essay is Evans’ description of cultural history in "The Rats in the Walls.” He presents these textual elements as a collection of assorted information regarding the narrator's familial past and his ancestral, cultural context. Mostly, this information is amassed as a collection of invented folklore and pseudohistory. In Evans’ words this "body of 'folklore' provides both ambience and clues for the reader about what is to come" (Evans 120). On a more general note, Evans concludes that an important foundation for the conception of the story is Lovecraft's own love and fascination with older times and his simultaneous interest in cultural evolution, a set of theories that condemned the antiquated as "obsolete", as well as noting it to be "the culmination of [Lovecraft's] early, more conventional fiction" (121).

Tangentially related to Lovecraft and history is Freud's theory of the uncanny. The uncanny, or that which causes anxiety and fear, is divided by Freud into two parts. One of these is to do with history that invokes the uncanny and the other is to do with art and architecture that invokes the uncanny (Svenaeus 240). This essay will demonstrate Lovecraft's relationship to the uncanny in architecture and history features in "Rats" as well as "Mountains."
Furthermore, this essay will make limited use of the model of reader presented by Stephen Mariconda in his article "Toward a Reader-Response Approach to the Lovecraft Mythos." Mariconda's proposed construction of the theoretical Lovecraft reader is based on those who read Lovecraft's stories upon their original publication. The reason for this is that these readers experienced Lovecraft's Mythos for the first time, without coming into contact with it beforehand (Mariconda 61). This sets Mariconda's Lovecraft reader apart from both the informed reader, as well as the theoretical student reader. Mariconda's ideas will be used to analyze the temporal reading experience in "Mountains."

2.4 Summary of Method and Application of Theory

In this essay, I firstly aim to take the stance of an informed reader, unveiling the elements of history in "The Rats in the Walls" and "At the Mountains of Madness." Secondly, I shall employ a close reading on chosen pieces of the texts to illuminate how the reader temporally experiences these elements. Overall, it is my belief that reader-response theory is a valuable way of examining Lovecraft and history because history within a piece of fiction only becomes valuable when a reader uses it to enrich the experience of reading.

Finally, I intend to explore this relationship in a didactic reflection that relates my findings with plausible situations in modern day Swedish education. This will be done by applying the five lenses of reader-response theory outlined by Beach to the teaching of Lovecraft in order to highlight the potential strengths and weaknesses of bringing Lovecraft to the EFL classroom in the first place. Thus, the intent behind the didactic reflection is to find points of applicability and inapplicability within the intersection of Lovecraft, history and the discipline of teaching English as they pertain to the Swedish upper secondary school system in the early 21st century.
3 Textual Analysis of "Mountains" and "Rats"

3.1 "The Rats In the Walls," History and Reader-response

"The Rats in the Walls" is one of the earlier works by H.P. Lovecraft. Originally published for *Weird Tales* in 1924, the short story chronicles the misadventure of a Virginian man named Delapore uncovering the dark past of his English heritage. The mystery is unveiled by the narrator exploring his family estate, Exham Priory, which falls into his lap in the wake of World War I. The sound of rats scurrying within the Priory walls prompts the narrator, as well as his companions, to continually delve down the levels of the ancient structure to unveil its secrets. After discovering a secret passageway underneath an altar in the Romanesque cellar, the story comes to a terrifying climax where it is revealed that the narrator's ancestors practiced cannibalism, as well as breeding humans into semi-animalistic quadrupeds. The scene causes the narrator to fly into a fit of madness in which he murders and eats one of his companions. The ordeal concludes with the narrator and a surviving companion locked up in a mental hospital.

What should be noted about "Rats" is its gradual descent backwards in time. The text begins with "on July 16, 1923, I moved into Exham Priory" (Lovecraft, "Rats" 90), which immediately situates the narrative in time and place. Once the back-story of our narrator and his ancestry has been presented, and the narrator has been placed in his new home, the titular rats in the walls make their first appearance. The rodents end up functioning as morbid spirit guides, leading the narrator from his chambers at the top level of the priory, down into the cellar. Eventually, the excursions of the narrator lead him, along with a group of friends, down a hidden passage into the unknown depths below.
However, the narrator's descent is not merely physical. Implicitly, the narrator's study, located in a tower, is connected to the present year of 1923. The rats then guide him down to the ground level of the priory, the level of the Elizabethan family estate as well as the Anglo-Saxon priory. Unfortunately, the rats elude the narrator again, as their noise seems to emanate from the cellar crypt below. Naturally, the narrator pursues the sound and the cellar's architecture betrays its historical origins. Of its fashioning the narrator remarks that "this vault was built by Roman hands. Every low arch and massive pillar was Roman—not the debased Romanesque of the bungling Saxons, but the severe and harmonious classicism of the age of the Caesars" ("Rats" 98). Aside from a brief assumption that the Roman architecture was preceded by a prehistoric and druidic site of ceremony, the next step in the descent takes the narrator from Roman architecture to the horrifying grotto that lies beneath.

