Degenerate Hybrids: Miscegenation, Racial Purity, and the Colonial Unconscious in H. P. Lovecraft's "The Shadow over Innsmouth"

Dr. Mohammad Sadegh Najjarzadeha

Independent Scholar

American Studies and Literary Theory

Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany

dr.sadeqnj@gmail.com

Abstract

This article offers a postcolonial reading of H. P. Lovecraft's "The Shadow over Innsmouth," arguing that the novella converts colonial contact into biological crisis by coding hybridity as degeneration and miscegenation as civic threat. Through close attention to the text's lexicon of contamination, physiognomic description, and spatial quarantine, the essay shows how Innsmouth is constructed as an "internal foreign zone" in which difference becomes legible as hereditary stigma and moral failure. Drawing on scholarship on immigrant eugenics and genotypic horror, the analysis demonstrates how the narrative's horror depends on racialized ideas of purity, breeding, and irreversible taint. The essay further situates Innsmouth's maritime economy within an Atlantic framework, reading Obed Marsh's pact and the sea-borne circulation of wealth as displaced histories of extractive exchange and imperial entanglement. Finally, it addresses the limits of postcolonial interpretation for an author whose racism is historically documented, arguing that the text's ending produces a structural ambivalence that destabilizes purity fantasies without redeeming their ideological violence. By foregrounding how otherness is manufactured through space, bodies, and inheritance, the article clarifies the novella's continuing relevance as a case study in the aestheticization of racial ideology as cosmic horror.

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I. Introduction

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" stages a community marked as aberrant through rumor, physiognomy, and contagion-talk, then turns that stigma into plot logic: Innsmouth's "look" becomes the visible evidence of an illicit history of contact, exchange, and interbreeding. The narrative's horror is not simply "the unknown," but the collapse of boundaries that early twentieth-century racial discourse worked overtime to secure: white identity, biological purity, and the fantasy that ancestry can be quarantined. Critics have shown how Lovecraft's tale draws on contemporary eugenic and nativist vocabularies in which the hybrid body is read as proof of degeneration and civic threat (Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192; Frye 2006, 237–254). This essay takes Innsmouth as a laboratory of the colonial unconscious: a place where the legacies of imperial commerce, racialized science, and exclusionary national myth return in monstrous form. Recent scholarship has clarified that the story's "nautical terror" is inseparable from Atlantic history, where racial purity was never an achievable fact but a retroactive fantasy (Lampe 2016, 166–167). At the same time, Innsmouth is built as an "Orientalized" enclave inside New England, where supposedly foreign rites and languages are coded as invasive forces that perforate the boundary between whiteness and Otherness (Wöll 2020, 233–235). Read this way, the Deep Ones function less as neutral monsters than as a racial technology: a narrative device that turns contact and mixture into degeneracy, and degeneracy into fear.

Rather than treating postcolonial theory as a checklist of famous names, this essay follows Lovecraft scholars who put its key operations on the page: the manufacture of Otherness, the policing of borders, and the panic triggered by hybridity. Wöll argues that "Innsmouth" produces an American variant of Orientalism by translating "exotic" practices and hybrid identities into the signs of moral and genetic decline within a supposedly Anglo-

Saxon space (Wöll 2020, 233–235). Lampe, approaching the tale through Atlantic history, shows how the "Innsmouth look" and the story's maritime economy expose the myth of racial purity in the Americas, even as Lovecraft's racism tries to convert that historical reality into horror (Lampe 2016, 166–167). Herrmann widens the frame by linking Lovecraft's recurring motifs of degeneration to colonial history and racialist science, arguing that the fiction repeatedly imagines dysgenic "devolution" with exterminatory implications (Herrmann 2019, 303–305). Complementing these accounts, readings of Lovecraft's weird historicism suggest that his narratives build "prosthetic" versions of the past to secure contested ideas of Anglo-Saxon liberty and national identity (Price 2016, 135–158). This essay argues that "The Shadow over Innsmouth" converts colonial contact into biological crisis: miscegenation becomes the privileged figure through which the text imagines the contamination of whiteness, the decay of a town, and the failure of national self-containment. In support, I draw on work connecting the tale to immigrant eugenics and genotypic horror (Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192; Frye 2006, 237–254), to the spatial production of an internal "Orient" (Wöll 2020, 233–249), and to Atlantic history's pressure on fantasies of purity (Lampe 2016, 166–210). I also use critical summaries that track how "Innsmouth" organizes communal decay and the "Innsmouth look" as the embodied index of intermingling (Pérez de Luque 2013, 174–175) and how the novella's descriptive logic repeatedly routes social disgust through racialized physiognomy (Pettersson 2016, 7–13).

