Finding Humanity in H.P. Lovecraft:

Enlightenment Humanity in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and *At the Mountains of Madness*

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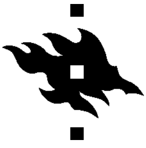

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Tutkielmassa analysoin ihmiskäsitystä ja sen rakentumista H.P. Lovecraftin (1890-1937) pienoisromaaneissa *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1936) ja *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936). Analyysissä tutkin tekstien ihmishahmoja, erityisesti kertojia, sekä myös teksteissä esiintyviä hirviöitä ja ihmiskäsityksen rakentumista hirviöiden kautta. Tutkin tekstien ihmiskäsitystä posthumanistisesta ja postkolonialistisesta tutkimuksesta nostetun valistushumanismin ihmiskäsityksen kautta. Hyödynnän tutkimuksessani myös hirviötutkimuksen löydöksiä, joiden mukaan hirviöt toimivat kirjallisuudessa ja kulttuurissa ihmisen ja ei-ihmisen kategorioiden välisen rajanvedon välineinä.

Väitän, että molemmat tekstit sekä rakentavat valistushumanistisen ihmiskäsityksen ihannoiman rationaalisen ihmishahmon että samanaikaisesti dekonstruoivat tätä ihmiskäsitystä. Lisäksi esitän, että molempien tekstien ihmiskäsitys näyttäytyy hierarkkisena ja joitakin ihmisryhmiä ulossulkevana, joskin hieman eri tavoin. *The Shadow over Innsmouthissa* hybridisten hirviöiden kautta rakentuva ihmiskäsitys asettaa valkoisuuden ihmisyyden normiksi ja sulkee rodullistetut ihmiset ihmisen kategorian ulkopuolelle. *At the Mountains of Madnessissa* taas painottuu luentani mukaan valistushumanistisen ihmiskäsityksen ihmiskeskeinen hierarkkisuus: rationaalinen valistusihminen asetetaan maailman keskipisteeksi, ja teksti pitää oikeutettuna, että valistusihminen dominoi ja hyväksikäyttää kaikkia muita elämänmuotoja.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The point of view and methods of the thesis

In July 2020, the prestigious Hugo Awards for that year were awarded. The 1945 Retroactive Hugo Award for Best Series was awarded to *The Cthulhu Mythos* by H.P. Lovecraft, August Derleth and others, which caused controversy (on the awards, see The Hugo Awards, 2020a; on the controversy, see responses to @TheHugoAwards on Twitter, 2020b and Ball, 2020). The primary cause of the controversy sparked by this posthumous award to Lovecraft was the American horror writer's well-known racist views (e.g. Sederholm and Weinstock 2016, 25-28; Simmons 2013, 15-16). Few would dispute, however, Lovecraft's influence on modern popular culture and horror fiction: concepts and imagery from his works have pervaded popular culture, from horror and science fiction literature and movies to music (Jones 2013, 227-230; Loponen 2019, 18). A pulp magazine writer who lived most of his life in poverty and relative obscurity (Joshi 2001, 168; Sederholm and Weinstock 2016, 1), Lovecraft has, in the 2000s, been accepted as a part of the American literary canon (Hantke 2013, 137); the influence of his works cannot be denied. This ongoing influence that his fiction exerts means that, even though Lovecraft's works have received much academic attention in the 2000s, the work of analyzing his writings critically is by no means over.

This thesis analyzes the construction of humanity in two of Lovecraft's novellas, *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and *At the Mountains of Madness.* Many critics have considered Lovecraft an anti-humanist and even misanthropic writer, whose stories express a worldview of "mechanistic materialism" where human beings are absolutely meaningless (Sederholm and Weinstock 2016, 4-6; Joshi 2001, 245). However, I hope to show in this thesis that the image of humanity constructed in these two works is more complex than that. Central to my thesis are the concepts of Enlightenment humanism and Enlightenment humanity, drawn from posthumanist and postcolonial theory. Enlightenment humanism exalts its subject, the Enlightenment human or "Man," who is defined by rationality, intelligence and individuality, and frequently by science. I intend to show that, while the analyzed texts may indeed take a dismissive outlook on humanity in general, they simultaneously construct a version of valorized Enlightenment humanity.

Even though it would be illuminating to study the construction of humanity in Lovecraft's fiction more generally, the scope of the present work only allows for the analysis

of two works, *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936) and *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1936) (abbreviated *MM* and *SoI*, respectively). Due to the fact that I am only analyzing two texts, one should not take the analysis as representative of all of Lovecraft's fiction: there may be works that express a different conception of humanity from these ones. However, limiting the number of analyzed works allows for detailed and in-depth analysis. I chose these texts mostly because they demonstrate different aspects of Enlightenment humanity. The two stories are also, according to S. T. Joshi, among Lovecraft's strongest works (Joshi 2001, 332). Both texts were written in 1931 (ibid., 300, 305), although published in 1936: thus, they can also be seen to provide a snapshot of Lovecraft's writing at a certain time.

In terms of genre, these works straddle horror and science fiction. Although Lovecraft's fiction in general is most commonly referred to as horror or weird fiction (Sederholm and Weinstock 2016, 1), most of his works post-*Call of Cthulhu* (written 1926: see Joshi 2001, 242) can also be defined as science fiction due to the fact that the "supernatural" events of the stories are eventually given a scientific justification (Joshi 2001, 300). While my analysis does not focus on the genre of the works per se, occasionally brief considerations of genre are relevant for the analysis.

Full synopses of each text will be provided at the start of the corresponding analysis chapter. Here I will provide shorter synopses of the texts. *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is about a fictitious New England town called Innsmouth, whose population appears to suffer from a disfiguring hereditary disease. Upon investigation, the narrator of the story discovers that the people of Innsmouth are the offspring of unions between humans and monstrous nonhuman creatures called Deep Ones, who live deep in the sea. The "disease" is in fact a physical transformation, where the hybrid descendants of humans and Deep Ones become more and more like the Deep Ones as they age. At the end of the story, the narrator finds out that he himself is descended from the people of Innsmouth, and to his horror, he undergoes the same transformation as the people of Innsmouth.

At the Mountains of Madness takes place in the Antarctic, where a scientific expedition discovers mysterious fossils previously unknown to science. Investigating the mountain range that gives the story its name, the narrator of the story finds an ancient, deserved city. He discovers that this city was once populated by intelligent alien creatures that he calls "Old Ones" and that the "fossils" are in fact hibernating Old Ones. He further finds out that the Old Ones once created all life on earth, including humankind. This revelation, and the narrator's insight that the Old Ones are in many ways much like humans, challenges the narrator's conceptions of the place of humanity in the universe.

Analysis of the conception of humanity in Lovecraft's works often must account for racism: numerous critics have noted that Lovecraft's racism is not only a matter of the author's personal opinions, but that racism is very much present in his literary work. To take but one example, China Miéville has said that Lovecraft's antihumanism is "predicated on murderous race hatred […] I don't think the racism can be divorced from [Lovecraft's] writing at all, nor should it be" (Weinstock 2016, 241). This observation prompted me to include this point of view in my analysis of how humanity is constructed in these works: who, in these texts, is included in (full) humanity, and who is excluded from it? Posthumanist and postcolonial critics of Enlightenment humanism note that Enlightenment humanism often, despite its claims to egalitarianism and universality, in practice excludes e.g. people of color, women, people with disabilities, and various minorities from full humanity (Gandhi 2019, Nayar 2013). Therefore, the examination of racism in the texts also ties in with the analysis of Enlightenment humanity. I intend to show that the conception of humanity constructed in these texts is a hierarchical and exclusive one: it sets some humans above others and even excludes some human beings from full humanity, particularly in terms of race.

Although I use some posthumanist theory in my thesis, it should be noted that this work is not posthumanist as such. This work does not participate in the posthumanist imagining of a new, more inclusive conception of humanity, of humans as biological-technological assemblies that contain nonhuman elements within themselves (Nayar 2013), or the articulation of a new ethical framework based on this new idea of humanity (Wolfe 1995, 33). I merely have found the philosophical foundations of posthumanism a useful theoretical starting point from which to embark on my analysis.

As the method of my analysis, I will employ close reading from two complementary points of view. Firstly, I will analyze the human characters (primarily the narrators) of the stories, with a particular focus on their epistemology, i.e. how they acquire and verify information. This is because a certain *method* of knowing things is constitutive of the Enlightenment human, as I will explain in more detail later. In addition to this, I will analyze the monstrous beings that the narrators encounter in the texts. This is because the monsters in these texts offer very useful insight on the nature of humanity that is constructed in the texts. I will explain the reasons for this in more detail in section 1.3., but to put it very briefly, monsters in literature and culture often function as devices that reveal the border between human and non-human. Thus, studying monsters helps us understand the construction of humanity (see Cohen 1996).

Literary texts play a crucial part in the definition and questioning of what it means to be a 'normal' human, or indeed human at all (Nayar 2013, 11-12). In this thesis, I interrogate the complex relationships between Lovecraft's fiction, Enlightenment humanism, scientific rationalism, monstrosity, humanity and normalcy. I hope to provide an analytical angle to Lovecraft's writing that has not been utilized before, and to perhaps make the reader re-think their assumptions of what it means to be human.

1.2. Enlightenment humanism and Enlightenment humanity

Unsurprisingly, the concept of Enlightenment humanism and the corresponding concept of Enlightenment humanity/Enlightenment human is one that can be traced back to the historical movement of the Enlightenment. Beginning in Europe in the 18th century, the Enlightenment can be characterized as aiming to replace religion with rationality and science as the epistemology that organized the world in the minds of people; or, in the words of Adorno and Horkheimer, "[t]he program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world: the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy" (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979, 3). This philosophical-political program also involved advocating for liberal reforms and societal progress, according to historian Peter Gay (Outram 2013,4).

This ambitious program for a rational new world was accompanied by a new conception of the human that I will here call "Enlightenment human", and a form of humanism that I will refer to as "Enlightenment humanism." The concepts are closely interlinked. The conception of the Enlightenment human is heavily predicated on mental characteristics, in particular rational thinking and intelligence, awareness or consciousness of one's self, autonomy and agency, or the capability to decide on one's actions (Nayar 2013, 15). These mental or cognitive characteristics are, in Enlightenment humanism, assumed to be common to all humans and constitutive of humanity itself. Enlightenment humanism posits a universal human, to the point that this creature can be referred to in the singular as the human, or sometimes, "Man" (ibid., 15, 23-24). Humanism is "the study of this individual subject" (ibid., 15), and typically takes it for granted that the human is at the center of the world, dominant over other life forms (ibid., 13). Enlightenment humanism takes a very positive outlook on its subject: "Man" is not only the measure of all things, but the gold standard of all things (Gandhi 2019, 29).

Given this background, why has Enlightenment humanism become a target of criticism in recent years? After all, such admirable things as the UN's Universal Declaration

of Human Rights are predicated on Enlightenment humanism, specifically the idea of all humans being created equal and “endowed with reason and conscience” (United Nations 1948). The concepts of inherent human value and human dignity likewise are based on Enlightenment humanism (Nayar 2013, 16). However, it turns out that while the principles of Enlightenment humanism may sound noble indeed, and the idea of the Enlightenment human sounds like one that exalts humanity in all its forms, in reality things have been less rosy. We noted that Enlightenment “Man” is constructed chiefly based on mental characteristics, such as intelligence and reason. One might think that this idea of the human as a creature of mind first would efficiently combat the treatment of some people as less worthy based, for example, on the color of their skin or their perceived gender. In practice, it turns out that at the same time that the rational Enlightenment “Man” was exalted based on his mental capabilities, women and people of color were frequently constructed by many thinkers as less mentally capable and, therefore, implicitly less human (Outram 2013, 76, 97-98; Nayar 2013, 23-24, 30). To give a more obvious example, there are human beings whose cognitive capabilities do not match the ideal of the Enlightenment human, such as people with cognitive disabilities, and few would dare to openly suggest that such people are not fully human. However, as Martha Nussbaum notes, theories of social contracts, which arebasic to the functioning of Western societies, tend to imagine society as consisting of “free, equal, and independent” (Nussbaum 2006, 98) and rational agents, i.e. Enlightenment humans. Predictably, these theories face considerable difficulties when they have to consider the fact that society also includes people with cognitive disabilities, and often are not able to adequately resolve these issues (ibid., 98.) As it turns out, the supposedly universal Enlightenment human is far from universal.

Leela Gandhi summarizes this failure of Enlightenment humanism’s universality as follows:

> While both of the humanisms [that is, Renaissance literary humanism and Enlightenment scientific humanism] we have been discussing assert that all human beings are, as it were, the measure of all things, they simultaneously smuggle a disclaimer into their celebratory outlook. The humanist valorisation of man is almost always accompanied by a barely discernible corollary which suggests that some human beings are more human than others – either on account of their access to superior learning, or on account of their cognitive faculties. (Gandhi 2019, 29)

Gandhi goes on to describe the concrete consequences of this thinking, where some humans are “more substantially the measure of all things” (ibid., 30) than others. Drawing on Kant’s characterization of the Enlightenment as an exit from “immaturity into the improved condition of maturity (Gandhi 2019, 30), she goes on to note how, for example, in colonial India, the colonized people were constructed as “childish” (and implicitly less human) in opposition to the enlightened “adult” colonizers. In this way, colonization was “justified” as a supposedly necessary process to spread Western Enlightenment to the rest of the world (Gandhi 2019, 32-34).