Thus, a picture is painted where the narrator moves through familiar cultural layers. With the narrator's descent, the sense of familiarity experienced by the modern reader with the evoked time period decreases and the uncertainty of what to expect increases. The finalizing of the journey is the step into the underground grotto, with architecture belonging to no part of known human history whatsoever. In essence, Lovecraft has guided his reader, step by step, away from their zone of comfort by way of historical connotations before submitting them to the true horror lurking beneath the Priory. This experience can only fully be appreciated by an informed reader who recognizes the trappings of these cultural layers. A reader who lacks the knowledge to contextualize the periods in relation to one another, the descent of the narrator will be personal, physical, or psychological, but not historical.

Joshi writes of "Rats" that it both succeeds in being Lovecraft's most historical story as well as a deeply contemporary one (Providence 1457). A man recovering from the
crippling of his son in World War I juxtaposed with the exploration of an ancient priory supports the notion of Lovecraft's discordant relationship between past and present as brought forth by Evans (121). Within the text itself, these tensions primarily manifest through the narrator's relationship with his ancestry. The narrator is lured towards the secrets of his genealogical past, only to discover it being not only antiquated, but altogether foreign to his own sensibility. It should not be regarded as improbable that his obsession with heritage generated in Lovecraft a fear that he too could uncover something hideously foreign in his ancestry. This has some support in the Freudian concept of the uncanny anxiety, where a danger comes from "a 'place' we do not know in ourselves" (Svenaeus 250).

Furthermore, Joshi notes that while the English setting seems appropriate for someone of Lovecraft's Anglophile persuasions, including an affinity for English history, he has made a number of glaring errors in his storyworld construction. Joshi is more specifically baffled by the fictional town of "Anchester," concluding that while it might simply be an alteration of Ancaster or Alchester neither of these towns could be the actual basis for the town. The error in question originates from the line "Anchester had been the camp of the third Augustan legion, as many remains attest" ("Rats" 92). In actual fact "neither Alchester or Ancaster were the sites of legionary fortresses in Roman Britain; what is more, the Third Augustan Legion was never in England at all" (Providence 1459). On the other hand, the name of the town may never have been inspired by a real place name at all, but rather lifted from other literature. This explanation is favoured by Walker, who points both towards the works of Richard Austin Freeman in particular, and 19th century fiction in general, as containing characters and places named Anchester (Walker).
Regardless of which of these explanations is the more important to the setting of "Rats," it is perhaps not particularly important. Rather, what is important is not in Anchester’s name, but its location. Lovecraft himself stated the location to be in southern England (Walker). As such, his inaccuracy with regards historical detail, while uncharacteristic, means little in comparison to his will to explore the heritage of his own unmixed English ancestry, half-imagined though it might have been (Providence I 3-5). Thus, written into "Rats" is Lovecraft's own search for a historical identity. He uses constructed folklore and pseudo-history, a staple of the gothic horror genre (Killeen 27), to explore his own grappling with ancestry and his place in history.

"Rats" thus becomes a fanciful exploration of the fear of what one might find in one's own past if one digs too greedily and too deeply. For an informed reader, the harrowing experience should ideally lead to similar contemplations regarding his/her own positions in other layers of cultural history. Therefore, the story is, as Joshi and Evans agree, a magnum opus of Lovecraft's first and youngest obsession with history, ancestry and gothic literature.

Applying Fish's method of close readings, I aim to explore the function of Exham Priory and its effect on the reading experience. The identity of Exham Priory fluctuates greatly with utterances in the text. It is mentioned by name twelve times in the story. The first five of these utterances are situated within the first third of the text, where the identity and back-story of the place is formed. The first mention is in the opening sentence: "On July 16, 1923, I moved into Exham Priory" ("Rats" 90). Immediately, the place is connected to the identity of the narrator, although the precise nature of this relationship remains unknown. An informed reader would likely know what a priory is, and might be puzzled as to why a person living in the 1920s would move there.
The second utterance, opening the third paragraph, relates that "Exham Priory had remained unattended..." ("Rats" 90). In the interim it was uncovered that the building was home to the narrator's ancestors and has been the subject of extensive restoration. Therefore, the second utterance serves as an explanation and contextualization for the aforementioned restoration, as the reader is familiarized with the building. Additionally, it is revealed that the narrator's ancestors were barons. Consequently, an informed reader can draw upon his/her knowledge about the status, duties and responsibilities expected of a baron to understand the full range of implications carried forth by tragedy that befell the narrator's ancestors. An informed reader would recognize the problem of a king's representative being murdered alongside the rest of his family by his own son, before the son vacates the country. The baron's responsibility and fealty being broken can be seen as a severe fall from grace in the context of a pre-modern society.

Additionally, the baron, being the centre of local power structures, suddenly disappearing without any heirs leads to destabilization in local society until the power vacuum is filled.

The third utterance comes in the middle of the fourth paragraph: "And this week workmen have blown up Exham Priory" ("Rats" 91). The phrase itself functions to return the reader to the present after the exploration of the Priory's past. Meanwhile, the narrator has informed the reader of the building's architectural trappings, including gothic towers, a Saxon or Romanesque substructure, Druidic and Cymric remains. Therefore, the informed reader can detect a wide range of cultural connotations in order to comprehend the precise nature of Exham Priory.

The fourth utterance comes at the end of the sixth paragraph: "Had I suspected their [the mysteries which evidently lurked far back in my family tree] nature, how gladly I would have left Exham Priory to its moss, bats, and cobwebs!" ("Rats" 91). This is the first
instant of the text when the narrator divulges that something about his staying at Exham Priory has gone horribly wrong, giving the reader's experience of Exham Priory a more sinister nature.

