



Racism and fear in H.P. Lovecraft's *The Shadow over Innsmouth*

Rasism och rädsla i H.P. Lovecrafts *Skuggan över Innsmouth*

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to show how elements of racism and xenophobia manifest themselves in H.P. Lovecraft's 1931 novella *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. Through a close reading of the text, I show how these two matters contribute to creating fear and horror in the story. In addition to the analysis of the text I also relate the elements found in the text to letters and essays written by Lovecraft to show how several aspects of the novella contribute to the theme of racism and xenophobia. Throughout the essay I suggest how topics such as miscegenation, the vilification of another race of people and even the landscape itself mesh together to form the basis of the horror and the fear in the story. In the end, it is clear that Lovecraft's own racism permeates the story.

Abstract in Swedish

Syftet med denna uppsats är att belysa hur rasism och xenofobi manifesteras i H.P. Lovecrafts kortroman *Skuggan över Innsmouth* från 1931. Genom en närläsning av texten uppvisas hur dessa två element bidrar till att skapa rädsla och skräck i berättelsen. Utöver närläsningen relateras också stycken i berättelsen till brev och essäer skrivna av Lovecraft och andra som visar hur ett flertal aspekter i kortromanen bidrar till temat rasism och xenofobi. Genom uppsatsen visas hur ämnen som rasblandning, rasförtryck och till och med själva miljön blandas ihop och utgör basen för rädsla och skräck i berättelsen. Till slut visas det klart och tydligt att Lovecrafts egna rasism genomsyrar hela berättelsen.

H.P. Lovecraft certainly has been a great many things to a great many people. During his active career he was mainly considered a writer of small importance, but he has later been read, analyzed and scrutinized by a large number of readers. His stories continue to fascinate readers to this day and Lovecraft has been considered by many to be one of the most influential horror writers of modern times, inspiring many other writers of horror and weird fiction. As a result, many scholars and critics have taken upon them to analyse his works and his life, with often contradicting results. Certain elements of Lovecraft's persona and writing keep polarizing literary critics: his racism and xenophobia. This essay will show how these two elements are crucial to one of his most famous stories: *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.

One of the leading Lovecraft scholars, S.T. Joshi argues that Lovecraft's racism is merely a result of his time and that his views can thus be partially excused. In the Lovecraft biography *I am Providence*, Joshi acknowledges that Lovecraft remained a racist until his death in 1937. Joshi defends Lovecraft's views by referring to the common attitude of American society in the 1920s and 1930s: "This view was by no means uncommon in the 1920s, and many leading American biologists and psychologists wrote forebodingly about the possibility that racial intermixture could lead to biological abnormalities" (Joshi, "Providence" 936). These views are shared with L. Sprague de Camp, another Lovecraft scholar and author of *Lovecraft – A Biography*. In this biography, de Camp mentions some authors of racist texts contemporary to Lovecraft, such as H.S. Chamberlain, Lothrop Stoddard and Madison Grant, and how their works influenced Lovecraft. De Camp then acknowledges that Lovecraft was indeed a racist, but also provides a number of excuses on his behalf. Like Joshi, he claims that Lovecraft was a man of his time and that his racism and aryanism can easily be brushed away as "silly" (Sprague de Camp 22). Despite the fact that Lovecraft wrote several racist letters during his lifetime, de Camp maintains that his racial views were largely trivial and mainly irrelevant to his writings. In short, both Joshi and de

Camp agree that Lovecraft was a racist, but only because it was the standard of the times he lived in and also that Lovecraft's racism should not be judged harshly since, in the end, the racial views of Lovecraft as a person should not be the basis on which to judge the written works of Lovecraft as author (Joshi "*S.T Joshi's blog*").