Methodologically, this essay combines close reading of the novella's descriptive lexicon and narrative focalization with historical contextualization through Lovecraft scholarship on eugenics and nativism, alongside spatial and Atlantic-history approaches that treat Innsmouth as a contact-zone where fantasies of purity are produced and destabilized.

The essay proceeds as follows: Section II examines how Innsmouth is produced as a quarantined racial space, where physiognomy, ritual, and language generate an internal frontier

(Wöll 2020, 233–249; Kneale 2006, 106–126). Section III turns to miscegenation as the tale's central engine of horror, showing how "degeneration" becomes both a biological and civic accusation (Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192; Frye 2006, 237–254; Pettersson 2016, 7–13). Section IV reads the maritime economy and Deep One pact as displaced Atlantic history, where commerce and contact return as monstrosity (Lampe 2016, 165–210). Section V addresses the interpretive problem posed by Lovecraft's racism and the limits of postcolonial diagnosis (Price 2016, 135–158; Herrmann 2019, 304–305). Section VI offers concluding reflections on the story's continuing relevance.

II. Constructing the "Other": The Deep Ones as a Degenerate Race

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" builds its horror by manufacturing a sharp boundary between the "normal" (coded as human, white, modern, and rational) and a racialized outside that is framed as primitive, contaminating, and biologically irreversible. The Deep Ones, and the Innsmouth people marked by interbreeding, are not presented as merely unfamiliar but as degraded: their bodies become the text's evidence for a hereditary fall. This is precisely how the tale translates social anxiety into biological certainty, echoing early twentieth-century hereditarian and eugenic imaginaries in which "mixture" is narrated as decline (Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192; Frye 2006, 237–254) (Lovecraft, "The Shadow over Innsmouth").

Lovecraft's descriptive method is basically physiognomic prosecution: he repeatedly returns to heads, eyes, skin, and "look," inviting the reader to treat appearance as proof of lineage and therefore as moral and civic diagnosis. The Deep Ones are rendered through a cluster of traits designed to trigger disgust: amphibious features, watery and bulging eyes, and a bodily aura of wrongness. The Innsmouth residents, as the story insists, carry a visibly inherited mark of association, a "look" that functions like a racial stigma legible at a glance. The effect is not subtle: the narrative teaches the reader to *see* otherness as degeneration, and to treat the hybrid body as a contaminant that threatens the stability of the category "human."

Scholarship on Lovecraft's eugenic logic has shown how this kind of writing produces what amounts to genotypic horror, where fear is organized around heredity, reproduction, and the fantasy of irreversible taint (Frye 2006, 237–254; Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192). At the level of cultural coding, Innsmouth is also an "internal foreign zone," a pocket of threatening alterity inside New England. Wöll's analysis is useful here because it demonstrates how *Innsmouth* converts space, language, and ritual into signs of Orientalized difference: the story's "strange" practices are not neutral cultural details but cues that translate foreignness into threat and proximity into invasion (Wöll 2020, 233–235). Innsmouth becomes the kind of place that dominant culture labels as both *inside* the nation and *outside* the social order. That spatial logic matters because it stabilizes the binary the story depends on: civilized/barbaric, human/inhuman, pure/contaminated. As Kneale argues about Lovecraft's horror-geographies more broadly, place in these narratives is not backdrop but a mechanism that organizes fear by mapping it onto zones imagined as abnormal, unhealthy, or beyond the limits of "proper" social life (Kneale 2006, 106–126).