In addition to its Eurocentrism, Enlightenment humanism is also characterized by anthropocentrism – the idea that human beings are the center of the universe. This conception led to the idea that human beings were *above* other forms of life, and entitled to rule over them (Gandhi 2019, 36). Nayar contends that this “hierarchization of life forms” (Nayar 2013, 48) has led to “catastrophic effects for/upon animals, forests and plant life” (ibid., 48) According to Val Plumwood, the Western conception of the human as outside and above nature even underlies the current ecological crisis (Plumwood 1993, 2, 191-192).

Enlightenment humanism, to Gandhi, is near-synonymous with “scientific humanism” (Gandhi 2019, 29). By this she means that Enlightenment “Man” is primarily defined by a rational epistemology that was central to the development of the scientific method: in all interpretations of the Enlightenment, rationality is central, and for many writers on the Enlightenment, science embodies that rationality (Outram 2013, 100). Thus, science and the Enlightenment are closely linked, although to talk of “Enlightenment science” is anachronistic, since in the 18th century, the word “science” did not exist: the term “natural philosophy” was commonly used (ibid., 100-101). The term highlights the reason why science became a connecting thread between areas of Enlightenment thought (ibid., 100). Nature became “an ‘ethical norm’ in the Enlightenment” (ibid., 100), and science gradually emerged during the period as the study of nature.

It has been noted that the scientific program of the Enlightenment created a quest for the enlightened scientist to take control of nature by gaining total knowledge of it (Gandhi 2019: 35-37). However, this quest for knowledge and control turns to fear when the Enlightenment encounters something it cannot assimilate in its knowledge-system: the quest to know everything is paired with a fear of the unknown and the different. According to Gandhi, “modern rationality has often attributed a dangerous Otherness to the figure(s) of the deviant” (Gandhi 2019, 40) – the creation of the supposedly universal Enlightenment “man” appears to produce fear of and discrimination against those humans who fail to fit the mold.

This idea of “dangerous Otherness”, according to David Punter, led to the birth of Gothic horror fiction. Punter argues that this was not a coincidence but the consequence of the attempt of Enlightenment to eradicate the unknown, which only made the unknown more taboo and therefore terrifying (Punter 1980, 26-27).

Some critics of the Enlightenment go as far as to claim that this fear of alterity and the exclusionary logic of Enlightenment humanism led directly and logically to fascism and genocide (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979; Gandhi 2019, 40). Whether such historical continuums truly inherently resulted from Enlightenment thinking, or whether Enlightenment thinking merely failed to prevent them, is beyond the scope of the present work. For the present purpose it is enough to note that the legacy of Enlightenment humanism involves the past, and in some cases ongoing, exclusion of some groups of people from full humanity, implicitly or explicitly. Whether by design or by accident, Enlightenment humanism can be used to create unequal power hierarchies in society despite its apparent egalitarianism.

The influence of the Enlightenment was not limited to Europe or to the 18th century. As Europe expanded its political reach around the globe during the 18th century via trade, colonialism and imperialism, the Enlightenment turned out to be an idea with global reach. The United States, in particular, was established on Enlightenment ideals: “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” (Outram 2013, 4). Timewise, the reach of Enlightenment has been far longer than merely the 18th century. Its program of science and progress is one that has defined the modern world and even the concept of modernity itself – our modern world, shaped by science and technology, is heir to the Enlightenment (Outram 2013, 7, 99-100). Furthermore, Jonathan Israel argues that the “value-system and political orientation of the West today” (Israel 2006, 57) were born out of the Enlightenment.

Just as the Enlightenment is not limited to the 18th century but rather forms a continuum with modernity, neither should we assume that Enlightenment humanism or Enlightenment humanity were confined to the period of Enlightenment. Rather, the conception of the Enlightenment human is the image of “human” that has dominated Western thinking until late 20th century, when the category of “human” came under critical examination in various academic disciplines (Nayar 2013, 12). Therefore, the critical examination of Enlightenment humanism and the conceptual category “human” is not merely a matter of historical interest but continues to be of relevance today.

1.3. Monster theory

In the previous section, I reviewed theory relating to the category of "human" that I will use in my analysis. In this section, I will focus on theory that deals with monsters with a particular focus on monsters in horror fiction, as the works I analyze belong to the horror genre. In his seminal work *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990), Noël Carroll writes a lengthy analysis about monsters in the context of horror fiction – or, to be more precise, art-horror (Carroll 1990, 12-13). Carroll defines art-horror as a genre that separated from Gothic fiction beginning from the last half of the 18th century and which is characterized by the intention to provoke a certain affect – the emotion of art-horror – in the reader or viewer of the work. This emotion, in turn, is one of combined disgust and fear, provoked by the monster or monsters in the story (ibid., 19).

An astute reader notices, at this point, an apparent flaw in Carroll's claim: how do we know what effects a work of fiction is *intended* to cause in the audience? Authorial intention is a notoriously thorny question in the study of literature (see Farrell 2017). Carroll argues that in art-horror, this question is unusually easy to answer, as a work of horror will instruct the audience in how to react to it: the audience's responses to the events on the screen or page are supposed to parallel those of the "positive humans" in the story. The humans of the story feel terror and revulsion at the sight and touch of the monster, and the audience feels similar emotions as they witness the scene; although Carroll notes that the emotions of the human characters and the audience are not exactly the same, as the audience does not believe the monster to be real (ibid., 18).

Carroll does not make it very clear what he means by "positive human". As I understand his use of the term, a positive human is a "true" human character and not, for example, a character who initially appears human but who is later revealed to be a monster masquerading as a human. There is an interesting corollary to be made concerning the role of humans in art-horror that Carroll does not explicate. Carroll writes at length on the indispensability of monsters to art-horror – but what he does not explicate is that positive human characters are, likewise, essential to the genre of art-horror. Without positive humans in the story to model appropriate responses for the audience, the audience would not necessarily feel the emotions that characterize art-horror – as Carroll notes, monsters are present in many genres that are not art-horror, such as fairytales and myths (ibid., 16). In other words, horror stories need monsters, but they also need humans whom the monsters horrify. This idea, in some sense, is at the heart of my analysis of Lovecraft's works. Lovecraft is

frequently considered an “anti-humanist” writer, but applying Carroll’s theory, his works *must* contain some sort of humanity to guide the readers’ reactions to the monsters.

Let us now look at monsters and their central role in art-horror. Carroll proposes a fairly simple initial definition for a monster: “any being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science” (ibid., 27). This definition will be refined very soon to better describe monsters in art-horror. However, in this initial definition there is another corollary that Carroll also remarks upon later (ibid., 55-57): the existence of monsters is predicated on the limits of scientific knowledge, i.e. the knowledge system of science is necessary for the genre of art-horror. The monsters in art-horror inhabit the margins and gaps of scientific knowledge. We will discuss this liminal property of monsters in more detail shortly: but this corollary seems to combine in interesting ways with the relationship between Enlightenment (scientific) humanism and the emergence of Gothic fiction, discussed in section 1.2. Carroll, too, entertains the idea that Gothic horror, and in turn art-horror, were born as a reaction to the Enlightenment’s overemphasis on scientific rationality: “[w]here the Enlightenment valorizes reason, the horror novel explores emotions […] in opposition to the Enlightenment’s faith in progress, the horror novel indulges regression” (ibid., 56). He admits that the historical causality is hard to verify empirically, but concludes that in the conceptual sense, the opposition between Enlightenment and horror is valid regardless of whether the early readers and writers of Gothic literature thought of themselves as acting in opposition to the Enlightenment (ibid., 57).

Next, we need to improve the definition of monsters in art-horror. Carroll’s initial definition is not quite sufficient for the genre of art-horror: he expands the definition by stating that in addition to being currently non-existent according to science, the monster must also be in some fashion threatening to humans and, usually, disgusting (ibid., 28). Referring to Mary Douglas’s classic study *Purity and Danger* (1966), Carroll stipulates that the horror and disgust that monsters elicit is due to their being in some way impure: and that this impurity is a result of their being in violation of the “natural order”, or rather the categories that humans construct to make sense of the world they live in (Carroll 1990, 31-32). This liminal property of monsters, that they are always “category violations” and horrifying as a result of this property, is crucial to my analysis. Monsters are, fundamentally, creatures that challenge and violate the conceptual schemes of humans. This creates an additional aspect in the threat that monsters pose to the positive human character (and, by extension, to the audiences) of art-horror: besides their physical threat, monsters are cognitively threatening, because they “breach the norms of ontological propriety” and thus threaten to shatter humans’

mental construction of the world (ibid., 16). Here, too, we can see the idea that horror is the "underside of the Enlightenment" (ibid., 56): for monsters to be "unnatural", there must exist a conception of "nature," which was central to Enlightenment thought (ibid., 55).

Carroll gives a detailed account of the characteristics and role of monsters in the limited realm of art-horror, but as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues in his influential *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), there are some characteristics of monsters that can be recognized in literature and culture in general. In Cohen's view, monsters are cultural signifiers that reveal something about the anxieties of the culture that spawned them: monsters should always be read in relation to the social, cultural and literary-historical context that they appear in (Cohen 1996, 5-6). Cohen makes a very similar point to Carroll about the "ontological liminality" of monsters that threatens the categories that humans see as natural and fundamental to the construction of reality:

> This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions. (ibid., 6)

The "forms" that the monster straddles are myriad: monsters can violate the borders between humans and animals, between different species, between male and female, between living and dead, and many more. The monster is, deep down, a device that questions ontological categories constructed by humans, the "order of things". This makes them not only physically, but also morally and cognitively dangerous. Cohen, too, connects literary and cultural monsters to science and sees monsters as resistant to the attempts of science to comprehend and order reality: "In the face of the monster, scientific inquiry and its ordered rationality crumble" (ibid., 7).

Another side of the boundary-breaking property of monsters is that many monsters embody cultural Otherness in some way. Cohen gives numerous examples of how various groups that are othered and seen as "not us" have historically been represented as monstrous and thus threatening: the examples range from Biblical times to the modern era. Most of the examples represent racial difference made monstrous, but Cohen notes that "[any] kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body" (ibid., 7), although the most common types of monstrous alterity are "cultural, political, racial, economical, sexual" (ibid., 7). As we will see, this tendency of monsters to represent dangerous Otherness

is important to my analysis, particularly regarding *SoI*: in *SoI*, monsters participate in the construction of humanity by showing who is othered and excluded from full humanity.

Monsters are, fundamentally, creatures of borders and limits. They not only embody the twilight zones between ontological categories, but they also "[police] the borders of the possible" (ibid., 12). By this, Cohen means that many monsters are warning signs (the word *monster* originates from *monstrum*, "that which warns" [ibid., 4]) against culturally prohibited behavior. In numerous ancient and classical myths, humans are transformed into monsters as a punishment for violating some taboo (ibid., 12-13). By showing what is prohibited, monsters simultaneously make visible the perimeter that a culture draws around acceptable, normal, *human* behavior. This far, and no further: there be dragons.

A particularly common class of prohibitions that is expressed through monsters is related to sexual behavior. Many a monster exists to enforce rules against incest, miscegenation or homosexuality (vampires, from Le Fanu's *Carmilla* to HBO's *True Blood* series, being commonly associated with the latter [ibid., 5]). Monstrosity that results from violating the taboo against miscegenation is a theme that runs from the Bible to 20th century horror movies (ibid., 15-16), and it will also be relevant for my discussion of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.

In violating borders and categories, monsters make those borders and categories visible. Those borders and categories, in turn, are essential to the construction of humanity: categories construct humans' understanding of the world, and borders delineate what a human is allowed to do, what a human being can *be*. It follows that monsters, as cultural phenomena, are essential to the construction of the conceptual category 'human': this is the ultimate category that the monster interrogates with its existence. In Cohen's words, "[the monster is] an abjecting epistemological device basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and identity formation" (ibid., ix) – the identity being formed here is the identity of a human. For this reason, I have chosen to include an analysis of monsters when analyzing the humanity in *SoI* and *MM*. The analysis of monsters offers an alternative and fruitful point of view to the analysis of humanity.

1.4. Text history and primary text versions

In this section, I will briefly review the text histories of my primary texts and the versions I have chosen to use, as well as the reasons for that choice. While *The Shadow over Innsmouth* was originally published as a novel (Joshi 2001, 382-383) and therefore its text history is

rather simple, the case of *At the Mountains of Madness* is more complicated. *MM* was first published in the pulp magazine *Astounding Stories* in a serialized format, and this version was edited in ways that did not please Lovecraft (ibid., 372). This raises interesting questions about what the “authentic” or “original” text version of *MM* is. I will not delve into this issue here, but due to the fact that there exist different text versions of *MM,* has I have chosen to analyze two versions of each text: the version printed in *Necronomicon*: *The Best Weird Tales of H.P. Lovecraft: Commemorative Edition* (2008) as well as the online versions available at “The H.P. Lovecraft Archive” (www.hplovecraft.com).

The printed versions of the texts were chosen on the basis of availability, whereas the online versions were chosen on the basis of availability and due to the fact that the website is maintained, among others, by S. T. Joshi, who has written several books on Lovecraft as well as edited an edition of his works, *The Annotated H.P. Lovecraft* (1997). Given Joshi’s reputation as an expert on Lovecraft’s works, I feel rather confident that the online versions can be considered “authentic”: but to be surer of textual correctness, I have compared the online and *Necronomicon* versions of both texts while writing the analysis. The two versions of *SoI* are virtually identical except for that *Necronomicon* uses more modernized spelling and sometimes different punctuation. This similarity is probably to be expected due to *SoI*’s unproblematic text history. The versions of *MM* differ more: in some places, the online version contains short passages of text that are missing from the *Necronomicon* version, in addition to similar differences of spelling and punctuation as in *SoI.* Differences between the text versions are indicated in the text of the thesis where relevant for the analysis: differences and spelling and punctuation, however, are not indicated. All page numbers provided are those of *Necronomicon*, as the online versions do not have page numbers. All quotes from texts are likewise from *Necronomicon* unless otherwise indicated.