Furthermore, there is once again the functionality of the phrase tying the reader back to the plot at hand after presenting a piece of back-story. However, this time the back-story has been that of the narrator and his family since his ancestor fled England and moved to Virginia. More specifically, the text deals with the experiences of the American Civil War as it was experienced by the narrator, his father, and grandfather. References are made to the burning of Carfax and the defence of Richmond ("Rats" 91). An informed reader would thus understand the cultural and political significance these events had for a lot of people in the old Confederate South. Thus, Lovecraft places his narrator around some of the most defining moments of American history, tying back to his own sense of pure Anglo-American descent.

The fifth mention of the Priory comes at the beginning of the eighth paragraph, simply reading: "I bought Exham Priory in 1918" ("Rats" 92). This statement efficiently catches the reader back up to the present time of 1923 and the reparations on the Priory. Preceding this, the narrator explains how his interest in the Priory was ignited by his son's time as an aviation officer stationed in England during World War I. His son uncovered Exham Priory's ancestral connection to the narrator before returning to the United States as a "maimed invalid" ("Rats" 92).

Thus, the identity of Exham Priory is established and elaborated upon over the opening paragraphs of "Rats." For an informed reader, this opening weaves a rich tapestry of historical allusions that situate the narrator, his ancestors, and Exham Priory, within the context of American and English history. The identity of Exham Priory has developed
into a microcosm of the different layers of English cultural history, as well as a site
where something ominous has been implied to dwell.

3.2 "At the Mountains of Madness," History and Reader-response

"At the Mountains of Madness" was originally written and conceived of in 1931 (Joshi,
*Providence* 2 781). It concerns itself with a Doctor at Miskatonic University and his
unfortunate expedition to Antarctica. Once arrived at the expedition outpost, the
narrator and his team unearth a peculiar fossil that seems to at once be of highly
developed and intelligent life, but also dated to be of Cambrian or possibly even Pre-
Cambrian origin. These discoveries are expanded upon when members of the expedition
unearth a cavern in the mountains, filled with both conventional fossils of fishes and
dinosaurs as well as evidence that the cavern showed "a remarkable and unique degree
of continuity between the life of over 300 million years ago and that of only thirty
million years ago" (Lovecraft, "Mountains" 435). The forward expedition relays this
information to the narrator by way of telegraph.

Eventually, the forward expedition discovers a whole fossil of the pre-Cambrian
creature. It reminds the researchers of the Elder Thing, a fictional race of
extraterrestrials in the Lovecraft Mythos. However, when the narrator takes a party with
him to reconvene with the forward expedition he finds their camp lying empty. As the
expedition presses on by plane towards the titular mountains, it is revealed that beyond
them lies an entire city, enormous in size and impossibly old. Upon exploring the alien
ruins the narrator and company find murals depicting the history of the Antarctic super
city's curious inhabitants. Afterwards, the narrator delves deeper into the city's tunnel
systems until eventually encountering the most horrendous of the alien creatures: a
shoggoth, an unshapely mass of artificial life created by the Elder Things. Following
this discovery, the narrator and what remains of his crew hurriedly vacate the premises
and warn the world to never venture to the great city on the other side of the mountains of madness.

History is integrated differently in "Mountains" compared to "Rats." Rather than engrossing his reader in the English cultural layers, Lovecraft employs his knowledge of history to create a new, entirely fictional, set of cultural layers for a race of prehistoric aliens. Effectively, the result is a hybrid consisting partly of human-like history and the geological conceptions of history and deep time. This is done primarily by providing the reader a history lesson about the Elder Things.

When the first sign of an unknown life form is discovered by Professor Lake, he notes that "it was of so vastly ancient a date—Cambrian if not actually pre-Cambrian—as to preclude the probable existence not only of all highly evolved life" ("Mountains" 430). This serves as the first hint towards the age of the creatures in question, as well as establishing the geological terminology that is used throughout the narrative. This effect is enhanced by Lovecraft continually sprinkling names for other geological periods into the text, such as Silurian, Ordovician, Oligocene and Pleistocene, in much the same way he employed historical allusions in "Rats." As a result, the informed reader will experience the same sense of traversing back in time. Just as Lovecraft used the names of English cultural layers to evoke English history, he uses terminology related to Earth's historical layers to invoke Earth's history.

The geological perspective on history thus established, Lovecraft proceeds to humanize this history through the alien creatures known as the Elder Things. Their history is relayed to the reader by the narrator and his companion Danforth interpreting inscriptions in the alien city. The murals tell of how a people came from the stars, landed on earth and fought a long series of wars against an unknown adversary. Thereafter, the beings had lived under the sea and created the first life forms on earth,
one of these being the shoggoths. Eventually, some of the Elder Things moved onto dry land while others remained in the depths of the ocean. Then came the advent of sculpturing, of arts, and out of this came a fully fledged society. Meanwhile, the creatures persisted and persevered through catastrophic climate changes that swept the young planet Earth ("Mountains" 469-75). It is, in effect, a narrative of early life on Earth through a humanoid and intelligent pseudo-history.