This construction of otherness has an unmistakably political edge. Herrmann's account of Lovecraft's racial imagination clarifies how "degeneration" in these texts is never merely aesthetic; it carries exterminatory pressure, the fantasy that the "problem" of hybrid or "bothersome" forms can be managed through surveillance, cleansing, removal (Herrmann 2019, 304–305). In *Innsmouth*, the disgust directed at bodies is therefore doing ideological work: it converts an entire population into something less than fully human and makes coercive solutions feel narratively reasonable. The "other," in other words, is not discovered. It is manufactured, then treated as self-evident. The language used to describe the Deep Ones and Innsmouth's altered inhabitants is not neutral description; it is evaluative vocabulary that turns difference into verdict. The narrative repeatedly codes the hybrid body through a hereditarian moral lexicon, where mixture is framed as contamination and inherited change is treated as an

index of civic and ethical collapse. That move is central to what critics identify as Lovecraft's *genotypic horror*: fear organized around breeding, lineage, and irreversible "taint," rather than around discrete acts or choices (Frye 2006, 237–254; Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192). In this framework, the Deep Ones are not simply nonhuman; they are narratively positioned as a degrading influence whose proximity reclassifies humans as something less-than-fully human. This moralization is reinforced by cultural coding. The Deep Ones are associated with non-Christian ritual, secrecy, and an alternative value-system that the narrator's discourse marks as primitive and dangerous. Wöll's analysis is useful here because it shows how *Innsmouth* produces an "internal foreignness" through strategies recognizable from Orientalist representation: alien practices become evidence of threat, and the "strange" becomes shorthand for inferiority and invasion (Wöll 2020, 233–235). The effect is that the Deep Ones' identity is defined relationally, as a negative mirror that stabilizes the narrator's world as civilized and rational by contrast, even while the story depends on proximity and entanglement to generate horror.

Innsmouth's setting intensifies this logic by turning space into a moral diagram. The town is rendered as a zone of rot and isolation, where physical decay becomes legible as the outward sign of racial and ethical decline. As Kneale argues of Lovecraft's horror-geographies, place is not backdrop but a mechanism that organizes fear by mapping it onto locations coded as abnormal, unhealthy, or socially fallen (Kneale 2006, 106–126). In *Innsmouth*, the built environment functions as proof: decrepit streets and declining infrastructure are made to "confirm" the narrative's claim that the population itself is degenerate. That spatializing move is not merely atmospheric. It assists the text's more coercive implication that such "bothersome forms" can be managed through containment or elimination, a pressure that Herrmann reads as part of Lovecraft's broader entanglement with racialist science and exterminatory imaginaries (Herrmann 2019, 304–305).

The narrative organizes its horror through a rigid binary: the narrator's world is coded as orderly, rational, and "modern," while Innsmouth and the Deep Ones are coded as irrational, regressive, and socially contagious. This opposition is not merely geographic but epistemic and moral. Innsmouth is framed as a space where ordinary categories (human/nonhuman, civic/uncivic, purity/mixture) break down, and that breakdown threatens the narrator's confidence in stable identity. As Kneale shows in his reading of Lovecraft's horror-geographies, "place" in these stories operates as a technology of fear: certain locations are narratively produced as abnormal zones where the rules of intelligibility fail and danger appears spatially concentrated (Kneale 2006, 106–126). In *Innsmouth*, that spatial logic supports a social one: the "uncivilized" is manufactured as a proximate, internal frontier. Crucially, the text maintains this binary through a monopoly on perspective. The Deep Ones are not granted interiority or interpretive authority; they exist almost entirely as objects of the narrator's gaze, rumor, and retrospective reconstruction. Their motives are simplified into a single terrifying vector, reproduction and "reclamation," so that contact becomes invasion and mixture becomes doom. This is consistent with what scholars identify as Lovecraft's genotypic mode of horror, where fear coheres around heredity, breeding, and the fantasy that biological mixture produces irreversible degradation (Frye 2006, 237–254; Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192). The result is a narrative economy in which the "other" is not encountered as a subject but processed as evidence: bodies become signs, and signs become verdicts.