2. Analysis of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*

This chapter will investigate the *SoI* narrator's Enlightenment human qualities and how the category of "human" is constructed in the story. My method of analysis will be dual: I will analyze the narrator and other positive human characters of the story, but also the monsters. This is due to the fact that literary monsters often function as devices that mark the boundaries of the human category. The analysis will also delve into the subtle and less subtle racialization of the non-human monsters, and how this creates a boundary limiting humanity, or at least full humanity, implicitly to white people.

2.1. Synopsis

The Shadow over Innsmouth (henceforth shortened *SoI*) tells the mystery of a fictitious New England town called Innsmouth. The narrator, a young, college-educated man on a poor man's *grand tour* of New England, learns of the existence of the town, which is plagued by a mysterious decay and whose inhabitants acquire a distinctive and repulsive "Innsmouth look" in their physical appearance as they age (see section 2.3.2. for a detailed description of their appearance). The narrator takes it upon himself to find out the cause of Innsmouth's decay and the strangeness of its people. He learns that the reason for both is that the people of Innsmouth have interbred with non-human but demonstrably intelligent marine creatures called the Deep Ones, creating a hybrid population. These Innsmouth hybrids become more and more like the Deep Ones as they age, eventually leaving land and joining the Deep Ones deep in the sea. As night falls, he is attacked by the inhabitants of the town and escapes Innsmouth on foot, relaying to the Federal government his information on the existential danger facing humanity.

After his investigation of and escape from Innsmouth, the narrator learns, to his horror, that he himself is descended from the Innsmouth hybrids, and he starts to undergo the transformation and acquire "the Innsmouth look". The story ends on an ambiguous note: the narrator expresses an intention of "taking to the water" and joining the Deep Ones in the sea, but it is not quite clear whether his traumatic experiences have caused him to go insane and hallucinate his transformation, or whether he truly undergoes the transformation and his mental state is affected as a result.

2.2. The humans

In this section, I analyze the narrator of *SoI*, particularly his ways of acquiring information about the mystery of Innsmouth. As noted in the Introduction, epistemology is central to the concept of Enlightenment humanity; or: humanity is a "function of the *way* in which man knows things" (Gandhi 2019, 29, emphasis in original). Therefore, if I wish to analyze the novella's narrator as an example of Enlightenment humanity, it is useful to look at how he acquires information during the course of the story.

2.2.1. The narrator: alternating between two epistemological modes

The narrator has access to two epistemological modes, which alternate during the story. The first one, which is dominant for most of the story, is a rational "scientist mindset" consistent with the Enlightenment humanist "Man". The second one is an irrational, intuitive, partly non-conscious mode, which is triggered by exposure to the monsters at Innsmouth and which allows him to know the monsters, which are unknowable to a rational human.

First, let me explain what I mean by the narrator's "scientist mindset". The narrator implicitly approaches solving the mystery of Innsmouth, in many respects, like a rationalist scientist. Before he travels to Innsmouth to make his field observations of the town, he "look[s] up data" (509) about the town at a library. Note the use of the word "data" rather than "information," since the usage repeats several times in the story (see 519, 549, 550), suggesting that this is a very deliberate word choice. Furthermore, during the course of the story, the narrator collects data about Innsmouth from multiple sources and informants. The data acquired in this way is remarkably consistent (to the point of the story becoming repetitive), which appears to suggest that the narrator's story is factually true within the fictional universe.

Having thus acquired background data about Innsmouth, the narrator then travels to the spot to do observations with a scientific eye ("To my architectural and historical anticipations was now added an acute anthropological zeal…" [511]), or at least he sees himself as doing so. It is noteworthy that even though he appears to view the inhabitants of Innsmouth as basically humans in the species sense (see section 2.3.2.), the narration still repeatedly calls them "specimens" (518, 519), dehumanizing them as the objects of his research.

However, there are multiple instances in the story where the narrator's "scientist mindset" or rational epistemology breaks. When confronted with Innsmouth and its

monstrous inhabitants, he slips into a different, intuitive mode of acquiring knowledge, as in the following excerpt when he sees the driver of the bus that takes him to Innsmouth:

> This, I reflected, must be the Joe Sargent mentioned by the ticket-agent; and even before I noticed any details there spread over me a wave of spontaneous aversion which could be neither checked nor explained. 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. (512)

The "wave of spontaneous aversion" is immediately followed by a paragraph of rational inspection and a clinical description, with few explicitly value-laden descriptors, of Joe Sargent's appearance: "When the driver came out of the store I looked at him more carefully and tried to determine the source of my evil impression" (512). The description suggests a "dull, expressionless face" and "cutaneous disease" (512), but otherwise it is somewhat hard to see any rational reason why Joe Sargent should have given the narrator an "evil" impression – even skin disease should be only cause for disgust at most, rather than an impression of malice or evil.

This pattern repeats several times in the story: the narrator is struck by ominous and fearful impressions when confronted with the people of Innsmouth, but he is able to quickly return to his rational mode. In his rational state of mind, he can no longer make sense of why he felt such horror. This pattern is well exemplified by this quote, where the narrator observes the people of Innsmouth: "Somehow these people seemed more disquieting than the dismal buildings, for almost every one had certain peculiarities of face and motions which I instinctively disliked *without being able to define or comprehend them*" (515, emphasis added). The Innsmouth people inspire instinctive dislike in the narrator, but he is not able to analyze or understand the precise characteristics in the Innsmouth people that cause him to dislike them. The monstrous people of Innsmouth hover just beyond the reach of the narrator's ability to know them with his rational mind: it is left to his non-rational instinct – and emotions – to recognize them as subtly outside humanity.

At times, the narrator manages to dispel the knowledge supplied by his instincts and rationalize the horror away, as in the following excerpt:

> And as I looked, a certain object crossed or seemed to cross that dark rectangle; burning into my brain a momentary conception of nightmare which was all the more

> maddening because analysis could not show a single nightmarish quality in it. […] The thing which had probably caught my first subconscious glance and supplied the touch of bizarre horror was the tall tiara he wore; an almost exact duplicate of the one Miss Tilton had shown me the previous evening. […] There was not, I soon decided, any reason why I should have felt that shuddering touch of evil pseudo-memory. Was it not natural that a local mystery cult should adopt among its regimentals a unique type of head-dress made familiar to the community in some strange way – perhaps as treasure-trove? (516)

As shown in this excerpt, contact with the mystery of Innsmouth causes the narrator subconsciously to be horrified, but his rational mind cannot determine the cause of that horror; and, once the narrator recovers his rational epistemological mode, it is almost as if the emotion of horror itself disappears. The horror that the monstrosity of Innsmouth inspires exists only as vague impressions that cannot be analyzed or comprehended by Enlightenment rationality, as in the quote from the passage above: "analysis could not show a single nightmarish quality of it". The monstrosity in Innsmouth is something that Enlightenment rationality, for all its supposed ability to know and control all of the world, simply cannot know.

As it turns out, the intuitive knowledge of the monsters that the narrator has acquired, even though not quite accessible to his rational mind, saves him when the monsters try to enter his hotel room, whose door he has bolted. Consciously, the narrator appears to have minimized the presence of any danger in his mind, despite all the menacing things he has heard of Innsmouth, but his subconscious has sensed the danger and prepared him for escape:

> My sensations upon recognising this sign of actual peril were perhaps less rather than more tumultuous because of my previous vague fears. I had been, albeit without definite reason, instinctively on my guard – and that was to my advantage in the new and real crisis, whatever it might turn out to be. […] The readiness with which I fell into a plan of action proves that I must have been subconsciously fearing some menace and considering possible avenues of escape for hours. From the first I *felt* that the unseen fumbler meant a danger not to be met or dealt with…. (536, emphasis added)

In the quote above, the narrator is calmer and better able to rationally plan his escape because, even though his rational mind has not been able to understand the monstrosities of Innsmouth

for what they are, his nonrational instincts have. Note how the narrator does not know, but rather feels, that the “unseen fumbler” at his door is dangerous. The alternation of emotions and reason continues throughout the story. The dual description, where the narrator first describes the Innsmouth creatures with terrified, disgusted impressions and then returns to an objective, almost dissecting way of description, occurs once more when the narrator views the procession of the monsters on a moonlit clearing during his escape from Innsmouth:

> And yet I saw them in a limitless stream – flopping, hopping, croaking, bleating – surging inhumanly through the spectral moonlight in a grotesque, malignant saraband of fantastic nightmare. […] I think their predominant colour was a greyish-green, though they had white bellies. They were mostly shiny and slippery, but the ridges of their backs were scaly. Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed. At the sides of their necks were palpitating gills, and their long paws were webbed. They hopped irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four. I was somehow glad that they had no more than four limbs. Their croaking, baying voices, clearly used for articulate speech, held all the dark shades of expression which their staring faces lacked. (548-549)

In this scene, the narrator’s worldview is shattered as he witnesses fully transformed Innsmouth hybrids. Previously, he has been able to view the inhabitants of Innsmouth as “abnormal” humans (this idea will be developed more fully in section 2.3.2.), but now, as he sees their clearly nonhuman bodies “in objective flesh” (548), he can no longer sustain that notion. Having witnessed this clear evidence of a clearly nonhuman species that is capable of “articulate speech”, the narrator promptly faints. The upsetting thing here is not only exposure to a sight that monstrously violates his idea of how the creatures of the world should be categorized – humans clearly as humans and animals as animals – but the fact that he has encountered a non-human species that carries signs of thinking and civilization. Even though the narrator cannot understand their speech, he can now identify it as speech, rather than just meaningless sounds. Previously, when he heard the creatures speak, he was only able to describe it as “hoarse barkings and loose-syllabled croakings [that] bore so little resemblance to recognised human speech” (537) and was not even sure if the “noises” were voices or not. Language, even if the narrator cannot understand it, acts here as a signifier of intelligence and

civilization. A similar emphasis on language is a recurring theme in Lovecraft's fiction (see George 2016, 171.)

In other words, this is an instance where humanity is unseated from its place as the undeniable center of the universe and the pinnacle of nature: there are contenders, and threatening ones at that. (As we will see, this idea is more fully developed in *At the Mountains of Madness*.) The cognitive threat of the monsters is twofold here: both the "disturbance of natural order" described by Carroll (Carroll 1990, 16, 32) that the Innsmouth monsters present in their hybrid, fish-frog-vaguely "anthropoid" (human- or ape-like) bodies, and the fact that they threaten humans' self-understanding as the center and top of the world.

To conclude, the novella's narrator shows qualities that clearly mark him as a representative of Enlightenment humanity: an explicitly rational way of acquiring information and approaching the mystery before him. However, this is undermined by the fact that his rationality is not sufficient or appropriate for truly knowing the monsters of Innsmouth, which lie outside the purview of rational humanity, as violations of the "natural order" constructed by scientific humanity: they can only be known by reverting to an intuitive, more emotional mode of knowing. Enlightenment humanity is thus both constructed and undermined in the story.

2.2.2. The other human characters

In this section, I will analyze the other positive human characters in the story (see section 1.3. in the Introduction for the concept of "positive human" as used by Carroll 1990). A caveat: the line between positive human characters and monsters is not necessarily an easy or safe one to draw in *SoI*, as humanity in the story is precarious and easily contaminated. As it turns out (see section 2.4.), not even the ostensibly human narrator remains one by the end of the story: he finds out that he himself is descended from the Deep Ones, and he undergoes the physical transformation into a creature of Innsmouth. However, the narration appears to draw a clear line between the "normal" humans and the "abnormal" monsters that the narrator meets; therefore, for the lack of a better concept, I will use that division to classify the characters of *SoI*.

A noteworthy feature of these positive human characters in the story – the ticket-agent, the librarian Miss Tilton, the boy at the grocery store, and Zadok Allen – is that they receive very little, if any, characterization, and they have nearly no meaningful interaction with the narrator (and none with each other). Their role in the story is limited to acting as information-

dispensers for the narrator as he delves into the mystery of Innsmouth: the narrator even refers to them as his “informants” (505, 518, 519). Save for Zadok Allen, the characters are basically interchangeable “talking heads”, characters in name only.

Zadok Allen, the old, possibly mentally ill alcoholic is however a more interesting case. Living in the poorhouse and spending his days loitering and drunk whenever possible (note that the story explicitly takes place during Prohibition), he occupies a liminal space at the margins of society and of rational, respectable humanity (Gandhi 2019, 40). He also serves as the narrator’s most valuable informant regarding the mystery of Innsmouth. No one else is able to provide the narrator with the secret of the Deep Ones who have interbred with the people of Innsmouth and sometimes come out of the sea at night, a story that the narrator dismisses as a myth but that appears to be confirmed by the later events of the novella. While Zadok’s madness – that is, his loss of rationality – appears to be a consequence of his knowing the secret of Innsmouth, his liminal location at the very edge of rational humanity apparently allows him to have the knowledge of the true nature of the monsters. If the monsters are unknowable to rational humanity, as seen in the previous section, then it takes someone who has partially left the purview of rational humanity to know them.