However, there are other views on Lovecraft's racism and racial views. French author Michel Houellebecq describes Lovecraft's racism and its effects on his writings. He argues that "as one of the finest authors of horror fiction, Lovecraft brutally takes racism back to its essential and most profound core: fear"(Houellebecq 3). This conclusion is shared by Mitch Frye in his article about Lovecraft and eugenics, where he cites another well-known Lovecraft critic and author, China Mieville, who asserted that Lovecraft's stories must be considered as works of their own, as they "locate the horror, the awe, the very stuff that makes Lovecraft great, inseparably from his paranoid terror of mixing the races" (Frye). Recalling the old Lovecraft adage that: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 5), one might be able to draw a few conclusions. Firstly, as evidenced by the aforementioned quote, Lovecraft often discussed using fear of the unknown as one of the main elements in many of his stories. Secondly, H.P. Lovecraft was a racist. Even though one might make the argument that Lovecraft simply was a man of his time, his views were still consistent with those we consider racist today. It is clear from letters, writings and correspondence that Lovecraft harboured hatred and disgust for other races, feelings that are often closely related to fear. Hence, the point I would like to make in this essay is this: Lovecraft's racism was not merely located outside of his published stories but is sometimes found at the very core of his works. In this essay, I will show the role of racism in Lovecraft's novella *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and also attempt to show how racism is the source of conveying fear in the novella. I will also to an extent try to connect Lovecraft's own racist

views and opinions to those expressed in the story and thus argue that racism and xenophobia make up the foundation of the story.

As this essay is built upon the exploration of the role of a couple of key terms in a story, it might be beneficial to define them for clarity and purpose. The first key term of this essay, racism, is clearly defined in several dictionaries. For this essay, the definition found in the Merriam Webster Dictionary will be used. It states that racism is “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race” (“Racism”). The second key term, xenophobia, is defined as follows: “fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign” (“Xenophobia”). Using these definitions of the words, it is possible to show how both racism and xenophobia is at the core of, and constitutes one of the main building blocks for, one of Lovecraft’s most well-known stories.

The Shadow over Innsmouth is one of H.P. Lovecraft’s most famous and revered novellas. Published in 1936, only a year before his death, it would be one of the very last stories he wrote. Just as many of his other stories, the novella is set in a fictional New England town, and features a protagonist travelling the countryside. This protagonist, Robert Olmstead, is a student on a sightseeing tour of New England. During his travels he finds rumors about a town by the sea called Innsmouth. Against the direct advice of the inhabitants of the neighboring town of Newburyport, Olmstead decides to take the bus to Innsmouth out of curiosity. He finds Innsmouth to be a very strange and derelict town and he is immediately suspicious of its inhabitants. They have a strange and repulsive appearance and they reek of fish. During his stay in the town, Olmstead learns several things about it from an old drunk named Zadok Allen. Allen reveals that the residents of Innsmouth are involved in a cult that practices human sacrifice among other abominable things. They have also intermarried and bred with a race of undersea creatures, later referred to as the Deep Ones, resulting in

offspring that eventually will descend into the depths of the sea to join the rest of the creatures. Due to the bus, his only means of transportation, breaking down, Olmstead is forced to spend the night at the Innsmouth hotel. During the night, the residents attempt to catch and kill him and he is forced to make a dramatic escape from the town. After returning home, he alerts the authorities who in turn proceed by laying the town to ruins and shipping off the inhabitants to places unknown. Finally, in the end, he finds out through research of his own that he too is an ancestor of the intermarriage between the Deep Ones and the inhabitants of Innsmouth. After resisting a strong urge to commit suicide, he instead accepts his fate and returns to the sea to be reunited with his ancestors.

Comparing the author's personal life with that of the main character of the story is not always recommended when analysing literature. However in this case, applying aspects of H.P. Lovecraft's personal life works as a way of further understanding the story and its elements. The protagonist and narrator of the story, Robert Olmstead parallels Lovecraft himself in many ways, especially in terms of travelling habits and eating habits, making the narrator very close to the author (Joshi and Schultz 239). Michel Houellebecq argues in his Lovecraft biography that Lovecraft often projects himself as the victim of his stories, an educated, young white traveller surrounded by "inferior" human beings or "greasy chimpanzees" (Houellebecq 34). Although *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is by no means an autobiography of Lovecraft's life, there are certainly enough similarities between H.P. Lovecraft the person and Robert Olmstead the main character to make a comparison. Such a comparison makes it possible to ascertain that several of the elements of fear stems from Lovecraft's own, further strengthening the connection between his racism and the horror in the novella.