The story's representational asymmetry also intersects with its broader cultural coding of alterity. Wöll argues that *Innsmouth* produces an "Orientalized" internal space by translating unfamiliar language, ritual, and social practice into cues of threatening foreignness, so that the reader is guided to interpret difference as danger rather than as intelligible culture (Wöll 2020, 233–235). That strategy makes "understanding" beside the point: the Deep Ones remain unknowable not because they are metaphysically beyond comprehension, but because the

narrative's ideological work requires them to stay unreadable except as threat. Herrmann's account of Lovecraft's racial imagination further clarifies the stakes: once the "other" is constructed as biologically and morally corrupting, the text's logic begins to lean toward containment and elimination, turning disgust into an implied politics (Herrmann 2019, 304–305). This limited perspective also exposes the representational trap at the center of the tale. The Deep Ones are not encountered as subjects with legible histories or interiority but as surfaces onto which the narrator projects disgust, fear, and hereditarian panic. That asymmetry is not an accidental feature of the genre; it is part of the story's ideological mechanism, where the "other" must remain unreadable except as threat in order for the narrative's binary to hold (Wöll 2020, 233–235). In this sense, *Innsmouth* is not simply "racist because Lovecraft was racist," although that is true in the plain historical sense. It is racist in a more structural way: it trains perception so that difference becomes degeneration, and degeneration becomes narrative justification (Frye 2006, 237–254; Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192). Seen from this angle, the novella forces an ethical question that postcolonial criticism keeps returning to: what does it mean to represent difference when the representational system is already loaded with hierarchies? Lovecraft's method shows one answer by negative example. When alterity is framed as contamination and when bodies are treated as proof of inherited moral defect, representation becomes a technology of exclusion rather than understanding (Herrmann 2019, 304–305). The continuing relevance of *Innsmouth* lies partly in this discomforting clarity: it demonstrates how easily a narrative can convert cultural anxiety into "common sense," especially when space, physiognomy, and history are arranged to make otherness look self-evidently dangerous (Kneale 2006, 106–126; Price 2016, 135–158).

III. The Horror of Hybridity: Miscegenation and the Threat to Racial Purity

The central horror of *"The Shadow over Innsmouth"* is not simply that the Deep Ones exist, but that they are **biologically and genealogically entangled** with humans. The story

treats interbreeding as a mechanism of doom: mixture is framed not as contact or relation but as hereditary damage, a transformation that moves through families like a curse. Critics have shown that Lovecraft's weird fiction repeatedly converts social anxiety into a hereditarian nightmare, producing what amounts to **genotypic horror**, where the terror is anchored in bloodline, reproduction, and the fantasy of irreversible contamination (Frye 2006, 237–254; Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192). In *Innsmouth*, miscegenation is not a background theme. It is the plot's deepest logic.

Obed Marsh's pact provides the narrative's origin-story for this logic, linking economic desire, maritime contact, and the sexualized fear of mixture. The town's "prosperity" is narratively purchased through exchange and sacrifice, and then biologically sealed through interbreeding. Read through Atlantic frameworks, this matters because Innsmouth's maritime economy is not incidental scenery: it is the story's way of importing a history of oceanic contact into the register of racial panic (Lampe 2016, 166–167). In other words, the tale transforms the Atlantic contact-zone (trade, movement, cross-cultural encounter) into a eugenic allegory where exchange produces not hybridity-as-history but hybridity-as-horror. The language the narrator uses to describe Innsmouth genealogy makes that allegory explicit. Mixture is cast in contamination terms, with inherited difference framed as "taint" and "pollution." This is exactly the vocabulary Lovett-Graff identifies when she connects the tale to nativist and eugenic discourse: the narrative works by translating immigration and demographic anxiety into a hereditary nightmare in which "foreignness" becomes embodied and transmissible (Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192). Frye similarly shows how Lovecraft's degeneracy rhetoric functions less as mere insult than as a structural principle, where difference is imagined as genetic decline that can only intensify across generations (Frye 2006, 237–254). Miscegenation, then, becomes a convenient narrative machine: it produces visible stigma ("the look"), moral suspicion, and an apocalyptic future, all at once.