2.3. The monsters

2.3.1. Monstrous hybridity

The monsters of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* are the “Deep Ones”, creatures that live in a city deep under the sea off the coast of Innsmouth. They are capable of interbreeding with humans: the offspring of those unions start their lives appearing outwardly human, but as they progress in age, they acquire the “Innsmouth look” and become more and more like the Deep Ones. Eventually, they transform fully into Deep Ones and “take to the water” (553), joining other Deep Ones in the underwater city.

The narrator describes the Deep Ones - or hybrids of Deep Ones and humans far along in their transformation – that he sees during the pivotal night scene as “blasphemous fish-frogs” (549): “Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed” (548). Everything about these creatures embodies hybridity. In their bodies, they incorporate two different nonhuman animals (fish and frogs). They “[hop] irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four” (548), alternating between human and animal movements. And of course the most

meaningful aspect of their hybridity, and the one that makes them truly threatening to (Enlightenment) humanity, is their breaking of the human-nonhuman border: although quite clearly a different species, they can breed with humans and thus violate a supposedly inviolable biological boundary, the species border. Furthermore, their offspring make the species border even more fluid, as they apparently move from one species category to another during their lifetime - they start their life looking like “normal” humans, but become more and more like the Deep Ones in appearance as they progress in age, eventually leaving land and taking to the sea once their transformation is complete. The meaning of the species border is questioned altogether in this transformation: by changing from one species to another during their lifetime, these creatures violate the laws of nature.

We are deep in the territory that Carroll describes when he tells us that the horror that monsters inspire arises from category violations (Carroll 1990, 34). Categories are not natural as such, but rather something humans construct to make sense of their world and to create a semblance of control over their environment: monsters are creatures that pose not only a physical but, more importantly, a mental threat to the way things should be (ibid., 34). It is in fact noteworthy in *SoI* that it is not clear that the monsters pose a physical threat to the narrator. The narrator merely assumes that they do, and they certainly form a mortal threat to the way he comprehends the world: “It was the end, for whatever remains to me of life on the surface of this earth, of every vestige of mental peace and confidence in the integrity of Nature and of the human mind” (548). As briefly noted by Joshi in *Weird Tale* (Joshi 1990b, 223), it is possible that, given that the narrator himself is descended from the Deep Ones, the monsters are not hostile to him at all but rather wish to welcome him in their midst. However, probably because the narrator is still a positive human at that point, he is unable to perceive that possibility and instead only sees the creatures as a physical threat.

2.3.2. “Abnormal horror”

The Innsmouth creatures have all the usual characteristics of horror monsters: they breach the laws of nature, they inspire fear and disgust in the narrator, and they are hybrid. However, it is noteworthy that for most of the story, the narrator does not in fact consider the Innsmouth denizens he meets to be nonhuman in the strict species sense. Instead, he repeatedly describes them as “abnormal” but implicitly human, stricken by some disease or “degeneration”: while he hears tales of the Deep Ones during the course of the story, he initially considers them the stuff of legends. The people are described as having the “Innsmouth look”, characterized by

the travel agent as “queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy stary eyes that never seem to shut, and their skin ain’t quite right. Rough and scabby, and the sides of their necks are all shrivelled or creased up” (507). The narrator also notes a “peculiarly shambling gait and saw that [Joe Sargent’s] feet were inordinately immense” (512). Note in these early quotes how the narration mentions the fish-like attributes of Innsmouth denizens, such as gills on the sides on their necks and webbed feet, without explicitly describing them as such: the full reveal of the horror is saved for later.

The narrator’s perception only changes late in the story, when he sees a procession of “fish-frogs” so far removed from humanity that he can no longer justify their appearance as a mere “abnormal” element inserted in humanity. He certainly tries hard to keep thinking of the creatures as “abnormal humans”, just before he describes the procession of the creatures: “My other pursuers had been accursedly abnormal—so should I not have been ready to face a *strengthening* of the abnormal element; to look upon forms in which there was no mixture of the normal at all?” (548, emphasis in original) This is a curious passage – “normal” here appears to refer to what the narrator has defined as “normal” *humanity*, and the abnormal the nonhuman element in Innsmouth denizens. In the quote, the narrator talks about fully transformed Innsmouth denizens who have undeniably become nonhuman – “forms in which there was no mixture of the normal at all”. It is clear that “normal” here means “human”, and “abnormality” means nonhuman.

The idea of normality, applied to humans, is a value-laden one, as shown by e.g. Grue and Heiberg (2006) in their discussion of the historical development of the concept. The concept of the statistical “normal” as developed by Adolphe Quetelet in the 19th century began innocently enough as the observation that many human features, on the population level, were statistically distributed according to the so-called normal distribution. However, Grue and Heiberg argue, along with Davis (2006), that the idea of “the average man” (whose features corresponded to the “normal”) became conflated with an *ideal* man – what humans normatively *should* be, not just what they statistically *were*.

Grue and Heiberg further discuss how the statistician and eugenicist Frances Galton built on Quetelet’s work to turn the normal distribution into a tool for rank-ordering people according to their “civic and genetic worth”. Those whose qualities fell below the average “normal” were considered of less worth, whereas the “normal” masses capable of benefiting society were labeled “respectable” and the statistically rarer people endowed with “better” than average qualities were considered of higher worth (Grue and Heiberg, 2006). Normal, then, emerges as a conceptual tool for dividing humans into those who were worthy of

participation in society, or indeed worthy of life (the “normal”), and those who were not (the “abnormal”). Grue and Heiberg cite the Nazi eugenics program and eventually the Holocaust as examples of the worst consequences of this othering way of thinking, and argue that the pressure towards normalization still affects the lives of people with disabilities.

The social prerogative to normality, of course, does not only affect people with disabilities: sexual and gender minorities too, for example, feel the pressure to be “normal” (as opposed to “deviant”). The pressure towards normalization is related to monsters and their function as the guardians of the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior, discussed in section 1.3. Ingebretsen (1998) writes on the normalizing social function of monsters: monsters act as the warning examples of what an acceptable citizen must *not* do, and thus the acceptable (“normal”) citizen is constructed through the monster via negation. Ingebretsen points out that people who fail to perform gender “correctly” or act in a way that society considers sexually “deviant” frequently are treated as monsters. Again, we discover monsters as devices of border construction: this time the border is the one separating normality from abnormality and socially acceptable behavior from socially abhorrent behavior. Implicitly, this border is simultaneously the same one that bounds humanity (Ingebretsen 1998, 30): abnormal turns out to equal “not (fully) human.”

Now that we have reviewed the significance of the normal/abnormal distinction, let us look at some more examples of that distinction in *SoI*. When investigating the mystery of Innsmouth, the narrator learns that “[i]t would be of no use […] to ask the natives anything about the place. The only one who would talk was a very aged but *normal*-looking man who lived at the poorhouse on the north rim of the town…” (518, emphasis added). The passage refers to Zadok Allen, described in section 2.2.2. The mention of his age is significant because previously in the text the “Innsmouth look” has been stated to become worse and more “abnormal” as the individual ages. The “normality” that Allen has retained despite his advanced age marks him as not “tainted” or “aberrant” (518): in other words, fully and undoubtedly human.

Just before this, we have been treated to the following narration, as the narrator acquires information about Innsmouth from a young man working in a local grocery store:

> The youth was certain that many specimens even worse than the worst visible ones were kept locked indoors in some places. People sometimes heard the queerest kind of sounds. The tottering waterfront hovels north of the river were reputedly connected by hidden tunnels, being thus a veritable warren of unseen abnormalities. (518)

Of note is the way in which the “abnormal” inhabitants of Innsmouth are dehumanized in the passage: aside from the objectifying word choice “specimens”, as mentioned in section 2.2.1., the word “warren” leads one to think of the inhabitants as burrowing animals. This is far from the only time the narrator dehumanizes the inhabitants of Innsmouth, even when he putatively describes them as belonging to the human species. The dehumanization and description of the Innsmouth natives as “abnormal”, appearing side by side in the text, once again strengthen the impression that “normality” is a property of those deemed fully human.

The dehumanization, and the accompanying marking of “normality” as a property belonging to humans, is clearly visible in the following passage: “Furtive, shambling *creatures* stared cryptically in my direction, and *more normal* faces eyed me coldly and curiously” (522, emphasis added). “Furtive” and “shambling” are descriptors that frequently stick to the people of Innsmouth, and “furtive”, in particular, is connected in the text to animals that hide from humans: “[The Innsmouth people] were as furtive and seldom seen as animals that live in burrows…” (518). The words relate, more or less, how the denizens of Innsmouth move and carry themselves: “furtive” expressing that they tend to avoid humans such as the narrator, and “shambling” describing a slow, dragging type of walking. Combined, the descriptors appear to connote lack of propriety and honesty.

There is one more occurrence of “abnormality” in the text worth mentioning, one slightly stranger than the others. This one occurs during the narrator’s escape from Innsmouth, when he looks out to the sea:

> Far out beyond the breakwater was the dim, dark line of Devil Reef, and as I glimpsed it I could not help thinking of all the hideous legends I had heard in the last thirty-four hours – legends which portrayed this ragged rock as a veritable gateway to realms of unfathomed horror and inconceivable abnormality. (542)

The use of the word “abnormality” is somewhat strange here, as the narrator is referring to Zadok Allen’s tale, which marks Devil Reef as a place where Obed Marsh would perform sacrificial rites to call the Deep Ones up from the sea. The narrator should have no reason to refer to the Deep Ones as “abnormal”, as, according to the tale, they are not of the human species and therefore are outside the normal/abnormal dichotomy - and yet he does. It appears that at this point in the story, “abnormal” has come to signify simply “horrifying” or

"unnatural", making the value judgment of the normality/abnormality dichotomy obvious. Normal is desirable and abnormal something to be shunned, avoided and feared.

As we will see, the ideas of normality/abnormality (and the value judgments present in the division), coupled with other signifiers attached to the monsters of *SoI*, have far-reaching implications for the image of humanity that is constructed in the story. To better understand these implications, I will next analyze another concept that crops up frequently in *SoI*: degeneration.

2.3.3. Degeneration

> Clearly, in the eyes of the educated, Innsmouth was merely an exaggerated case of civic degeneration. (509)

This is first instance where degeneration is mentioned by name in the text. It occurs fairly early on, after the ticket agent has provided the narrator with basic information about Innsmouth as well as several alternative explanations for the town's decline and dark reputation. These include devil-worshipping (which the agent dismisses as ridiculous), the epidemic of 1846 taking out the "best blood" in the town, and finally the attribution of the "strangeness" of the Innsmouth folk to interbreeding with people from "queer ports in Africa, Asia, the South Seas" (507). Make note of this racist notion that the "strangeness" of Innsmouth is the result of racial mixing (assuming that the inhabitants of Innsmouth, a town in New England, are white and the people in these "queer ports" are not): it is crucial for the analysis of degeneration in *SoI.*

Historically, degeneration is a complex idea that started its life in the 19th century as a medical diagnosis and an explanation for various medical conditions, but which then expanded to a more general, putatively scientific concept of "racial decline" (Pick 1989, 8-9, 21, 230). Degeneration was seen as a biological force that "produced degeneracy in society" (ibid., 21): thus, via heredity, degeneration was not only of concern for the afflicted individual but the whole society. As Pick notes, there were also strong racist aspects to the idea of degeneration. In the 19th century, the concept of degeneration came to include the notion that the "white race" was the pinnacle of evolution and the other races (as they were construed in the biological sciences of the time) were "degenerate," placed below white people on a ranking scale of humanity (ibid., 21, 61-62). Degeneration was, in a sense, the flip side of the Enlightenment idea of progress: the fear that progress might be reversed into regression, that

time might start to run backwards towards an atavistic, primitive past (ibid., 62; McClintock 1998, 9).

There exists a connection between the ideas of degeneration and normality: Pick notes that the term degeneration was often applied to "deviations from the 'normal type' of humanity" (ibid., 50). Various physical conditions, moral failures and mental illnesses were all seen as the products of degeneration. Furthermore, Pick notes that, over time, degeneration expanded from a medical concept - explaining the medical problems of an individual - to a sociological one that was used to explain social ills (Pick 1989, 20). We can see both uses of the concept operating in *SoI*. "Biological degeneration" (513) is named as a possible explanation for Joe Sargent's (the Innsmouth bus driver's) "odd" and "alien" (512-513) appearance, but the town's general decay is also explained by "civic degeneration" (509). The "death and decay" (522) of Innsmouth are not confined to the people, but are instead visible in the dilapidated buildings themselves: it is as if degeneration is spreading from the people to their physical environment. The idea of degeneration as spreading outwards from the affected individuals to the wider society is even taken as far as the narrator hypothesizing that the town is causing "contagious madness" (547) or mass hallucinations of horrors in the "normal" people from outside who visit it.

The social or cultural sense of "degeneration" is also present in the story, as evidenced by this quote where the narrator interviews an elderly librarian about Innsmouth: "[Miss Tilton's] own attitude toward shadowed Innsmouth – which she had never seen – was one of disgust at a community slipping far down the cultural scale…" (511). The excerpt shows a rank-ordering of cultures from "primitive" to "civilized" – not entirely unlike Galton's rank-ordering of people – as well as the possibility of a culture or society "degenerating" to a lower rung on that ladder.