Lovecraft repeatedly iterated his fascination with the fear of the unknown (Joshi, "Providence", 12). This is a technique he utilizes in the novella, where he introduces the

inhabitants of Innsmouth long before one of them is presented and described in the text. Lovecraft uses the prejudice, fear and hate of the people of the neighbouring village of Newburyport, in order to introduce the citizens of Innsmouth. Olmstead is introduced to Innsmouth by one of the Newburyporters describing the bus route: “It goes through Innsmouth - you may have heard about that - and so the people don't like it” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 4). Immediately, the prejudice, hate and fear result in the people of Newburyport portraying the people of Innsmouth as the evil sort of “others”. This is also an example of xenophobia, the fear of foreigners and other cultures, something Lovecraft would have been very familiar with. It is made abundantly clear in the text that almost no Newburyport citizen has ever been to Innsmouth, indicating that statements like the one above is largely prejudicial in nature. The way Lovecraft chooses to introduce the Deep Ones to both the readers and the protagonist is using fear of the unknown and prejudice in order to scare the reader.. Thus, Lovecraft is using xenophobia in order to develop the fear of the people of Innsmouth, something which continues and escalates later in the story.

The reader, too, is introduced to the people of Innsmouth immediately at the beginning of the novella. It starts by reciting a report of the aftermath of the story, describing arrests and raids made secretly in Innsmouth by the Federal Government. There is no indication as to why the arrests were made, but it is clear that the circumstances are unusual and comprehensive. For some reason, the town of Innsmouth has been cleansed from its people through arrests, raids, burnings and torpedoes (Lovecraft, ‘Innsmouth’ 1). The opening paragraphs are designed to make the reader wonder about the people of Innsmouth and what they have done to deserve such harsh treatment. One of the most extreme examples described in the beginning involves people from Innsmouth being put in prisons and concentration camps, for reasons yet unknown to the reader. What is remarkable about this opening passage is not the treatment of the Innsmouth people per se, but its intended effect on the reader –

immediately justifying said treatment, possibly dehumanizing the people of Innsmouth. The opening passage also describes how there initially were complaints from liberal and humanitarian organisations, but that they eventually died down and the organisations became passive and reticent (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 2). The reason for this was that they were taken on trips to the aforementioned camps and prisons, and after seeing the imprisoned people from Innsmouth decided to accept the treatment and abandon their humanitarian causes. The consensus of the liberal organisations, and thus the message sent to the reader, is that the people of Innsmouth deserve to be imprisoned, put in camps and eventually exterminated, ostensibly based on their looks alone.

Right from the start, the reader is thus inclined to be prejudiced towards the Innsmouth residents and perhaps even fear them because of their appearance. Hence, Lovecraft keeps building up the idea of the people from Innsmouth as a group of beings completely different from the narrator and the intended audience. They are shunned by the residents of the neighboring town, based mostly on hearsay and rumors, which is Lovecraft’s way of using xenophobia in order to scare the reader. They are also deemed worthy of nothing less than cruel and unusual punishment, not only by the Federal Government, but by humanitarian organizations as well. This is what the reader is presented with before properly being introduced to a character from Innsmouth. This all contributes to viewing the Innsmouth people through a lens of racism and xenophobia, as Lovecraft are using them as ways of conveying fear.

The people of Innsmouth are without exception portrayed in an extremely negative light, even long before the narrator has even visited the town itself. Their physical appearances are something that comes under heavy scrutiny, both from the Newburyporters and Olmstead himself. The Newburyporters provide their opinion on the appearance of the people of Innsmouth:

Some of 'em have queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, starry eyes that never seem to shut, and their skin ain't quite right. Rough and scabby, and the sides of the necks are all shriveled or creased up. Get bald, too, very young. The older fellows look the worst - fact is, I don't believe I've ever seen a very old chap of that kind. Guess they must die of looking in the glass! Animals hate 'em - they used to have lots of horse trouble before the autos came in. (Lovecraft, "Innsmouth" 8)