What makes *Innsmouth* especially revealing, though, is that the narrative cannot keep mixture safely external. The narrator's response to Innsmouth is organized around repulsion, yet it is shot through with a creeping recognition that destabilizes the very boundary he depends on. Pettersson's discussion of the "Innsmouth look" is useful here because it highlights how the story makes physiognomy do ideological work: the hybrid body is treated as self-evident proof of otherness, but that same logic becomes terrifying when the narrator discovers that "proof" can appear in himself (Pettersson 2016, 7–13). Pérez de Luque likewise stresses how the tale turns that bodily mark into a community-wide stigma, so that "looking" becomes a social diagnostic practice that polices belonging (Pérez de Luque 2013, 174–175). The narrator's horror is therefore not only fear of monsters; it is fear of **classification failure**, the possibility that whiteness and humanity are not stable categories but narratives propped up by exclusion. This is also where the story's politics tighten. If mixture is framed as irreversible degeneration, then the implied "solution" becomes management: surveillance, containment, removal. Herrmann's argument clarifies how Lovecraft's degeneracy imagination can slide toward exterminatory thinking, where "bothersome forms" are not merely feared but imagined as problems to be eliminated (Herrmann 2019, 304–305). And once Innsmouth is established as an internal foreign zone, the tale's spatial coding reinforces the same logic: the decayed town becomes a quarantined space whose population is narratively available for coercive intervention (Kneale 2006, 106–126; Wöll 2020, 233–235).

The narrator's final discovery that he is himself descended from the Deep Ones is the novella's decisive reversal: it collapses the distance that has allowed him to treat Innsmouth as a quarantined spectacle. What had been framed as external contamination becomes internal inheritance. That shift does not simply "surprise" the narrator; it dismantles the epistemic comfort of the civilized/uncivilized binary by forcing the story's category system to confront its own failure. Critics who read Lovecraft's weird historicism emphasize how his narratives

depend on inherited pasts that return with coercive force, making identity feel less like choice than like fate (Price 2016, 135–158). Innsmouth pushes that logic to an extreme by turning genealogy into horror's final proof: the narrator is no longer merely observing the "look," he becomes vulnerable to it. Psychologically, the transformation is staged as a sequence of affective whiplash: denial, disgust, fear, and then a disturbing turn toward attraction and belonging. This is where the story's racial logic becomes most exposed. The narrator has internalized a vocabulary that equates mixture with degeneration, so the recognition of kinship initially reads as self-contamination, a private version of the public stigma attached to the "Innsmouth look" (Pettersson 2016, 7–13; Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192). In that sense, the text dramatizes the consequences of its own evaluative language: once a population has been represented as biologically debased, the discovery of shared lineage can only appear as identity catastrophe. At the same time, the novella's ending complicates the simple arc of horror-to-rejection. The narrator does not remain in pure repudiation. He begins to imagine the sea not only as threat but as destination, and he starts to reframe transformation as release rather than doom. That ambivalence is crucial: it shows that the "other" cannot be kept permanently outside without constant narrative policing, because the story's genealogical structure keeps producing entanglement. Read through Atlantic frameworks, the sea functions as the medium of contact and history, the space that makes purity fantasies untenable even as the narrator initially clings to them (Lampe 2016, 166–167). What looks like "acceptance," then, is not necessarily liberation. It can also be read as the narrative's final capitulation to genotypic logic: heredity wins, and the self is reorganized around bloodline destiny (Frye 2006, 237–254) (Lovecraft, "The Shadow over Innsmouth").