Let us next look at instances where the narration uses the medical sense of "degeneration" – in other words, describes the people of Innsmouth and their difference in terms of disease. The rhetoric of disease is present from the narrator's first encounter with an Innsmouth native, the bus driver Joe Sargent, where the narrator notes that, among other unusual and vaguely disgusting features in the man's appearance, "in places, the surface [of his cheeks] seemed queerly irregular, as if peeling from some cutaneous disease" (512). When the narrator reaches Innsmouth and questions the youth at the grocery store, we are told that, of the Innsmouth people, "… it was generally only rather young people who were seen about in public, and of these the oldest were apt to be the most tainted-looking. […] One wondered what became of the bulk of the older folk, and whether the "Innsmouth look" were not a

strange and insidious disease-phenomenon which increased its hold as years advanced" (518). Here, the "strangeness" of the people of Innsmouth is explained as the consequence of a degenerative disease, and their difference is evaluated negatively by the use of the word "tainted." The narration continues to refer to the "Innsmouth look" as an "affliction" and a "malady."

It should be noted that in all these instances, the narrator is constantly unsure of whether the "Innsmouth look" is indeed a case of disease or a racialized "blood strain" of "foreign" heritage in the New England town. The following passage shows him contemplating the alternative explanations side by side:

> For one thing, the people were more hideous and abnormal than those near the centre of the town […] Undoubtedly the alien strain in the Innsmouth folk was stronger here than farther inland – unless, indeed, the "Innsmouth look" were a disease rather than a blood strain, in which case this district might be held to harbour the more advanced cases. (521)

In this passage, the narrator calls the people of Innsmouth "hideous and abnormal", attributing their hideousness and abnormality either to an "alien strain" (from the "queer ports in Africa, Asia, the South Seas," 507) or alternatively a slowly progressing degenerative disease. The repeated juxtaposition of these qualities – of disease and non-white heritage – arguably equates them in the story, especially when both are given as possible explanations for why the people are "hideous" and "abnormal". In this passage, then, "normal" is subtly marked as both "healthy" and "white European".

We are approaching the point where *SoI* reveals itself as a deeply racist story. While the narrator is at this point uncertain of what has caused the "degeneration" of Innsmouth, both in the social and medical sense, the audience will eventually learn that it is caused by the fact that the town's human inhabitants have interbred with the Deep Ones and produced hybrid offspring, who are marked by the "Innsmouth look". There is, therefore, a very literal non-human "alien strain" in the people of Innsmouth, but as I will show in the next section, simultaneously the monstrous people of Innsmouth are in many ways discursively linked to people of color.

2.3.4. Explicit and implicit racialization

This section analyzes the ways that the monstrous Innsmouth people are racialized in the narration. The process starts with the travel agent's lengthy exposition of Innsmouth and the popular dislike against it and its inhabitants, which the travel agent attributes to "simply race prejudice" (507), directed at a "foreign" strain in the population of Innsmouth:

> … what a lot of our New England ships used to have to do with queer ports in Africa, Asia, the South Seas, and everywhere else, and what queer kinds of people they sometimes brought back with 'em. […] Well, there must be something like that back of the Innsmouth people. […] There certainly is a strange kind of streak in the Innsmouth folks today – I don't know how to explain it, but it sort of makes you crawl. (507)

In this quote, we can already see that foreignness is regarded as something disgusting or disconcerting. Furthermore, as will become apparent in this section, foreignness is here functionally equal to non-whiteness and not simply being from a different country than the United States.

The narrator takes the suggestion of "foreign blood" as his working hypothesis when he starts to investigate Innsmouth, as shows in his inspection and description of Joe Sargent, the first person with the "Innsmouth look" that he encounters: "Just what foreign blood was in him I could not even guess. His oddities certainly did not look Asiatic, Polynesian, Levantine, or negroid, yet I could see why the people found him alien. I myself would have thought of biological degeneration rather than alienage" (513). While he is unable to pinpoint the "source" of Joe Sargent's otherness and tends toward the explanation of disease ("biological degeneration"), the passage shows a few interesting things. First, the narrator is clearly thinking in terms of putative biological human races (a now discredited notion), as he inspects Joe Sargent and tries to find physical signifiers of a non-white "race." The vocabulary that he uses while doing so reveals that he is clearly thinking in terms of quasi-biological "race" rather than, say, country of origin. Secondly, there is a very clear line being drawn at what is considered an "oddity" and "alien" versus what is "normal" and "familiar": it is presumed non-white heritage that is marked as a source of "oddity" and "alienage", which in turn marks whiteness implicitly as "normal" and "familiar".

A third observation that can be made from this very telling passage is the juxtaposition of "foreignness" or "alienage" (read: non-whiteness) and an unspecified disease as alternative explanations for the mystery and decline of Innsmouth, as noted earlier. This occurs several times, with the narrator unsure of which cause to attribute the town's degeneration to. A possible effect of this repeated juxtaposition is that the value judgments and connotations of either attribute bleed into the other: and so the negative connotations attached to disease also become attached to non-whiteness.

It would be easy to discount this argument on the basis that, as we learn later in the story, the "strangeness" of Innsmouth is caused by the town's (assumedly white) human population interbreeding with non-human creatures rather than non-white humans. Following this line of thinking, the initial attribution of the townspeople's "aberrant" appearance and the town's decline to "foreign blood" being introduced to the previously white town, as the ticket agent does, is a mere narrative misdirection that is supplanted by the revelation that the "foreign strain" of Innsmouth is in fact nonhuman rather than non-white. However, the racialization and the presentation of "foreignness" as an integral part of the monsters' alterity do not end here. The Innsmouth monsters, during the narrator's escape from the town, are at times described in terms that closely resemble racist stereotypes of Black people, as in this excerpt: "[I] was horrified by the bestial abnormality of their faces and the dog-like sub-humanness of their crouching gait. One man moved in a positively simian way, with long arms frequently touching the ground…" (545). The idea of "sub-humanness", of course, is one with very racist implications as well, and the description of one man's (note that the narrator, at this point, still sees the monsters as fundamentally human) movements as "simian" and with "long arms frequently touching the ground" is an image which, while here not explicitly attached to a Black person, still carries the racist connotations (see Loponen 2019, 65 for similar racist stereotypes in fantasy fiction). A similar description of "dirty, simian-visaged children" (515) occurs early on in the story, as the narrator describes the general decay of Innsmouth.

It should also not escape our notice that while the degeneration, ultimately, is not technically caused by the town's white inhabitants "mixing" with people of color, the introduction of Deep Ones to the people of Innsmouth happens in connection with Obed Marsh's voyage to the Pacific Islands. In other words, it is still a threat from outside white New England, from a racialized location, that causes the corruption and decline of the town and its people. This aspect of the story comes across as xenophobic at least, if not actually racist.

When discussing how *SoI* constructs "foreignness" as frightening, it is instructive to look at how the narrator treats the Innsmouth people's speech. The narrator repeatedly draws attention to the speech of the Innsmouth people, its sound and particularly its language: "… the passengers […] shambled to the sidewalk and exchanged some faint guttural words with a loafer in a language I could have sworn was not English" (534). The word "guttural" comes up several times when the narrator describes the Innsmouth people's speech, as does the mention that they are not speaking English. Both notions are presented as frightening or disgusting, as when the narrator describes Joe Sargent as speaking in "a throaty voice of peculiar repulsiveness" (534). "Guttural" or "throaty" sounds are uncommon in the English language, and native speakers of American English tend to evaluate "guttural" accents (such as Russian speakers of ESL) negatively (Lindemann 2005). We can infer that the probable effect of describing the speech of Innsmouth people as "guttural" is dual: the description makes the reader evaluate the Innsmouth hybrids' speech both as "foreign" and "unpleasant".

The notion of the monsters not speaking English is repeated with more certainty later in the story during the narrator's escape from Innsmouth, when he hears the monsters speaking in "horrible croaking voices exchanging low cries in what was certainly not English" (541). We should note that this is in some way justified as a source of disquiet to the narrator, as it is noted early on in the story that "foreigners seldom settled [in Innsmouth]" (509), and therefore hearing a non-English language in the town can be considered strange. However, combined with the other ways the creatures' speech is described in the story, the notion of non-English language as frightening cannot be seen as an innocent choice in the story.

Besides the Innsmouth creatures' speech being described as "not English," it is also said to be non-human, as in this excerpt when the narrator is accosted in the hotel: "A moment later I felt less sure that the deeper sounds were voices, since the apparent hoarse barking and loose-syllabled croakings bore so little resemblance to recognised human speech" (537). As with the observation that the monsters' speech does not sound like English, the narrator's certainty of the non-humanity of their speech increases as the story progresses to his escape from the town: "… the noises swelled to a bestial babel of croaking, baying, and barking without the least suggestion of human speech" (547). Before, he was unsure; now he describes their "noises" as "without the least suggestion of human speech," as the non-humanity of the creatures is finally established. It is noteworthy that the narrator's certainty of his identification of the creatures' language as non-English increases in a similar way as his certainty of the non-humanity of their speech. As with the previous analysis of the

juxtaposition of disease and non-white heritage as causes of Innsmouth's degeneration, here, too, non-English language and nonhuman noises are presented side by side for the reader, and implicitly equaled with each other.

The monsters' speech is also explicitly frightening aside from the assumed physical threat that they pose, as can be seen in this quote: "But even in this acute moment my chief horror was something apart from the immediate weakness of my defences. I was shuddering because not one of my pursuers, despite some hideous pantings, gruntings, and subdued barkings at odd intervals, was uttering an unmuffled or intelligible vocal sound" (539). The narrator's "chief horror" is not that he feels physically threatened but that he is not able to understand the monsters' speech: unintelligible speech that does not sound how the narrator expects human speech to sound is represented as frightening.

To reiterate the analysis so far: the Innsmouth monsters' speech is presented in turns as "not English," unintelligible, frightening and non-human. A curious boundary emerges in these representations: one where "foreign" (non-English) speech is not only unintelligible but also frightening (or outright terrifying and "hateful") and even non-human. It is noteworthy that the narrator does not progress during the story from the recognition of the speech as "not English" to recognizing it as "not human," but instead these notions are carried in the text side by side. English functions in the text as a signifier for "humanity," or at least the local New England humanity.

The very last description of the monsters' speech occurs when the narrator witnesses the creatures' moonlight procession and describes their voices as "clearly used for articulate speech" (549). During the course of the story, the narrator has subtly grown from first recognizing the monsters' speech as tentatively "not English" and having "little resemblance to recognised human speech" to then seeing it as certainly non-English and non-human and a fully unintelligible "bestial babel," to finally recognizing it as expressive "articulate speech," albeit not in any language he knows. There is a subtle change in how he perceives the monsters that is most visible through how he perceives and describes their speech: from an initial impression of the creatures as "aberrant" humans, then racialized and dehumanized "subhumans", and finally the recognition of them as a fully non-human, entirely distinct species with a distinct means of communication. The creatures pass, in the narrator's perception of them, from human to non-human through a racialized conceptual space that stands between non-human and (implicitly: white) fully human. In other words, the narration constructs a category of humanity that excludes people of color, or at least banishes them to its margins.

Let us now tie together the various threads of monstrosity that I have analyzed in this chapter. As I have shown, the monsters of Innsmouth are racialized in various ways in the story and subtly presented as originating from outside (white) New England or white America. Furthermore, their interbreeding with the (implicitly white, as e.g. Joe Sargent's description shows) human population of Innsmouth is presented as causing both biological and "civic" degeneration, which the narrator presents as a thing to be horrified and disgusted by. Given all this, it is very hard not to read the plot of *The Shadow over Innsmouth* as a metaphor for the perceived danger of miscegenation (the "mixing" of putative human "races") and its supposed deleterious or degenerative effects on society.

The construction of the monsters of *SoI* as simultaneously racialized, dehumanized, degenerate and non-human also shows how *SoI* draws the perimeter around humanity: humanity is marked as white, and the miscegenation of white people and people of color causes the degeneration of a previously white society. (Remember Pick's observation that in the history of the idea of degeneration, non-white "races" were thought of as degenerate in comparison to the white "race" (Pick 1989, 21).) In *SoI*, the line separating humans from non-humans is implicitly drawn in order to exclude people of color from full humanity, if not humanity altogether.

2.4. The narrator's monstrous transformation

In section 2.2.2., I mentioned that the narrator does not stay a "positive human" until the end of the story. This is because at the end of the story he learns, through multiple sources, that he himself is descended from the Deep Ones and gradually undergoes a transformation similar to the people of Innsmouth, losing his humanity in the process.

The claim of the narrator's transformation must be accompanied by the qualification that the narration is somewhat ambiguous, leaving room for two different interpretations. Either the narrator truly undergoes the transformation, or else he is going insane after his traumatic experiences and hallucinating that he is transforming into an Innsmouth hybrid. To some degree, the narration seems to imply that the explanation for the changes as insane hallucinations is mere desperate denial from the narrator, who does not wish to accept the "hideous truth." Notably, the narrator keeps his rational tone and capability of precise observation even as he apparently undergoes a physical transformation:

> It was then that I began to study the mirror with mounting alarm. The slow ravages of disease are not pleasant to watch but in my case there was something subtler and more puzzling in the background. My father seemed to notice it, too, for he began looking at me curiously and almost affrightedly. What was taking place in me? Could it be that I was coming to resemble my grandmother and Uncle Douglas? (553)

By the reference to his grandmother and uncle, the narrator means two of his relatives who he knows to have shown traces of "the Innsmouth look". The narrator undergoes one of two possible transformations: either he physically transforms into an Innsmouth hybrid and loses his humanity, or he experiences a less literal transformation into a non-rational madman and therefore loses his rational Enlightenment humanity (Nayar 2013, 23, 138). Either transformation results, one way or another, in the loss of his Enlightenment humanity. The fact that the narrator seems to retain his rational cognitive state fairly long into the transformation implies that his transformation is primarily physical (resulting in an eventual change of mental state, as noted below) rather than psychological. For the purposes of my analysis, it is not very significant even if the transformation ends up being caused by madness and hallucination rather than biological predestination, as either case results in the loss of the narrator's Enlightenment humanity. Likewise, in either case, the transformation is caused by the Enlightenment human being "contaminated" by the monstrous, either by biological descent or by infectious encounter.