An example of this intertwining is the tale of how the Elder Things interacted with Cthulhu and his star spawn, a rival race of Lovecraftian aliens that also came to Earth. In a manner reminiscent of human history, the two races of aliens waged long and costly wars over new land and territory. However, unlike conflicts engineered by human hands, these lands were not uncovered by colonizers or settlers forced into the fringes of society, but by the drifting of continental and tectonic plates causing new land to rise and sink out of the ocean. The informed reader can experience this integration of human-like history and geological history via his/her encounter with the alien species in the text and by his/her knowledge of continental drift theory during Earth's lifespan.

Furthermore, in the exploration of the city, Lovecraft shows not only a development of his sense of history but of architecture as well. When describing the interior of the buildings, the narrator writes of "labyrinthine complexity, involving curiously irregular differences in floor levels, characterised the entire arrangement" and describes how "the rooms we encountered were of all imaginable shapes and proportions, ranging from five-pointed stars to triangles and perfect cubes" ("Mountains" 464). Gone and are the notions of the gothic, having been replaced with "an impressive notion of the architecture of that nameless geologic past" ("Mountains" 464). Thus, Lovecraft's love for architecture, too, has been transfixed and interwoven into the chaotic mixture of history and geology that comprise the backdrop to "Mountains."
This alienating effect of the architecture is noted by Evans to be the natural setting for a Lovecraftian horror story: "if 'foreign' architecture is frightening, the ultimate embodiment of fear is non-human architecture, which has no relationship, to familiar forms or aesthetics" (Evans 118). He explicitly cites "Mountains" as an example of the use of such depictions. However, from a structuralist point of view, it could be argued that the natural instinct for a reader is to force this alien architecture into something more comprehensible. For example, an informed reader might read of the "Cyclopean maze of squared, curved, and angled blocks" ("Mountains" 456) and categorize it as a relative of the Labyrinth of Knossos, or the Egyptian labyrinth described by Herodotus. Here again resurfaces Lovecraft's relation to the uncanny, using signifiers Egyptian art and aesthetics to invoke an otherness (Bergstein 186). Therefore, it can be concluded that Lovecraft created an architecture that is both alien and carries historical connotations. History is fused with the alien in architecture, as well as with a pseudo-historical chronology.

Thus, Lovecraft's use of history has undergone a significant transformation. In "Rats," the historical connotations guide the reader along from the known and familiar to the foreign and abhorrent. In "Mountains," on the other hand, the effect is a heightened sense of familiarity with the otherwise abhorrent creatures that serve as the threats in the story. By intermingling creatures that live through age-spans that dwarf the human conception of time with familiarizing attributes, such as art, culture, war, scientific progress, etc., Lovecraft permits a sense of empathy to intermingle with the discomfort towards the strange species. Additionally, the implication that the human race itself might originate from a failed experiment carried out by these same beings brings yet another shade of discomforting kinship with the Elder Things. For the informed reader
this sets the entirety of human existence into a cosmic context. The reader experiences how this alien version of Earth's history dwarfs all of human history.

"Mountains" stands on the other side of a crossroad compared to the author's earlier work. While history serves a purpose, its focus has shifted, expanded, mingled with speculative science. As a result, Lovecraft's fiction is brought out of the gloomy shadows of Edgar Allan Poe and is left to bask in the cosmic rays of Herbert George Wells. The departure from gothic horror towards science fiction is complete. By approaching the history of the alien with the same reverence as he approaches the history of the human, Lovecraft provides the reader a chance to be humbled before the vastness of Earth's history.

In order to gain a greater understanding for how the alien is humanized, it would be useful to explore its first textual reveal with the help of Fish's temporal reading experience. For the purpose of this analysis, the model of the informed reader will be modified by adding a detail from Mariconda's proposed Lovecraft reader. Namely, the reader's lack of prior knowledge of Lovecraft's work (Mariconda 61). The reason for this is that the informed reader already knows the alien's place in Earth's and humanity's history in the Lovecraft Mythos. As such the reveal of the Elder Thing gives the informed reader a different response than a reader experiencing the Mythos for the first time.

In the execution of the temporal reading process, I shall adhere to the paradigm brought forth by Fish of asking the question "what does this word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, chapter, novel, play, poem, do?" (Fish 26-27). The excerpt to be analyzed is taken from part II of the novella. It is the voice of Professor Lake, giving the reader the first physical description of the Elder Things in some detail. Thus, the excerpt is the first
impressions given to the reader of the creature they are meant to both abhorr and relate to:

10:15 P.M. Important discovery. Orrendorf and Watkins, working underground at 9:45 with light, found monstrous barrel-shaped fossil of wholly unknown nature; probably vegetable unless overgrown specimen of unknown marine radiata. Tissue evidently preserved by mineral salts. Tough as leather, but astonishing flexibility retained in places. Marks of broken-off parts at ends and around sides. Six feet end to end, 3.5 feet central diameter, tapering to 1 foot at each end. Like a barrel with five bulging ridges in place of staves. Lateral breakages, as of thinnish stalks, are at equator in middle of these ridges. In furrows between ridges are curious growths. Combs or wings that fold up and spread out like fans. All greatly damaged but one, which gives almost seven-foot wing spread. Arrangement reminds one of certain monsters of primal myth, especially fabled Elder Things in *Necronomicon.*