From this description, and many others like it, it is made clear that the look of the Innsmouth people is one of the main reasons as to why they are disliked, disdained, and despised. The implications can be found later in the story when it is revealed that the people of Innsmouth are all results of miscegenation, a cross-breed of humans and so-called Deep Ones, creatures living deep below the vast ocean surface. Lovecraft provided his opinion on miscegenation and "pure races" several times, stating his disgust for anything other than a "pure" race. In one of his many letters he wrote: "To be a member of a pure-blooded race ought to be the greatest achievement in life!" (de Camp 92). The miscegenation has resulted in a species which neither human nor animal can stand. The narrator of the story immediately agrees with the people of Newburyport, judging the people of Innsmouth on their appearance alone. As he prepares to board the bus to Innsmouth, he notices the bus driver is a man from Innsmouth, previously described to him by the old fellow from before, Zadok Allen. Olmstead is immediately taken aback by the appearance of the bus driver. "It suddenly struck me as very natural that the local people should not wish to ride on a bus owned and driven by this man, or to visit any oftener than possible the habitat of such a man and his kinsfolk" (Lovecraft, "Innsmouth" 18). The opinions about the people from Innsmouth are clearly rooted in racism and prejudice of other races, and the treatment of them, although somewhat justified in the story, definitely reflects racism expressed both in Lovecraft's lifetime and modern society. Lovecraft manages to portray the Innsmouth residents as monstrous, something to avoid and

something to feel very uneasy about. The criticism against miscegenation can be seen throughout the entire novella. The concept of degeneration and in particular biological degeneration appears quite early in the story, when the narrator reflects upon the appearance of the aforementioned Innsmouth bus driver: “I myself would have thought of biological degeneration rather than alienage” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 19). This is a clear indication that race-mixing, interbreeding and miscegenation is the source of the degenerated “Innsmouth look”. Judging people based on their looks and attributing it to race-mixing and “biological degeneration” is clearly racist, and is a way for Lovecraft to show that the people from Innsmouth, the evil others, are clearly racially inferior to the “normal” people, of which he is himself a member.

Throughout the novella Lovecraft describes the people of Innsmouth not always as human beings, but as diseased monsters, something to stay far away from. The so-called Innsmouth look is a constantly criticised by the narrator, being called both a “disease” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 30) and a “blood stain” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 35). In addition, he is also calling the bearers of this look “dirty-looking”, among other different terms (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 23). As this degeneration is a result of Innsmouth people breeding with Deep Ones, it is possible to make the connection that miscegenation is a source of fear and horror. Thus it is clear, that as portrayed in the story the act of miscegenation and mixing races results in monstrous, ugly creatures, inferior to other human beings.

The portrayal of mixed race and cultures does not stop with the inhabitants of Innsmouth. During his initial travels, Olmstead encounters a piece of jewellery in the Newburyport Historical Society. At the sight of the golden tiara he finds, he is disturbed and made uneasy by the mere appearance of it:

At first I decided that it was the queer other-worldly quality of the art which made me uneasy. All other art objects I had ever seen either belonged to some known racial or

national stream, or else were consciously modernistic defiances of every recognized stream. This tiara was neither. It clearly belonged to some settled technique of infinite maturity and perfection, yet that technique was utterly remote from any - Eastern or Western, ancient or modern - which I had ever heard of or seen exemplified. (Lovecraft, "Innsmouth" 14).

Just as in the case with the Innsmouth bus driver, the appearance of the tiara is enough to make the narrator uneasy and disturbed. And likewise in this case, cultural impurity is the reason for it. Olmstead fails to trace the tiara to a single origin, be it Western, Eastern, ancient or modern. The appearance of the tiara and the narrator's uneasiness is another example showing his fear of the unknown. It is speculated that the tiara originated from Innsmouth, and thus Olmstead fears it. The tiara is different and strange looking, which is enough to put fear into the narrator.

Appearance is a key element in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* in order for Lovecraft to create fear and also portray the people of Innsmouth as inferior and sometimes even inhuman beings. French geographer Jean-Francois Staszak gives further insight on what effect portraying people in such a way might have: "Skin color and certain secondary signs that physical anthropology has helped to identify are used to distinguish White Men, the 'superior' phase of humanity, from 'inferior' races" (Staszak 3). It is clear from the text that the people of Innsmouth are not of a light complexity, as they are described as "dark, unkempt men of sullen visage" (Lovecraft, "Innsmouth" 17). The narrator of the novella also goes so far as to describe how he is "horrified by the "bestial abnormality of their faces and the doglike sub-humanness of their crouching gait" (Lovecraft, "Innsmouth" 86). In the same fashion, he describes how they move in a "positively simian way, with long arms frequently touching the ground" (Lovecraft, "Innsmouth" 86). Finally, groups of "dirty, simian-visaged

children” can be seen around the village (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 23). It is impossible to look at these descriptions without noticing the racial connotations. It is made clear that the people of Innsmouth are racially inferior to the white, Anglo Saxon race that Lovecraft prided himself on belonging to. Once again, this contributes to categorizing the people of Innsmouth into “others” and a different race entirely.