Whether caused by biology or by madness, the narrator's transformation is accompanied by a notable change of his emotions towards the monstrous. What previously aroused horror, culminating in the narrator's fainting when he witnesses the full extent of the alterity of the Innsmouth monsters, becomes a source of lyrical ecstasy. "The tense extremes of horror are lessening, and I feel queerly drawn toward the unknown sea-deeps instead of fearing them. I hear and do strange things in sleep, and awake with a kind of exaltation instead of terror" (553). This change in emotion marks the moment when the narrator loses his Enlightenment humanity: he no longer fears the monstrous Other or seeks to separate himself from it, but embraces it joyfully and decisively, planning to unite with his cousin, who is also hinted to have "the Innsmouth look": "I shall plan my cousin's escape from that Canton madhouse, and together we shall go to marvel-shadowed Innsmouth" (554).

The change in tone in this final paragraph is outright jarring compared to only two pages earlier, where "the Innsmouth shadow (…) had so darkly coloured my imagination" (552). The reader is likely meant to be horrified by the dissolution of the narrator's

Enlightenment humanity (Carlin and Allen 2013, 83) – although the exact effect on the reader probably varies. Recall here Carroll's notion that in art-horror, the emotions of positive humans instruct the audience in how to react to the story. At the end of *SoI*, that positive humanity disappears as the narrator transforms and his emotions cease to be a reliable indicator of how the audience should react – the audience is left to fend for itself, emotion-wise.

The final sentence of the story reads: "We shall swim out to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to Cyclopean and many columned Y'ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory for ever" (554). The tone of the narration and the narrator's attitude to the Deep Ones are entirely changed. Gone are the fearful descriptions of "monstrosity," "blasphemousness," and "abnormality" that earlier accompanied these creatures: these are replaced by awe and elation. Whether by madness or physical transformation, the narrator has lost his fearful Enlightenment human outlook on non-human alterity.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the construction of humanity in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and compared the humanity constructed in the story to Enlightenment humanity. The narrator of the story is a rational Enlightenment "man," whose rationality however fails upon contact with the monstrous Innsmouth hybrids. By constructing a rational Enlightenment humanist narrator and having his rationality fail upon contact with monstrous alterity, the story – perhaps unintentionally – reveals the limits of the capability of Enlightenment humanism to face alterity.

Perhaps the most interesting, and the most ethically problematic, aspect of the story's construction of humanity is its racialization of the monstrous Innsmouth hybrids. The Innsmouth hybrids are described in terms that resemble racist stereotypes of African Americans, and they are also discursively cast as foreign to white, English-speaking America. Parallel to this run discourses of degeneration and normality/abnormality that are closely linked to the racism of the story. The monstrous hybrids of Innsmouth act as an allegorical warning tale against miscegenation: the racialized hybrid monsters are a terrifying result of white Americans interbreeding with alien creatures from "outside." In this, the monsters reinforce the taboo against interracial relationships that was very real in the United States in

the 1930s: as Cohen (1996) notes, monsters are frequently employed in culture to enforce the prohibition of miscegenation (Cohen 1996, 15-16).

It should be noted that this interpretation of *SoI* as a metaphor for the perceived dangers of miscegenation is not new: e.g. S. T. Joshi (2001, 305-306) has written on it previously. However, I have not found previous analyses of *SoI*'s miscegenation allegory in terms of the story's general conception of humanity anywhere. In implicitly casting whiteness as a "normal" state of humanity that is disturbed by the intrusion of "abnormal" foreign elements, *SoI* constructs a conceptual category of humanity that excludes people of color: in *SoI*, only white people get to be fully human. This is sadly consistent with the observation that Enlightenment humanism has, despite its claims of egalitarianism, tended to exclude people of color from humanity or at least relegate them to the status of not-quite-human.

3. Analysis of At the Mountains of Madness

The analysis in this chapter focuses on how the category of ‘human’ is constructed in *MM*. I will again analyze the human characters (predominantly the narrator) from the viewpoint of Enlightenment humanity, as well as the monsters that function as devices for the construction of the human/nonhuman border. I will introduce some comparisons with my analysis of *SoI*, although I leave more detailed comparisons to the Conclusion of this thesis. The analysis will also compare the human, quasi-human and monstrous characters of the story, and highlight some ethical issues in the story’s construction of humanity.

3.1. Synopsis

At the Mountains of Madness (henceforth abbreviated *MM*) recounts the experiences and findings of a fictional Antarctic expedition that takes place in 1930-1931. What begins as a geological and paleontological investigation turns strange as excavations performed by the group’s biologist, Lake, reveal perfectly-preserved fossils of previously unknown creatures that challenge accepted scientific knowledge. The narrator of the story learns of this via radio, as the expedition has split into two groups. The following night, the group of scientists that discovered the fossils are gruesomely killed and the bodies maimed.

Shocked by the murders of his fellow scientists, the narrator of the story, along with his assistant Danforth, goes on an airplane expedition over a mystifying mountain range that the late group of scientists discovered before their deaths. Beyond the mountains, they find a deserted city that they understand to have belonged to alien creatures called the Old Ones that ruled the Earth forty million years ago, and they come to understand that the “fossils” that Lake’s group found and studied were, in fact, Old Ones in a state of hibernation. In the city, they find evidence of the Old Ones’ bygone civilization and the destruction of that civilization, which leads the narrator to identify the Old Ones with humanity, calling them “the men of another age” (495). They also discover that all life on Earth, including the human species, was once created by the Old Ones: in this, the Old Ones replace humans as the dominant species of the planet. The scientists are forced to end their investigation as they encounter a terrifying monster called a Shoggoth, which forces the scientists to escape the city. The narrator tells the story of the expedition only unwillingly, in order to warn another planned expedition to Antarctica of the existential danger to humanity that lurks in that continent.

3.2. The human narrator

This section focuses on the narrator of *MM*, who, like the narrator of *SoI*, is what Carroll (1990) calls a 'positive human' – even more so than the narrator of *SoI*, whose humanity is challenged by the end of the story. The narrator of *MM* is a scientist and firmly associated with the scientific rationality that is central to Enlightenment "Man". The narrator retains a mostly rational tone and a rational method of acquiring information throughout the story, with one exception, which we will discuss later: it occurs when the narrator encounters the Shoggoth. (The scientists, however, also resort to mythical explanations for any inexplicable things they find, which could be said to constitute a breach of scientific rationality: I will discuss this below.)

There are two ways in which the narration works to establish the narrator, a geologist participating in the scientific expedition, as having the thought process of a rationalist scientist. First, the narration is littered with very exact information concerning the times and locations of events and discoveries: even the location of the titular mountains is given with exact geographical coordinates ("Probable Latitude 76° 15', Longitude 113° 10' E ," (431)). The biologist Lake's messages describing the hibernating Old Ones that he has discovered are time-stamped, and the narrator keeps precise track of the dates of the events in the story. The narration strives to give the impression of a scientific report, with precise and objective information that could at least theoretically be fact-checked and verified within the fictitious universe.

It should be noted that this preoccupation with reporting precise times all but disappears as the narrator and Danforth enter the dead city beyond the titular mountains. While this is partially because the start and end times of that expedition are reported, and the journey happens within the span of only sixteen hours (448), the change in the tone of the narration is noticeable. It is as if in this "monstrous" and "aeon-dead" (464) city, human time and the precision of time demanded by a modern, scientific society lose their meaning, giving this section of the story a timeless, dreamlike quality (on modern time schema, see e.g. Hunt 2008, 25). In the presence of monstrosity and in touch with deep time – a recurring theme in Lovecraft's fiction (see Carlin and Allen 2013, 74) – mere human time appears to become meaningless.

The second way in which the narrator is constructed as "thinking scientifically" is the repeated referencing of scientific discoveries and theories, many of which would have been

very recent and cutting-edge in 1931, when *MM* was written. These include several vague references to quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity as well as a mention of the discovery of Pluto,[1] which happened in 1930 (Leonard 1930). A particularly prescient reference concerns "the theories of continental drift lately advanced by Taylor, Wegener, and Joly" (472), first proposed by Wegener in 1912 but only accepted by the scientific community in the 1960s as plate tectonics (Oreskes 1999, 9). A less lucky example is a reference to "planetary ether" (474), a theory concerning the substance with which some nineteenth-century physicists proposed that space is filled. The theory had already been made obsolete by Einstein's theory of relativity by 1931, but for some unknown reason, Lovecraft continued to believe in it (Joshi 1990a, 19). Aside from the mishap with ether, the story's genre approaches "hard" sci-fi (Roberts 2006, 15), giving an impression that the story is solidly tied to then-contemporary real-world science: the story creates an illusion of happening in the "real" world, rather than in an imaginary, fantastic one.

Why is the narration so eager to construct the narrator as a rationalist scientist and to give the impression that the story is happening in the "real" world? There is a heightened concern in the story, expressed most powerfully in the beginning, that what the narrator has to tell will not be believed: "Doubt of the real facts, as I must reveal them, is inevitable; yet if I suppressed what will seem extravagant and incredible there would be nothing left" (422). The narrator is worried that even the photographic proof he has of his discoveries beyond "the mountains of madness" (449) will be considered forged: "The hitherto withheld photographs, both ordinary and aerial, will count in my favour, for they are damnably vivid and graphic. Still, they will be doubted because of the great lengths to which clever fakery can be carried. The ink drawings, of course, will be jeered at as obvious impostures…" (422).

The narrator is so convinced of the scientific skepticism of his fictional audience that he can conceive of no proof that would convince them: photographs can be forged, and ink drawings will be seen as obvious fiction. The narrator, then, is left with only his word as the assurance that he is speaking the truth, and the acceptance of his report becomes a matter of whether he will be believed. This is a moment where one of the pillars of Enlightenment humanism is stealthily deconstructed: scientific knowledge becomes a matter of belief, not undeniable truth. The deconstruction goes even deeper in this paragraph:

[1] The mention of Pluto is absent from the version of the story printed in *Necronomicon*, but present in the online version; hence the lack of page number. The quote is from the online version.

> In the end I must rely on the judgment and standing of the few scientific leaders who have, on the one hand, sufficient independence of thought to weigh my data on its own hideously convincing merits or in the light of certain primordial and highly baffling myth cycles; and on the other hand, sufficient influence to deter the exploring world in general from any rash and over ambitious programme in the region of those mountains of madness. It is an unfortunate fact that relatively obscure men like myself and my associates, connected only with a small university, have little chance of making an impression where matters of a wildly bizarre or highly controversial nature are concerned. (422)

This paragraph is taken from the beginning of the story, where the narrator talks of the necessity of convincing other scientists against further Antarctic exploration, and the difficulty in doing so due to the incredibility of his report. Here, the narrator is not putting his hopes of succeeding in the persuasiveness of his data but that scientific leaders will have "sufficient independence of thought" to "weigh [his] data on its own […] merits" – in other words, without the consideration that it comes from researchers of little standing and representing only a "small university". On the other hand, he hopes that the rest of the scientific world will be convinced by the word of these "scientific leaders" of high status.

The most noteworthy thing about this passage is that what is accepted as scientific truth becomes not only a matter of belief, but a matter of *who* is believed: those of high standing in the community of scientists. The ideal of science as the open-minded weighing of evidence is corrupted by status contests within the scientific community: the narrator places his hope of success in that a) the scientific leaders will deem his data trustworthy and b) the influence of the scientific leaders can prevent further explorations, whereas the narrator's own influence cannot. Rather than being objective and based on evidence, what is accepted as scientific truth becomes a matter of the status of the person presenting the evidence.

All this considered, the painstaking construction of the narrator as a rationalist scientist appears to be a strategy for assuring his narratees of the truthfulness of his report. Lacking objective data that would convince the narratee, the narrator has to resort to constructing an identity as a rational, objective, trustworthy scientist, the epitome of the Enlightenment "man". While the narration superficially appears to deconstruct Enlightenment humanism – and, in a sense, it does, as it deconstructs the ideals of scientific truth – it simultaneously constructs and affirms it in the identity of its narrator. Scientific Enlightenment humanism is both deconstructed and constructed in *MM*.

As noted earlier, there is a way in the story in which the scientists' rationality could be said to fail when encountering inexplicable creatures. This is the scientists' use of myths as explanations for inexplicable discoveries. This happens from the very beginning of the story, in the previous quote, where the narrator considers the possibility of the "scientific leaders" weighing his work "in the light of certain primordial and highly baffling myth-cycles" (422), and it is present in Lake's description of the Old Ones he discovers:

> Complete specimens have such uncanny resemblance to certain creatures of primal myth that suggestion of ancient existence outside antarctic becomes inevitable. Dyer and Pabodie have read *Necronomicon* and seen Clark Ashton Smith's nightmare paintings based on text, and will understand when I speak of Elder Things supposed to have created all earth life as jest or mistake. (438-9)

Natural scientists raising "primal myths"[2] as even vaguely convincing explanations for their findings in this way is quite unscientific, irrational and borderline ridiculous: and yet the supposedly utterly rational Enlightenment scientists of *MM* do so here. This reliance on mythical explanations when faced with that which scientific models fail to explain (such as the Old Ones, which Lake fails to classify as either plant or animal) can perhaps be called a lapse of rationality, although it is not nearly as dramatic as the narrator's switch between epistemological modes in *SoI* when he encounters the Innsmouth hybrids. The latter affects the narrator's entire cognition, unlike the *MM*'s scientists' reliance on the realm of myth and art where science fails.