("Mountains" 436-7)

The first important piece of information is that the fossil uncovered is that it is described as "monstrous" and "barrel-shaped." Given the story's prior mentions of conventional fossils, it might give the reader reason to suspect this to be an extinct form of animal. In fact, given the shapes of many Thyreophoran dinosaurs, such as Stegosaurus, the comparison to a barrel might not appear as quite so alien to the reader. More alien, then, would be the description of the creatures as "probably vegetable." A mixture of animal and plant, while not unknown in the natural world, might appear as an oddity to most readers when set in the context of a collection of dinosaur fossils.
Next, the texture of the creature's skin is described as leathery, tough and flexible. Conceivably, this remark could instil in the reader a sense of what these creatures feel like. The texture of a "vegetable" is not terribly specific, more so one that has a leathery yet flexible feel. It could be posited that what the reader might think of at this moment is a giant cabbage head garbed in a leather jacket. Moving on, the references to marks of broken-off parts can initially be understood by connecting it to the finding of such a severed appendage previously in the narrative. Thus, the reader is presented with narrative puzzle solving to construct a more holistic view of the creature.

In the subsequent sentence, Lovecraft finally states the full dimensions of the fossil. The reader thus discovers that whatever the creature is, its measurements put it to roughly human sized. Combining this new piece of information with what has formerly been revealed, the image begins to warp from slightly comical to something more sinister. The pieces reveal a thing of human size, but part vegetable, and equipped with strange star shaped appendages. Given what is later revealed about the Elder Things in their chronology and history, the choice of bestowing upon them dimensions of ordinary humans, rather than the gargantuan dimensions otherwise present in Lovecraft's work, could be regarded as foreshadowing the human-like nature of the Elder Things.

Thenceforth, Lovecraft makes a return to likening the creatures to barrels, this time employing the feature of "staves" to provide a more precise description of the bulging features present on the Elder Things' bodies. The informed reader, equipped with a rudimentary familiarity with basic elements of coopery, should begin to formulate a clearer image of the idiosyncratic features of the alien life form. Furthermore, the return to the simile of the barrel might cause an association in the reader of the third wheel in the creature: It is not merely humanoid and plant, it is also suggested to be mechanical, if not mechanized, in nature.
Similarly, the text then returns to the plant like features of the being once more, noting the presence of stalk-like appendages within the barrel-like features. Once more, the language presents an implied interconnectedness between the human, the plant, and the inanimate device. The text then proceeds to announce that the Elder Things were equipped with "combs or wings that fold up and spread out like fans." Based on the choice of words, the image that might come to mind is not that of a bird, or a bat, but an insect, an odonata, or a butterfly. This would prompt the reader to add a fourth association to the creature. The Elder Thing is not merely man, plant and machine, but also an insect.

When this assemblage of information is complete, the text gives context to the Mythos that these creatures inhabit. It is revealed that of these aliens can be read in a book called the Necronomicon, where the creatures themselves are labeled Elder Things. Possible prior knowledge of the *Evil Dead* films notwithstanding, it is at this juncture that the reader's eyes are opened to the larger world of the Mythos. The reader is necessitated to accept that this hybrid of animal, plant, inanimate object and insect is already an established concept. Lovecraft opens the curtain and reveals the fantastical world that he has created to the reader. If the payoff of the history of the Elder Things is making the reader sympathize with them, this incident, and the discomfort it may impart to the reader, can be described as the setup. History is woven on top of a mixture of discomfort and empathy.

### 3.3 Summary and Conclusion of Textual Analysis

"The Rats in the Walls" remains a triumph of gothic horror with its vivid exploration of the terrors of ancestry. It permits the reader to share Lovecraft's fascination with English history and cultural layers in a way that lures the reader out of his/her comfort zone in the modern world. The reader is taken back through centuries of bygone history by
means of exploring the various cultural and historical layers of Exham Priory. These elements seem to indicate that the story is suited for a reader who is knowledgable enough on English and Anglo-American history to understand and appreciate the nuance and layers that Lovecraft provides as backdrop for his story.

In "At the Mountains of Madness" Lovecraft employs an alternative mode of history. By showcasing a humanesque chronology of an alien species, Lovecraft makes the species sympathetic. All the while, Lovecraft retains the sense of dread and discomfort in the reader by intermingling descriptions of humanized history with geological history. The reader experiences the existential smallness of the human individual by having it be dwarfed by human history, which in turn is dwarfed by Earth's history. This mixture of history is foreshadowed by the introduction of a specimen of the aliens themselves, establishing the combination of kinship and horror that their history magnifies.