Some Lovecraft scholars and critics, such as Timo Airaksinen, are adamant in their view that H.P. Lovecraft cannot be called a racist even “if he lets the narrator-author be one” (Airaksinen 18). However, looking outside of the text, these descriptions are eerily similar to some of the letters Lovecraft wrote during his life, often referring to non-white people as “simian looking” and “sub-human” (de Camp 236). Thus, it is possible to establish that Lovecraft uses a certain terminology when writing about the non-white immigrants he so disliked in the “real” world, and the people of fictional Innsmouth. Lovecraft appears to view them in the same light, projecting racist opinions within the novella. Even though several scholars argue against applying too much of the author’s own views on the story, the similarities between Lovecraft’s own confirmed racist views and the image he portrays of the residents of Innsmouth in the story are too great to ignore. Thus, it can be argued that the image of the residents of Innsmouth is based almost entirely on Lovecraft’s own views of immigrants and non-whites around him. Thus, racism and xenophobia are the basis of the people of Innsmouth: the villains of the story.

After establishing that the appearance of the villainous villagers is based upon racism and xenophobia, there are other aspects of the novella to address. Another area in the story where Lovecraft uses racism to generate fear is the environment itself. Innsmouth as a town matches its inhabitants in decay and degeneration. The description of the town amounts to a virtual landscape of miscegenation. The entire town,

seemingly neglected for years by the villagers, is filled with crumbled steeples and black gaping holes. The bleak, shadowed environment aside, there are a few aspects of the environments of Innsmouth that stand out. The first and most obvious sign of racism in the environment descriptions would be the large white belfry standing out in an otherwise dark, black and shadowed environment. Lovecraft was a firm believer in the white race reigning supreme (de Camp 89) and choosing to put a large, white belfry in the middle of a decaying, dark landscape is in line with such thinking. The white, well-preserved belfry stands out as a symbol in the otherwise shadowed Innsmouth, threatened by decay and degeneration by darkness and strange people. Later, during his escape from the town, the narrator looks back upon it and thinks about “The ancient spires and roofs of decaying Innsmouth [that] gleamed lovely and ethereal in the magic yellow moonlight, and I thought of how they must have looked in the old days before the shadow fell” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 88). First, his thoughts once again touch the subject of the decay of Innsmouth, commenting on the negative effects of miscegenation and the influx of strange culture and foreign blood. Second, he once again describes the shadow that has befallen Innsmouth and how it has shrouded the town in darkness, both literally and figuratively. It also shows, through the narrator, the yearning for the olden days and the past, when both race and culture were pure and not yet tainted by the shadows from the sea. The town of Innsmouth itself can thus be seen as the horrible consequence of miscegenation. Not only have the residents turned into monstrous, subhuman creatures, the town itself has fallen into dark and shadowy ruins, full of nightmares.

There are also other aspects of Innsmouth that stand out:

Here and there the ruins of wharves jutted out from the shore to end in indeterminate rottenness, those farthest south seeming the most decayed. And far out at sea, despite a

high tide, I glimpsed a long, black line scarcely rising above the water yet carrying a suggestion of odd latent malignancy. (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 22)

The narrator notices “indeterminate rottenness” in the far south, while looking at a long black line, “carrying a suggestion of odd latent malignancy” out in the deep water. At one time, Lovecraft wrote in a letter to his friend, fellow writer Frank Belknap Long:

The organic things inhabiting that awful cesspool could not by any stretch of the imagination be call'd human. They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous slime of the earth's corruption, and slithering and oozing in and on the filthy streets or in and out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities. They — or the degenerate gelatinous fermentation of which they were composed — seem'd to ooze, seep and trickle thro' the gaping cracks in the horrible houses – (Quoted in Houellebecq 31).