The reason for this difference between the narrators of *SoI* and *MM* is not explicated in the text. One could think that *MM*'s less pronounced failure of rationality upon encounter with the monstrous is because the characters do not actually ever meet living Old Ones in the flesh (those that do, do not survive the encounter). In *SoI*, the narrator physically meets the Innsmouth hybrids, which prompts a more dramatic change in his cognition. (Note that the physical encounter with the Shoggoth near the end of *MM* prompts a cognitive switch similar to *SoI*, as we will see later.) The *SoI* narrator's greater failure at being a rational human could also be due to his own contested humanity: he carries non-humanity within his own body, although this does not become apparent until the end of the story.

[2] Incidentally, the myths mentioned refer to parts of Lovecraft's mythos that have been introduced in his other stories (see Joshi 2001, 243-5 for a brief treatment of the Mythos).

3.3. The Old Ones

In this section, I introduce the first of the monsters that the narrator of *MM* encounters: the Old Ones. The researchers' first encounter with these creatures occurs when one of the expedition groups finds a cave full of fossils thirty million years old or older, including several damaged and several perfectly intact "specimens" (437) that are unlike anything known to science. "Dark grey, flexible, and infinitely tough" (437), eight feet long and barrel-shaped, with "flexible arms or tentacles", wings and five-pointed, starfish-shaped heads, the things confound the scientists thoroughly. The biologist of the expedition inspects and dissects one specimen but fails to "assign [them] positively to animal or vegetable kingdom" (438), as they exhibit features of both categories. In other words, the creatures are hybrid and challenge the categories that the scientists (and by extension, humans) use to make sense of the world: signs of monstrosity.

However, it is noteworthy that the feelings of fear and disgust, the marks of a horror monster according to Carroll (1990), are absent in the scientists' initial interaction with the creatures. Rather, the things initially inspire wonder and puzzlement with their extreme age, perfect preservation, hybridity and highly developed and unknown structure. The only cause of disgust is the "pungent and offensive odour" (440) of the fluid they ooze when cut, which maddens the expedition's sledge-dogs. (The Innsmouth denizens in *SoI* also provoke intense dislike in animals.)

The biologist Lake dissects one specimen, covers it with a tarpaulin, sends a final radio message to the narrator and the other members of the expedition, and decides to rest for the night. The following day, there is radio silence from Lake's camp, and the worried narrator, accompanied by some other members of the expedition, flies to the camp to investigate. Upon arrival, they find the camp destroyed, the men and dogs gruesomely killed, the damaged "specimens" buried, and the undamaged ones missing without a trace. One man and one dog are also missing. The narrator draws our attention to how the slaughtered men and dogs have been not only killed, but mutilated:

> I have said that the bodies were frightfully mangled. Now I must add that some were incised and subtracted from in the most curious, cold-blooded, and inhuman fashion. It was the same with dogs and men. All the healthier, fatter bodies, quadrupedal and bipedal, had had their most solid masses of tissue cut out and removed, as by a careful

butcher; and around them was a strangle sprinkling of salt – taken from the ravaged provision chests on the planes – which conjured up the most horrible associations. (450)

This scene is the first hint that the "human" category is going to be challenged during the course of the story, even though the significance of the scene is only going to become clear later. This is not merely a butchering, but a dissection, as the narrator notes a while later when he refers to the "human incision subjects" (450) and "carefully though oddly and inexpertly dissected parts of one man and one dog" (451). The humans, who earlier were dissecting the hibernating Old Ones, have now become the objects of dissection; and to add insult to injury, they are lumped in the same category with dogs in the process. And as the narrator will learn and reveal later, the dissection was carried out by the Old Ones who awakened to find out one of their kind cut apart by the humans; thus, the roles of human scientist and nonhuman dissection-subject are reversed. This reversal also dramatically changes the nature of scientific dissection: when done by the Old Ones on humans, it ironically becomes "inhuman" rather than an act of scientific curiosity, a lauded act of an Enlightenment human.

The sprinkling of salt around the bodies of men and dogs is another subtle challenge to the humanity of the scientists. The image calls to mind the folklore practice, observed in several cultures, of sprinkling or pouring salt to ward against evil spirits or demons (Laszlo and Mader 2001, 149).[3] In this, the humans are made into monsters that the Old Ones try to protect themselves from. In further irony, it also marks the Old Ones as creatures that, despite the narrator's later claims of the Old Ones' scientific thinking, cling to folklore and myth as their first explanation when facing the unknown. In this, they are not at all unlike the human scientists, who also resort to mythological explanations frequently.

The third irony in this scene that hints at the coming challenge to humanity is the burial of the damaged Old Ones: some of them apparently died during their hibernation, and the narrator finds these "six imperfect monstrosities carefully buried upright in nine-foot snow graves under five-pointed mounds punched over with groups of dots" (447). This burial strikes him as "crazy" (451), very possibly because he assumes that the missing scientist or some other human did it, and he cannot understand why any human would give funeral rites to non-human "monstrosities" (454). Later the narrator and the reader can infer that the burial,

[3] Another possible interpretation is that the Old Ones used the salt to preserve the flesh cut from the bodies: the text does not state what happened to those removed "solid masses of tissue".

too, was carried out by the surviving Old Ones, who marked the graves with symbols that are meaningful for them.

Next, the narrator and his companions carry out a burial of their own: "We buried the human parts beside the other ten men, and the canine parts with the other thirty-five dogs" (451). In burying the men and the dogs separately, they reaffirm the human-animal boundary, which has been momentarily disturbed by the indiscriminate dissection performed by the Old Ones. The symmetry of mutual dissection of the Other and respectful burial of one's own kind is near-perfect, and it foreshadows the later identification of the Old Ones with humanity. The humans, without realizing it yet, carry out the exact same actions that the Old Ones carried out earlier – dissection and burial.

Upon observing the horror at the camp, the narrator's outlook on the Old Ones changes. Previously, he displayed no fear or disgust towards them, but now he refers to them as "those hellish Archaean organisms" and "nightmare specimens" (450). It appears that the arrival of horror to the narrative also triggers a change in the narrator's attitude regarding the creatures: his emotions change into ones more typical for horror.

This atmosphere of vague fear and a feeling of "monstrosity" continue to be present when the narrator and the graduate student Danforth investigate the deserted city of the Old Ones beyond the "mountains of madness." This is in spite of the fact that no physical danger is present, save for the encounter with the Shoggoth near the end of the story: it is primarily the sheer age ("appalling antiquity," 466) of the city that appears to make it horrifying. As already noted in section 3.1., the narrator's investigation of the city eventually leads him to identify the Old Ones with Enlightenment humanity. However, before we delve into the analysis of how that change of perception occurs and what it means, let us first look at the other species of monsters present in *MM*: the Shoggoths. This will give us more perspective on the significance of the Old Ones' humanization.

3.4. The Shoggoths

In this section, I will analyze the second kind of monsters in *MM*, the Shoggoths. The narrator encounters a Shoggoth only very briefly near the end of the story in the deserted city of the Old Ones (although he learns of their existence earlier when studying the murals of the city). The encounter is a terror-filled one, as the Shoggoth chases the narrator and Danforth through an underground tunnel, and only by sheer luck the humans manage to lose their pursuer. This is the one instance in the story where the narrator's rationality slips into irrationality and

intuition in a manner similar to the narrator of *SoI*: "[The sight of the Shoggoth] crippled our consciousness so completely that I wonder we had the residual sense to dim our torches as planned, and to strike the right tunnel toward the dead city. Instinct alone must have carried us through – perhaps better than reason could have done…" (498). Similarly to the hotel scene in *SoI* where the narrator's subconscious prepared him for escape, in this scene instinct briefly serves the human characters better than rationality when it comes to escaping an assault by a monster.

This cognitive switch from rationality to irrational instinct is perhaps to be expected, as this is the only time in the story when the narrator encounters a true horror monster: the Old Ones, who are eventually identified with humanity, do not qualify as such. The Shoggoths, appearance-wise, have many monstrous qualities: they exude a disgusting smell and are formless, "shapeless entities composed of a viscous jelly which looked like an agglutination of bubbles" (473). Carroll notes that formlessness can function as a type of monstrous defiance to categorization, as a formless or endlessly shape-changing creature is impossible to pin down as a member of any category (Carroll 1990, 33). Shoggoths inspire the characteristic monstrous combination of fear and disgust: seeing a mere sculptured image of a Shoggoth "fill[s] Danforth and [the narrator] with horror and loathing" (473). They are black, iridescent and fifteen feet in diameter when spherical, but capable of taking on many forms and even transforming their protoplasm into "temporary limbs and organs" (473). This malleability is by design, as the Shoggoths are an artificial species created by the Old Ones as "ideal slaves" (469) to build and maintain the Old Ones' civilization.

Unlike the Old Ones, the Shoggoths remain firmly placed outside humanity throughout the story. Not only are they never identified with humanity as the Old Ones are, but their hideousness is partially outside the capability of human language to describe: "The words reaching the reader can never even suggest the awfulness of the sight [of the Shoggoth]" (498). The narration goes as far as to say that "Shoggoths and their work ought not to be seen by human beings or portrayed by any beings" (495) and to describe the glimpse of the Shoggoth in a somewhat self-aware manner as "the utter, objective embodiment of the fantastic novelist's 'thing that should not be'" (499). These creatures are something so antithetical to the narrator's understanding of the world that his mind recoils from them in horror and denial: in other words, they embody absolute monstrosity.

The narration's treatment of Shoggoths is remarkably different from how its treatment of the Old Ones. As mentioned above, Shoggoths are a species created by the Old Ones for slave labor, and they remain completely inhuman monsters throughout the story. Not even

intelligence, the usual marker of an Enlightenment human, can humanize the Shoggoths to the narrator – on the contrary, it only adds to their horror. When studying the murals in the deserted city, the narrator learns that the Shoggoths, first created as mindless beasts of burden whom the Old Ones control by hypnotic suggestion, over time developed "a dangerous degree of accidental intelligence" (473). This leads to a "war of re-subjugation" waged upon the Shoggoths by the Old Ones, which the Old Ones win, and afterwards the Shoggoths are "tamed and broken" (473) and "kept in admirable control" (479) by the Old Ones. Note this: the admiration and sympathies of the narration are firmly on the side of the Old Ones, even when they keep enslaving the now-sentient Shoggoths.

The Shoggoths' intelligence is thus presented not as humanizing but as a threat to the civilization of the Old Ones: the Shoggoths' developing intelligence leads to their rebellion against the Old Ones' domination. What is more, the Shoggoths' intelligence is presented as horrifying. The narrator previously observed the Old Ones' artwork in the murals, sculptures and reliefs of the city: in the underground parts of the city he finds "new and degenerate [art]work" (492) by the Shoggoths that crudely imitates the Old Ones' style and which strikes him as disturbingly alien. The narrator's perception of the Shoggoths' creations is strikingly different from how he perceives the Old Ones' art: the latter aroused feelings of admiration and aesthetic appreciation. Another aspect of this terrifying intelligence is the sounds that the Shoggoths make. They have "no voice save the imitated accents of their bygone masters" (499), and once they develop intelligence they are said to "converse with the Old Ones by mimicking their voices" (479). The Shoggoths are presented as capable of only imitation, not creation of their own, and this imitative intelligence consistently creates feelings of disgust and horror in the narrator.

3.5. "They were men!" The humanization of the Old Ones and its problems

In this section, I will discuss the humanization of the Old Ones by the narrator. The narration builds towards this climactic moment gradually, as the narrator and Danforth investigate the dead Antarctic city once inhabited by the Old Ones. They find artistic murals and statues and evidence of a highly developed civilization as well as technology surpassing that of humans. Having thus learned that the Old Ones had science, technology, a developed society and high art, the narrator says the following:

> … poor Lake, poor Gedney… and poor Old Ones! Scientists to the last – what had they done that we would not have done in their place? God what intelligence and persistence! What a facing of the incredible, just as those carven kinsmen and forebears had faced things only a little less incredible! Radiates, vegetables, monstrosities, star spawn – whatever they had been, they were men! (495)

The first thing in this quote that we should note is, of course, the ascribing of humanity to the Old Ones: "they were men!" ("Men" here is a generic masculine for "humans," although we should also note that *MM* is a story without a single mention of women.) This ascription of humanity happens on the basis of the Old Ones' mental qualities (intelligence and persistence) in spite of their nonhuman biological bodies. This focus on mental qualities when assigning humanity is consistent with Enlightenment humanism, as noted in the Introduction. Furthermore, the narrator considers the Old Ones "scientists to the last," implicitly assigning them the same place at the top of the hierarchy of Enlightenment humanity as he grants to human scientists.

The second thing to be noted in this passage is the extension of sympathy to the Old Ones alongside humans. For context, this passage occurs right after the narrator finds Old Ones who have been gruesomely decapitated by Shoggoths in the tunnels of the deserted city. He assumes, with good reason, that these are the same individuals that were excavated by the scientists, woke from their hibernation to find one of their kind dissected, killed the scientists and the dogs, and escaped the camp to their city. In saying "poor Lake, poor Gedney… and poor Old Ones!", the narrator sets the dead Old Ones alongside his dead fellow scientists and extends his sympathy for these men to the Old Ones. The extension of humanity to the Old Ones is accompanied by the extension of sympathy to them, and the narrator is even willing to forgive them for the slaughter at the camp, as he sees it as done by a fellow human in self-defense: "what had they done that we would not have done in their place?"