The commonality between the two texts seems to be that history is used to generate a desired emotional response by using historical connections that the reader is presumed to be familiar with. Additionally, it shows an extraordinary variance occurring in Lovecraft's application of history. In "Rats" he looks backwards into Anglo-American history, in "Mountains" he contemplates the history of humanity and the planet Earth. Due to the vast differences of these two modes of history, it might be useful to catalogue the usage of history in more of Lovecraft's writing in order to determine which mode was the more predominant throughout his career.
4 Didactic Reflection: Lovecraft and the EFL Classroom

Returning to the notion of the theoretical student reader versus the informed reader, it is important to recognize the disparity between them. A teacher should wish to utilize the theoretical student reader to find ways to increase the literary and linguistic competence of his/her actual students readers. However, a student reader can never be supposed to have the same level of literary competence as the informed one. Rather, the student reader's literary competence should be based on current realities of the English classroom in Sweden. This involves paying heed to the system's significant variety of students from various cultures and backgrounds, all equipped with multifaceted compositions of reading presuppositions, interests and reading experiences. It should be estimated that a majority of the students might not pay heed to Lovecraft's use of history, since history is not the most prevalent element in his texts. Therefore, should one wish to employ a historical reading of Lovecraft in the classroom, it falls to the teacher to guide students readers towards the relevant historical elements of the text. The teacher would be required to guide the reading of the students to particular passages and elements of history in order for the student readers to respond to them.

Beach offers a number of considerations for teaching English through the medium of reader-response theory in general. His five theoretical perspectives on reader-response ought to all be examined and considered in order to produce as multi-faceted and complete image of the possibilities and pitfalls in teaching Lovecraft, and the modes of history uncovered in the analysis.

Textual

In this approach, the teacher would expect the student reader to understand the context within which Lovecraft and his texts are situated. Possibly, this is the juncture at which
intermingling between the school subjects could be in order. However, it should not be undertaken simply as a means to understand Lovecraft. Rather, the timing of teaching Lovecraft should coincide with relevant topics being taught in other subjects, such as History. Speculatively, a group of students could be in the process of studying cultural history pertaining to the time periods seen in "Rats," say Anglo-American architectural history, preceding their encounter with Lovecraft's work in the subject of English. Not coincidentally, as the main focus of History 2b, a course that in many cases might run parallel to students reading English 7, is cultural history (Skolverket, "History" 2).

Thus, the aim of the textual approach in this context is for the teacher to guide his/her student readers towards elements of cultural history in the text. The point of this would be to increase the students' linguistic and literary competences, bringing them closer to being informed readers. However, it should be considered that this approach might be experienced by the students as having artificial limitations imposed upon their reading, resulting in a decreased enjoyment. This could be problematic given the importance of students retaining an interest in what they are reading in order to procure a productive response (Purves and Beach 108). As a consequence, the need for the teacher to be attentive to students' responses while at work would be of utmost importance.

**Experiential**

In the experiential approach, Beach proposes the usage of an activity that revolves around different forms of visualization or a transmedia experience for the students to build on their experience of reading a text (Beach 157). For the purposes of teaching "Mountains," this method could have the decided benefit of letting the students visualize the Elder Things. Relating to the findings of this essay, if the response of an informed reader should be one of understanding towards the alien, it should be advantageous for the student reader to visualize the alien to emulate those responses.
Thus, the experiential approach could help guiding the student reader towards becoming more like the informed reader.

Utilizing multiple forms of media to enhance the understanding of literature has a degree of support from the syllabus. For example, the grading criteria mentions the requirement of the student to look for language in different formats of media in order to receive a passing grade ("English" 12). However, under such circumstances it would require of the teacher to structure an activity where a student does not only produce a different form of visualization of, say, an Elder Thing or a Shoggoth, but to also produce a response in language as well. For instance, a student could record his/her process of interpretation that he/she uses as the base for visualization, relating to the concept of reading against a text to achieve a different understanding than what might be canonically accepted (Borscheim-Black 125).

Creating a visual image might impact the sense of empathy a student has towards the aliens. Should their empathy be lessened by the alien's abhorrent appearance, it could open a discussion on how appearances affect how we feel towards beings in literature and real life. In a sense, this permits the students to reflect on their own relationship to Freud's ideas of the uncanny, which has proved to be present in both "Rats" and "Mountains."

Using alternative means to visualize elements from Lovecraftian stories can also be applied to history. For instance, a teacher could have a student go on a similar journey as the narrator of "Rats." The students could be tasked to describe the cultural history, local or national, where he/she comes from and visualize elements that he/she deems relevant. These elements can be architectural or natural, urban or pastoral. Regardless, the idea would be to have students connect and contextualize themselves in history the
same way that Lovecraft's protagonist did; to undertake a journey back in time, guided by the student's own ancestry.

Psychological

The psychological perspective requires the teacher to consider the cognitive and developmental phases of his/her students and allow students to voice and discuss difficulties they might have with a text (Beach 158). Considering that the teaching of Lovecraft has been confined to English 7, the student readers would, under most circumstances, be within the later stages of adolescence. This period, according to psychology, is marked primarily by the adolescent's search for a meaningful identity, including "personal beliefs, values, and goals" (Cramer 538).

Thus, it is worth considering how Lovecraft's ideas affect a student's sense of identity and personal beliefs as the student reader is exposed to Lovecraft’s use of history. One possibility would be that the student reader is influenced by the view on human existence in "Mountains." For the informed reader, history in "Mountains" signifies the smallness of human history compared to geological history. For a student reader, arriving at the same conclusion has different implications, given his/her implied psychological development in late adolescence. What meaning would, for instance, the tracing of a familial lineage through layers of cultural history provide when compared to the possibility of the universe hosting creatures whose civilization is measured in deep time?