The letter in question deals with immigrants Lovecraft met while living in New York City, a period in his life which affected his racial views greatly. Like the Deep Ones in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the immigrants in New York City also came from the ocean, as “deep-sea unnamabilities”, emitting an odour just like the “most nauseous fishy odour imaginable” that can be found in Innsmouth (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 23). Neither does he consider them human, providing yet another reason to compare Lovecraft’s real life racial views with those expressed by the narrator towards the people of Innsmouth in the novella. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the inhabitants are portrayed as the same monsters Lovecraft perceived immigrants to be in his life and time.

Another aspect through which the Innsmouth residents are portrayed as the inferior, subhuman other and something to be feared is through the use of language. In the

novella, Lovecraft uses the language of the degenerated Innsmouth people as a way of further distancing them from the normalized, English-speaking Newburyporters. At several points in the story the narrator comments on the language of the people of Innsmouth. When he first hears their language, he is uncertain whether or not it is even English. He notices a few men speaking as they “shambled to the sidewalk and exchanged some faint guttural words with a loafer in a language I could have sworn was not English” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 62). The way Lovecraft chooses to have them speak another language altogether strengthens the connection between the people from Innsmouth and the foreign people Lovecraft spoke out so heavily against. Later in the same passage, the narrator describes how the bus driver from Innsmouth “began mumbling in a throaty voice of peculiar repulsiveness” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 63). Thus the narrator makes it clear that the voices and the language of the Innsmouth residents, the others, are abnormal, strange and inferior to English. Later on, Olmstead is certain the language of the human-fish hybrids is not English, which makes him even more horrified. Towards the end, he hears “horrible croaking voices exchanging low cries in what was certainly not English” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 77). Once again, he mentions how horrible the voices sound, and through the emphasis on mentioning that they do not speak English, the element of fear is meant to be even greater.

Finally, Lovecraft uses certain words to describe the language of the Innsmouth residents that further suggests it is both inferior and degenerated to the point of unrecognizability. During his escape from Innsmouth he is listening to “croaking and jabbering in some hateful guttural patois” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 86). Not only does he describe the language as “hateful”, he also uses the word “patois” in connection with the Innsmouth tongue. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “patois” refers to a dialect of a certain area, “especially one with low status in relation to the standard language of the country” (“Patois”). This fact implies that the Innsmouth residents do speak English, albeit such a twisted and miscegenated version

of it that it is unrecognizable to the narrator. Once again, Lovecraft shows the negative effect of miscegenation, not only by describing the people from Innsmouth as grotesque looking individuals, but by showing the English language degenerated into a hateful croaking as well.

In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, there is a symbol that does not go unnoticed to the contemporary reader. Zadok Allen describes an older appearance by the Deep Ones, where their offspring created together with local islanders were killed by other islanders – “Seems the other islanders had got wind o' what was goin' on, and had took matters into their own hands” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 49). He mentions that “In some places they was little stones strewed abaout - like charms - with somethin' on 'em like what ye call a swastika naowadays” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 49). Through the text, it is implied that the swastika symbol, among others, is used as a charm which may help in defeating the race mixing Deep Ones and their offspring. At the end of the novella, it is mentioned that “The Deep Ones could never be destroyed, even though the palaeogean magic of the forgotten Old Ones might sometimes check them” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 109). The magic in this case is referring to the aforementioned swastika stones, implying that they are indeed used to ward off the fish people from the deep sea. However, Lovecraft’s active choice of putting a swastika in the story is somewhat complicated to put into perspective. *The Shadow over Innsmouth* was written in 1931 and published in 1936, so Lovecraft would not have known the full extent of the atrocities committed by the German National Socialist party during the 1930s and 40s. However, there is proof that Lovecraft supported Hitler during his rise to power and early days, as shown in several letters and documents (Joshi, *A Dreamer* 360). The swastika symbol might then have been used in that context. The swastika is also an ancient symbol used in many different cultures and in many different ways. Lovecraft might thus simply have used it as a powerful and recognizable symbol, but some Lovecraft scholars seem to think otherwise. Bennett Lovett-Graff strongly argues the case that the swastika is meant as a symbol of racism

and reference to Nazism (9). The fact that the symbol is used in order to defeat the undesirable elements does make it possible to draw such parallels, especially considering the views Lovecraft expressed himself in regards to the matter. In the light of that, the swastika filling the role of racial purity and the fight against miscegenation is not all that incredible.