However, despite this forgiveness, the danger that the Old Ones pose to humans does not appear to be completely dispelled. When stating the reason for telling his story in the first place, the narrator speaks of "unnamable and perhaps immeasurable evils" (453) that would arise if scientists continued to disturb the secrets of the Antarctic. It is unclear whether this refers to the Old Ones, the Shoggoths, or both, but the narrator's thoughts betray that he does not quite believe the Old Ones to be kindly disposed to humanity. When the narrator and Danforth, investigating the tunnels of the dead city, believe themselves chased by an Old One (their pursuer turns out to be a Shoggoth instead), the narrator thinks: "We had a vague hope,

however, that nonaggressive conduct and a display of kindred reason might cause such a being to spare us in case of capture, if only from scientific curiosity. After all, if such a one had nothing to fear for itself it would have no motive in harming us" (496). Firstly, the narrator has "a vague hope" that the Old One would not kill them: he is far from convinced. And even the qualifier "if only from scientific curiosity" rings hollow, if we remember that in Lake's camp, the human scientists' scientific curiosity led to dissection and subsequent revenge by the dissected. Of note in this passage is what the narrator imagines would prompt the Old One to save them: "display of kindred reason." This is one of the strongest indicators that the story employs the concept of Enlightenment humanity: "reason" is named as the feature that supposedly connects humans and Old Ones into the same ontological category.

In addition to possible physical threat, the Old Ones certainly form a cognitive threat to humanity. Besides the creation of Shoggoths, the Old Ones' ability to create artificial life led to the accidental creation of all life on earth; or as the text puts it, they were "the makers and enslavers of that life" (467). Note again the casual mention of enslavement without any problematization. It is important to note that the life that the Old Ones created also includes humans: "It interested us to see in some of the very last and most decadent sculptures a shambling, primitive mammal, used sometimes for food and sometimes as an amusing buffoon by the land dwellers, whose vaguely simian and human foreshadowings were unmistakable" (472). This quote pushes humanity from its pedestal as the center of the universe. S. T. Joshi calls it "probably one of the most fiercely cynical and misanthropic utterances ever made: the degradation of humanity can go no further" (Joshi 1990b, 197). The observation that the species *Homo sapiens* is degraded in this quote is obviously correct; however, we should note that Enlightenment humanity remains more or less intact in the Old Ones regardless of what happens to the humanity of *Homo sapiens*. Again we see Enlightenment humanity both deconstructed and upheld in the story.

This replacement of humans by the Old Ones as the most advanced beings in existence is probably the chief threat that the Old Ones form to humanity, and a deeper cause of horror than the direct physical threat from the Shoggoth. The recognized humanity of the technologically and intellectually advanced Old Ones threatens the self-understanding of Enlightenment humans, and the simultaneous degrading of *Homo sapiens* works towards the same end.

Having said this, the narration granting Enlightenment humanity to the Old Ones is far from unproblematic. We see this perhaps most clearly if we contrast the humanization of the Old Ones, granted on the basis of their "intelligence and persistence," with the absolute

inhumanity of the Shoggoths, which persists despite their developing intelligence. The fact that the Old Ones' civilization is based on the Shoggoths' slave labor is never problematized in the story, and, as seen earlier, the narration sympathizes with and even admires the Old Ones but never the Shoggoths. Not to put too fine a point on it, the narrative sympathy in *MM* remains with the slave-master the entire time, while the enslaved creatures arouse only feelings of horror and disgust. In other words, the narrative ascribes Enlightenment humanity and encourages sympathy for the slave-master but not the enslaved.

It would be tempting, knowing Lovecraft's infamous racism, to draw, from *MM'*s tacit acceptance of slavery and simultaneous exaltation of Enlightenment humanity in the Old Ones, a parallel to the enslavement of Black people in the U.S., which at the same time was established on Enlightenment principles (Outram 2013, 138-139).[4] However, I would exercise caution while doing so, as there is little in the descriptions of Shoggoths that would warrant such a comparison – they are not described in terms of racial stereotypes, unlike e.g. the Innsmouth hybrids in *SoI.* (The Shoggoths are black in color, but then the Old Ones are dark grey: no neat parallels to be drawn there.) It is noteworthy that the "taming and breaking" of Shoggoths after their rebellion is described in terms of American frontier mythology: "Shoggoths were tamed and broken by armed Old Ones as the wild horses of the American west were tamed by cowboys" (473). This, too, no doubt entices the reader to look for other parallels in the history of the U.S. However, I think that reading "slaves" as inherently a metaphor for "Black people" is problematic in itself (and reading "slime monsters" as a metaphor for "Black people" on scant evidence even more so), which is a big part of the reason that I would avoid doing so in this case, when other narrative evidence for that reading is rather slim. Furthermore, there is plenty to criticize in *MM*'s sympathy for the slave-master even without drawing the specific parallel with the enslavement of Black people. However, I recognize that there is room for disagreement on this point.

Another aspect of *MM* that has possible racist implications is the discourse of degeneration, discussed in Chapter 2, that is present in the construction of the Old Ones' Enlightenment humanity. When investigating the city, the narrator says, regarding the art of the Old Ones: "The technique [of the murals in the city], we soon saw, was mature, accomplished, and aesthetically evolved to the highest degree of civilised mastery…" (465). Note how this quote implies rank-ordering of civilizations according to the "degree" of

[4] Indeed, some literary works have drawn such a parallel: see Elizabeth Bear's short story *Shoggoths in Bloom* (2008), which humanizes the Shoggoths and has given some inspiration for the present work with its reading of *MM.*

civilization that they have reached: this is reminiscent of the themes of Galtonian rank-ordering and degeneration discussed in section 2.3.3. The narrator also observes that the Old Ones' civilization decayed over time, referring to the later art-work as "decadent" (472) and to the Shoggoths' imitations as "degenerate" (492). I discussed the connection between degeneration, Enlightenment and racism as well as other types of discrimination in Chapter 2; all of the implications that the term "degeneration" carries are also present in *MM*.

The last problematic aspect of the Old Ones' Enlightenment humanity that I wish to discuss is their place as the "masters and possessors of nature" (Gandhi 2019, 37). This passage is instructive of the Old Ones' attitude to the life forms that they created:

> These vertebrates, as well as an infinity of other life forms — animal and vegetable, marine, terrestrial, and aerial — were the products of unguided evolution acting on life cells made by the Old Ones, but escaping beyond their radius of attention. They had been suffered to develop unchecked because they had not come in conflict with the dominant beings. Bothersome forms, of course, were mechanically exterminated. (472)

In this passage, the narrator sees the Old Ones as the dominant species on Earth in their time, exercising complete control over its biosphere and exterminating "bothersome" species at will. The tone of the passage is mostly neutral, but the words "of course" are very revealing: the narrator sees it as perfectly natural that the human-aligned dominant species acts as the arbiter of which species gets to live and which does not. This, as well as the narrator's admiration for the control that the Old Ones exert over the enslaved Shoggoths, suggests that this power structure is entirely natural to the narrator and his Enlightenment humanist view of the world. In his view (and by extension, in the Enlightenment humanity that the story constructs), the rule of Enlightenment humans over lesser beings and the exploitation of those beings seems to be perfectly justified and not in any way problematic. As discussed in the Introduction, Nayar (2013, 48) sees this anthropocentric hierarchy of life forms as one of the central ethical issues of Enlightenment humanism: and this hierarchy is on display completely unproblematized in *MM*.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the construction of humanity in *At the Mountains of Madness* and compared the humanity constructed in the story to Enlightenment humanity. The humanity in the story is constructed through the narrator and the other human characters, as well as the Old Ones, who are eventually identified with Enlightenment humanity based on their intelligence and due to being "scientists."

The humanity constructed in the story is thus consistent with Enlightenment humanity. However, what is done with Enlightenment humanity in the story is not so simple, as it is both undermined and upheld. The Enlightenment humanity of humans is eroded when science as the producer of reliable knowledge is questioned, and it is even degraded when humans are revealed to be the creation of the Old Ones and described in less than flattering terms. However, Enlightenment humanity appears to remain intact in the Old Ones, who are humanized and valorized on the basis of their intelligence, science, and art.

Furthermore, a critical reading of the story reveals characteristics of its Enlightenment humanity that are ethically questionable: the scientist narrator does not seem to find any ethical issues in the fact that the Old Ones' civilization is one constructed on the slave labor of Shoggoths, even after he learns that the Shoggoths have developed a degree of intelligence and rebelled against their masters. The narration allows humanity and sympathy for the Old Ones, but none to the Shoggoths, thus taking the side of the enslaver rather than the enslaved. The discourse of degeneration, discussed in detail in the previous chapter, is also present in *MM*, albeit less prominently. Finally, the humanization of the Old Ones reveals a very anthropocentric, hierarchical attitude to the natural world and other life forms: the narrator does not see any issues in the fact that the Old Ones once exerted complete control over the Earth's biosphere, exterminating "bothersome" species at will. The story thus reveals its Enlightenment humanism to be hierarchical in that it sets its valorized Enlightenment human above all other lifeforms and sees it as natural that Enlightenment "Man" should rule over and exploit lesser beings.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Humanity, and its construction through monstrous alterity, has been the unifying theme throughout this thesis. At the beginning of the thesis, I stated that I would show that while these texts take a disparaging view of humanity in general, they still construct a valorized version of Enlightenment humanity. In addition, I stated that the humanity constructed in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and *At the Mountains of Madness* reveals itself as hierarchical and exclusionary, leaving some humans out of full humanity.

There are common elements but also meaningful differences between the humanity constructed in *SoI* and *MM*, respectively. Both texts construct a version of scientific Enlightenment humanity in their narrators, and in both texts, the category of humanity is exclusionary in some fashion: but the exclusion takes slightly different forms in either text.

The humanity constructed in *SoI* is, in one word, precarious. The narrator is a classic Enlightenment "Man," but his rationality wavers as soon as he comes into contact with an Innsmouth hybrid, whose monstrous alterity is beyond the capability of Enlightenment rationality to understand. The humanity of the people of Innsmouth is contaminated and lost through interbreeding with the Deep Ones, and the narrator, who is descended from the Innsmouth hybrids, loses his own humanity at the end of the story. The question that *SoI* seems to ask is: how strong or worthy is humanity if it cannot survive contact with nonhumans? This qualifies as a disparagement of humanity, but we should note that the story also represents the loss of humanity as horrific, thus implying that the story sees humanity in general as a desirable state of being. This seems to be at odds with the assertion usually made of Lovecraft that his stories express "indifference" to humanity (Sederholm and Weinstock 2016, 5). *SoI*, in fact, pays a lot of attention to defining the "human" category, as can be seen in its hybrid monsters. Through the racialized Innsmouth hybrids, *SoI* constructs a transparently racist idea of humanity, revealing that its idea of "untainted" humanity is *white* humanity. Thus, *SoI* excludes people of color from the purview of humanity.

MM's construction of humanity is interesting in that the story both constructs and extols Enlightenment humanity in the Old Ones, and simultaneously disparages humanity in *Homo sapiens* by attributing an unflattering origin to the human species and making Old Ones the creators of that species. In this story, the Old Ones replace the human species as the dominant intelligent species on earth. However, the story's attribution of Enlightenment humanity to the Old Ones is not unproblematic, as the story's construction of humanity is

very hierarchical. The narration admires the Enlightenment humanity of the Old Ones while finding no ethical issues with the fact that the Old Ones enslave another sentient species, the Shoggoths. Besides slavery, the narration gives tacit acceptance of the Old Ones' exercise of complete control over other life forms and the extermination of species that become "bothersome." The story replicates the ecologically destructive anthropocentrism of Enlightenment humanism that posthumanist writers have criticized. Both stories, therefore, show aspects of Enlightenment humanity that can be considered ethically problematic: despite the apparent universality of Enlightenment humanity, the concept has in practice tended to relegate people of color, women, and various minorities to not-quite-human status.

Not everything that I have done in my analysis is new, but analysis of Lovecraft's texts from the viewpoint of Enlightenment humanism has not, to my knowledge, been done before. In retrospect, I could have delved even deeper into the postcolonial and posthumanist criticism of Enlightenment humanism, since a more rigorous theoretical basis would have added depth to the analysis. My review of the Enlightenment in particular should be recognized as a rough sketch of a historically complex period, whose meanings and interpretations are contested (Outram 2013, 1-7).

It should also be recognized that my analysis only deals with two texts out of Lovecraft's fairly large published production, and therefore its results are not necessarily generalizable. Therefore, one avenue for further research could be the analysis of other works from Lovecraft to see if their conception of the human is similar to the one constructed in these works. *SoI*'s discursive nexus of normality/abnormality, degeneration, racism and the construction of humanity, in particular, is a theoretically fascinating idea for further research that I would like to analyze in more detail: I believe occurrences of this bundle of discourses can be found outside of *SoI* in literature and culture.

Studying Lovecraft's fiction is not just a matter of historical interest, as his works continue to exert an influence on literature and culture to this day. Given that Lovecraft's works are still read, reinterpreted and rewritten today, it is crucial that they are also understood; and to be understood, they must be studied. With my thesis, I hope to have shown that at least some of Lovecraft's literary works contain racist and otherwise discriminatory ideas in how they conceive of humanity. Engagement with his fiction cannot take the viewpoint of "separating the art from the artist", i.e. focusing on the texts only rather than the writer's personal views, since the texts themselves contain a conception of humanity that is ethically questionable. Lovecraft's works feature Enlightenment humanity prominently – and

Enlightenment humanism’s usual corollary, that some humans are excluded from full humanity, is very much included.

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