On a more encouraging note, the insignificance of human history before Earth's history could cause the student to be humbled and spark a discussion regarding the responsibilities of humans towards the earth itself. This perspective is outlined as compulsory in the Swedish school Curriculum (6), as well as tying into course-work on
ecology (Skolverket, "Biology" 3). This is hardly surprising, as such contemplations are imperative for the survival of the human race. Similarly, Lovecraft's text could be seen as encouraging humans to preserve the world we have, as no cosmic order will save us from our own destructive behaviour. This offers

Social

The social perspective is about students' social contexts reflecting upon their social and empathetic understanding of a text (Beach 159). While an informed reader has no defined social context to derive this type of response from, the student reader does. By being a product of socio-economic circumstances in contemporary society, Swedish or otherwise, the student reader comes with an understanding of his/her place in various social contexts, which in turn shapes its empathetic understanding of the literature he/she responds to.

Therefore, what ought to be considered are students' potential empathetic responses towards characters in the Lovecraft canon of literature. Lovecraft's protagonists, though contemporary at the time of writing, have since become historical aspects in their own right. The narrator of "Rats" is an educated man in the 1920s who is so well-situated economically that he need not concern himself with employment or a career. Rather, he may simply abandon all he knows and go to live in an abandoned priory on an entirely different continent. It stands to reason that few students come from a background where this type of living is even feasible.

On the other hand, the narrator of "Mountains" is a scientist on a mission uncovering fossils in Antarctica. At a surface level, the set-up for the plot is not more foreign to modern sensibilities than a documentary on the Discovery Channel. However, the narrator might retain a distance from some of the students by virtue of being a highly
educated, white man. Therefore, a teacher should anticipate a large variance in the degree of empathy exhibited by students towards Lovecraft's protagonists. Furthermore, both of the narrators share Lovecraft's distinct voice: archaic, word-heavy and with a propensity towards lengthy digressions on various topics of academia. Fundamentally, Lovecraft's mode of narration creates distance between himself and student readers.

This distance between modern students of English literature and Lovecraft's antiquated protagonists opens up the possibility for two observations. Firstly, it permits the examination of changes in attitudes and living conditions between the present and the early 20th century. The characters will prompt the students to contemplate changes in cultural and political sensibilities, as well as examining changing social norms. What does it say about Lovecraft and his time that there is, for instance, not a single female character in neither "Rats" nor "Mountains"? One conceivable way to put this into practice would be to arrange a seminar where students may voice these concerns with once another. According to principles outlined by sociolinguistics, this form of interaction is a favorable way to generate new knowledge (Lundahl 201). Furthermore, it offers the teacher an opportunity to observe the student readers' responses to mould the teaching sequence moving forward. Secondly, it offers an opportunity for students to empathize with protagonists coming from widely different circumstances than their own. Having a protagonist that differs from the reader might make it more difficult for the reader to empathize with, but also present a vital opportunity for the reader to widen his/her repertoire of empathy and understanding.

Moreover, this perspective can also be used to turn a critical eye towards norms in general. What norms surround characters that the students themselves are more likely to empathize with? Additionally, this can be turned into a question of convention. What characters are "conventionally" empathetic to EFL students and how would these differ
to characters present in Lovecraft's work? This questioning of normativity is an important part of working towards a desired social transformation (Borscheim-Black 124).

*Cultural*

In the cultural perspective, it is ceded that it is more difficult for students to empathize with other cultural perspectives than their own, meaning that it should be the task of the teacher to generate activities to remedy this issue (Beach 159). Naturally, this exercise in multicultural understanding is something teachers of all school systems in Sweden are expected to perform. On its most foundational level, these ideas and ideals of cultural equality are present in the core documents in the form of rules pointing towards the sanctity of life, the freedom and integrity of individuals, equality amongst all individuals, equality between sexes, and solidarity between all individuals ("Curriculum" 10).

In a way, this sort of activity is precisely what is described by Shafer in his article "Reader-Response Makes History." His method is that of allowing the students to share their responses to culturally and racially loaded texts with each other, trusting the inherent cultural diversity of the class itself to lead the students to a fruitful and successful encounter (Shafer 65-66). Thus, the cultural perspective would call for an illumination of Lovecraft's aforementioned, deeply problematic, tendencies. The most overt and egregious one would be his racism, but other less obvious factors, such as his lack of female characters, should also be addressed. In this regard, simply historicising Lovecraft would not be enough, as the racism he exhibited in his youth could be considered quite extreme even for the 1920s. The subject should be tackled deliberately and carefully, and reader-response theory offers a way for the students to each share their voice on the issue. Unlike the informed reader, who can merely recognize the
racism in the text, the important factor for the student reader is its emotional response to these issues.

For example, how would a teacher concretely tackle the subject of "Niggerman," the cat belonging to the narrator of "Rats"? One solution would be to follow the example of Zest Magazine and rename the animal "Black Tom." However, that might be an unhelpful distorting of facts regarding Lovecraft and his historical context. Lovecraft's racism should not be swept under the rug but instead be scrutinized. An option would be to raise the name of the cat as a topic for historicist discussion among the students. What does the name say about Lovecraft's personal attitudes, or the attitudes of his day? By answering questions such as these the students can acquire a better understanding of racial conditions in early 20th century American literature. Thus, the student reader can enhance his/her understanding by reading with the text (Borscheim-Black 124).