Other explanations can also be found. Writer Gavin Callaghan suggests that the use of the swastika in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is tied to Lovecraft's racism in a different way. Callaghan writes that the use of the swastika implies that Lovecraft's racism was a search for "the ultimate father, the ultimate ancestor – a father in the form of a collective racial soul" (Callaghan 99-100). Lovecraft certainly had a strong opinion on the importance of ancestry, which is shown in several of his stories, including *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. The thought of racial impurity and the degeneration of Western society was a horrifying thought to Lovecraft, and it is something that he used as a major theme in at least two of his stories: *the Shadow over Innsmouth*, and also, presented further below, *Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and his Family*. The swastika is but one symbol connected to Lovecraft's fear of a decaying and degenerating society, used as a weapon to confront and defeat the foreign invaders. Essentially, the swastika could have been used by Lovecraft in any or both of the functions previously mentioned: a symbol of racism and support of Nazism as Lovett-Graff suggests, or as Callaghan argues, symbolizing the search for a collective racial soul or the ultimate father. Most importantly, Lovecraft wanted to emphasize the dangers of a multicultural society and the horrors of societal and human degeneration. This becomes apparent in the ending of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. For the modern reader, of course, the swastika sends an even stronger message, and makes for an even more obvious racial and political connotation. Even though Lovecraft himself was not fully aware of the implications of using the swastika, the effects of placing it into the story as a symbol for racial purity are even greater today.

The ending of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* manages to turn all the racist views and fears of Lovecraft into a climax of dread and horror. The narrator, having managed to escape the clutches of the Innsmouth monstrosities, finally arrives home again. Unable to forget the things he has seen and experienced, he immediately gives up his previous plans and continues his research. During his research, he finds information about one of his uncles that turns his life upside-down and forces the plot of the story into a typical Lovecraft ending. His research reveals the horrible truth about his family and himself: he is a descendant of the founder of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, Obed Marsh. Marsh was the first person who summoned the Deep Ones in order to make the town of Innsmouth wealthy. Thus, he is a result of the union between a human and a Deep One, a product of miscegenation. This is one of the narrator's worst fears, and he struggles to accept the truth. He realizes that his maternal grandmother and his uncle Douglas had always disturbed him because of their "staring, unwinking expression" (Lovecraft, "Innsmouth" 99). Once again, the appearance of the miscegenated offspring is portrayed as unsettling and abnormal, something to avoid at all costs. Olmstead also mentions a cousin transforming into one of the sea monsters from Innsmouth, and that he is currently locked up in a mental institution. This shows that contact with another race and even just a drop of racially impure blood might be grounds for incarceration (Lovecraft, "Innsmouth" 104). The implied effects of being a product of a union between two different species are clear. The narrator mentions that his uncle Douglas shot himself after a trip to New England. The message is there – products of miscegenation are doomed to fail and should be wiped off the face of the Earth.

The previously mentioned stare and those particular eyes are mentioned as a foreshadowing earlier in the story, when old Zadok utters "come to look at ye, ye hev kind o' got them sharp-readin' eyes like Obed had" (Lovecraft, "Innsmouth" 44), suggesting that Olmstead bears a resemblance to the old sea captain Obed Marsh, the original miscegenator.

The narrator describes the worst shock of the experience being when another of his uncles showed him the old family jewellery: jewellery that resembles the tiara he found in Newburyport earlier and bears the same characteristics. No one had been able to “define their exact material or assign them to any specific art tradition” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 100) a fact that once again terrifies the narrator to the extent that he faints upon seeing them. The jewellery confirms his deepest fears: he is a product of miscegenation and is no longer as pure-bred as he once thought. As the narrator describes that he is starting to feel “a kind of terror of my own ancestry” (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 99), it is clear that having his bloodline tainted by a foreign culture and, in his eyes, an inferior race, is the most dreadful thing that can possibly happen. His worst nightmares have been realized.