Conclusions of Didactic Analysis

While all of the above perspectives and angles have their own merit when teaching Lovecraft through reader-response theory, I would argue that the most important ones are the textual and the cultural angle. The textual, as Lovecraft's text is demanding and difficult. As such, it might require more aid from the teacher in order to guide the students through their reading processes. A greater focus on interpreting the text would likely be helpful in that regard. Additionally, the knowledge acquired by the student to understand this interpretation makes student an informed reader, with all of his/her associated bags of knowledge, which have also proven fruitful in dissecting and understanding Lovecraft's world building.

The cultural aspect, on the other hand, is important to increase the students' understanding of other cultures. Lovecraft opens up a possibility for this, albeit in an
abstract way, by having the reader respond to a race of aliens with empathy. However, it is equally possible to read Lovecraft's texts and respond to them with the conclusion that alien and strange cultures are to be abhorred and feared. In this light, the cultural angle likely becomes the single most important one for the teacher to employ in order to avoid potential harm to the students' belief in the righteousness of cultural equality and pluralism.

The fruitful implementation of these systems places a demand on the teacher: a demand to be aware of cultural sensitivities in students, a demand to be aware of reading interests, and a demand to be aware of student capacity to process text written in archaic language. However, should these demands be met, by a sort of informed teacher, if you will, Lovecraft could be a boon to the EFL classroom. With the historical angle, a teacher could use Lovecraft to encourage reflection on students' social, cultural and historical contexts, environmental issues, as well as providing a reading challenge for students, in accordance with Krashen's theory of input (Lundahl 196).
5 Final Conclusions

With the help of the responses of the informed reader, a number of conclusions have been drawn about Lovecraft, history and its relationship to the modern EFL classroom. Firstly, Lovecraft displays two modes of history used to achieve two different narrative effects. By loading the setting of "Rats" with a rich catalogue of historical connotations and references, he invites an informed reader on a journey through cultural layers of English and American history. Additionally, Lovecraft highlights the value of knowing one's own place in history, horrifying as though it might be. Experientially, Lovecraft orients these elements around the Exham Priory, loading the site with all the layers of real and fictional history.

Conversely, in "Mountains" Lovecraft uses the history of the alien to convey the smallness of human history in relation to Earth's history. Once again working in layers, Lovecraft builds the structure thus: human history is a fraction of human existence. And human existence, in turn, is dwarfed next to the scale of Earth's history, helpfully anthropomorphized into a race of extraterrestrials. In "Mountains," the backdrop that provides this revelation to an informed reader is not one of English History, but layers of fossils, bones and periods of geological history. Remnants of human history are substituted with remnants of Earth's history in order to illustrate a different point about the person's relationship to the past. Consequently, the informed reader of "Mountains" is one knowledgeable in geology and paleontology. Furthermore, in the reveal of the alien's physical form, Lovecraft carefully intermingles visual signifiers of a human, an inanimate object, and an insect, providing a temporal reading experience whereby the reader can both identify with the alien and be abhorred by it.
Secondly, a historical reading of Lovecraft carries much potential for a number of fruitful discussions in an EFL classroom. Under the guidance of a teacher, the student reader could use its own responses to become closer to the informed reader and increase its literary competence. Overall, Lovecraft and history is a mixture that permits students to create an enhanced understanding of the strange, alien and unfamiliar. The facets of cultural and geological history present in Lovecraft's texts provide potential ways to link studies of English to the subjects of Biology and History. Furthermore, adopting an experiential approach, students could be urged to visualize the alien and strange, aiding in furthering the development and breadth of their understanding and empathy. Alternatively, the same technique could be employed to permit students to visualize their own place in a historical and cultural context by, like Lovecraft, asking questions about cultural history, architecture and ancestry.

Moreover, Lovecraft's views on cosmic existentialism, as exhibited by the juxtaposition of human history and Earth history, could be used as a spring board for students to consider environmental questions and the ethic responsibilities of mankind towards the planet which we inhabit. Additionally, Lovecraft's texts, and their historical context, are useful to build a perspective on American sensibilities in the early 20th century. Furthermore, this perspective allows a point of entry into discussions on changing sensibilities regarding politically charged topics, such as the use of racial slurs and gender equality. By providing a perspective from a hundred years ago, Lovecraft can engineer a discussion that is more vital than ever in a classroom today. Just the same as Lovecraft can be a useful challenge for the difficulty of his antiquated prose, so too can he provoke interesting questions with his antiquated values. For these effects to take place, the teacher would be required to guide his/her student readers on their way towards becoming more like the informed reader.
Lastly, I would like to propose this essay to be an invitation towards further studying of the connection between Lovecraft and history. After all, this work only covers two examples of the writer's bountiful plethora of fiction. This essay should serve as an indication of what could be found in studies of his other stories like "The Call of Cthulhu," "The Dreams in the Witch-House," or "The Dunwich Horror." Given the results yielded by this short study, it should be interesting to further chart this borderland between history and horrifying insanity. More generally speaking, this essay should be an example of the merit of studying history within literature through reader-response theory. Specifically, that reader-response theory can help illuminate how using history as a literary tool affects the reading experience.
6 References


Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in this Class? - The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Harvard University Press, 1980.