The Shadow over Innsmouth is not the first time Lovecraft has utilized such an ending, and that might make it more suitable for analysis. In a short story written in 1921, “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family”, the theme of racial pollution or impurity is also a crucial point. The main character, Arthur Jermyn, discovers that one of his great-grandparents produced a child with a “white ape-goddess” (Lovecraft, “Jermyn” 4), thus rendering his pure bloodline tainted with inhuman blood. Upon realizing his polluted ancestry, Arthur subsequently douses himself in oil and sets himself on fire, committing suicide. In addition to this short story, the theme of racial impurity and consequences thereof is used in several other Lovecraft stories, making it a recurring theme. Bloodline impurity and a society degenerated by foreigners was one of Lovecraft’s worst fears and it permeates many of his stories, and the theme is dealt with in various ways. Arthur Jermyn, like Robert Olmstead of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* are both products of miscegenation, but they choose to deal with the subject very differently. While Jermyn is so horrified by the thought of his impure ancestry that he chooses to commit suicide, Robert Olmstead reacts differently. He does buy a weapon with the intent of killing himself, but reveals that certain dreams

prevents him from doing so (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 104). The dreams he refers to increase in frequency as his transformation from human to monster progresses further. Unlike Arthur Jermyn, Olmstead eventually embraces his fate to become one of the Deep Ones. He makes a plan to free his cousin from the mental institution and to finally join their amphibian brethren under the sea, seeking “stupendous and unheard of splendors” below (Lovecraft, “Innsmouth” 104). Thus ends the story of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, with Robert Olmstead finally realizing his destiny, even embracing it. The previous feelings of horror implied by racial impurity and miscegenation turn into feelings of acceptance and empowerment, perhaps reflecting the inevitability of the decay of society and humanity.

It is possible to draw a couple of conclusions from this ending. In contrast to the ending of “Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and his Family”, Olmstead eventually gives in to his ancestry and becomes one of them. This might be because *The Shadow over Innsmouth* was written later in Lovecraft’s life, when his opinions had transformed somewhat. In one of his longer letters, Lovecraft wrote the following in regards to culture: “the old culture with its idea of quality versus size is worth fighting for—perhaps the only thing on earth worth fighting for – but I don’t think it’s going to win” (Guarde Paz 16). This letter has implications for an interpretation of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*: Lovecraft had a genuine fear of a decaying culture, and thought fighting for it to be worthwhile, something shown not only in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, but in several other of his stories as well. But most importantly, the letter suggests that Lovecraft might have given up the fight for the “old culture” and through *The Shadow over Innsmouth* wanted to convey the horrors of giving up the fight and embracing the reality of mixing races and cultures.

The fact that Olmstead chooses to embrace his fate might be a sign that he (and to an extent, Lovecraft himself) has accepted the new society and overcome his racist views. However, one must consider the symbolic implications of the miscegenation taking place in

The Shadow over Innsmouth. A human mating with one of the Deep Ones results in their offspring gradually transforming into an amphibian creature dwelling underneath the ocean surface, biding its time until the Deep Ones are ready to conquer the human world. A return to the ocean is something Lovecraft has mentioned before in other texts of his. He had theories in which “Individual, by some strange process, retraces the path of evolution & becomes amphibious” (Guarde Paz 18). In other words, the miscegenation would result in humankind evolving “backwards” by producing offspring with beings of an inferior race. With this in mind, the ending of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is thus not embracing a mixed society, but rather the possible and horrible effects of miscegenation: the downfall of humanity and the end of society as we know it.

In conclusion, based on the story of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* alone, it is difficult to determine if H.P. Lovecraft was indeed a racist or merely a man of his time. However, the role of racism and xenophobia in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is large enough to suggest that they have been major influences on it. Through the use of examples of Lovecraft’s portrayal of several aspects of the story, this essay has shown that a large portion of the fear, setting and theme stems from his own racism and xenophobia. This mentality permeates the entire story, all the way from the physical setting and environment, to the portrayal and treatment of the people of Innsmouth. Lovecraft’s own personal worldview and opinions of people of other races and backgrounds are similar enough to the descriptions used in the story and the views of the narrator to draw parallels between them. Racism and xenophobia are present, although mostly in subtle ways, and are in many cases used to create fear and horror. While *The Shadow over Innsmouth* can certainly be read without necessarily thinking about its racist and xenophobic connotations, analysing it with those aspects in mind allows for a deeper understanding and adds another layer to the story.

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