This ending also carries a political aftertaste. If the hybrid body is framed as contaminating and the town as a quarantined site of degeneracy, then the implied social response becomes management: containment, surveillance, eradication. Herrmann's account

of Lovecraft's racial imagination clarifies how easily degeneration discourse leans toward exterminatory desire, where "bothersome forms" are narratively positioned as problems to be eliminated rather than subjects to be understood (Herrmann 2019, 304–305). The narrator's final yearning for the sea is therefore structurally ambiguous: it can be read as a break from the dominant gaze, but it also completes the story's movement from social disgust to biological determinism, from "they" to "I."

IV. The Colonial Unconscious: Innsmouth as a Site of Repressed Guilt and Fear

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" can be read not only as a tale of racial panic but also as a narrative about **historical entanglement**: a community shaped by maritime contact and extractive desire, then haunted by what that contact brings home. Innsmouth's decaying infrastructure and quarantined reputation operate like a domestic "colony" inside New England, a pocket of internal foreignness whose disorder is treated as proof of moral and biological failure. Scholarship on Lovecraft's spatial logic helps clarify how the story makes place do ideological work: Innsmouth becomes a concentrated zone of fear where social breakdown is mapped onto geography, and geography is then read back as destiny (Kneale 2006, 106–126). The town is "shadowed" not merely by supernatural threat but by a past the narrative insists must remain hidden.

That hiddenness is not only thematic but structural. The narrator's investigation proceeds by assembling fragments, rumors, and half-erased histories, and the story's suspense depends on the gradual disclosure of what the town has tried to keep unspeakable. Price's account of Lovecraft's "weird politics of history" is useful here because it shows how these tales generate a coercive sense of inheritance: the past is not past, but a force that returns and reorganizes identity (Price 2016, 135–158). In *Innsmouth*, the slow surfacing of the town's story reads like an exposure of buried historical knowledge, where the narrative's "horror" is the discovery that the present is built on compromised origins. Obed Marsh's pact is central to

that compromised origin-story, and it can be read as an allegory of **extractive contact**. Marsh approaches the Deep Ones as resources to be leveraged: he enters into exchange, secures material benefit, and stabilizes the arrangement through violence and secrecy. Read through Atlantic frameworks, the sea in *Innsmouth* is not neutral scenery but the medium of historical contact that makes fantasies of isolation and purity impossible (Lampe 2016, 166–167). The pact's gold and prosperity therefore function less as magical reward than as the story's way of narrativizing a familiar modern structure: wealth accruing through morally tainted exchange, insulated by distance, and then returned to the metropole as "normal" prosperity. That structure does not map neatly onto one single colonial episode. But it resonates with a broader Atlantic history in which economic gain is routinely braided with coercion and the management of "others" (Lampe 2016, 165–210). The tale's representation of difference makes that management visible. Innsmouth is constructed as an internal frontier through cues of cultural othering, where unfamiliar rites, speech, and social practice are coded as dangerous and invasive. Wöll shows how Lovecraft's story produces an "Orientalized" enclave within New England by turning cultural difference into the sign of threat and moral inferiority rather than intelligible social life (Wöll 2020, 233–235). This is precisely how the narrative gives a historical relationship (contact, trade, exchange) the shape of a civilizational panic (invasion, contamination, decline).

Finally, the Deep Ones' expanding presence can be read as the story's mechanism of historical return: what was traded with, exploited, and hidden refuses to stay contained. But it matters how this "return" is framed. It is not presented as justice or mutual recognition; it is narrated as catastrophe, biologized through heredity and visual stigma. That is why Herrmann's argument is so important here: once difference is encoded as degeneration, the story's logic begins to lean toward containment and elimination, turning historical entanglement into an implicit politics of cleansing (Herrmann 2019, 304–305). The horror, then, lies less in the mere

existence of an "other" than in the collapse of a fantasy the narrator desperately wants to preserve: that one can extract wealth from contact while keeping identity pure, and that buried histories can remain buried.

V. Limits of Postcolonial Readings and Lovecraft's Ambiguities

Postcolonial theory is useful for reading *"The Shadow over Innsmouth,"* but it also has limits that need to be stated plainly, especially given Lovecraft's own ideological commitments. The novella's fixation on heredity, contamination, and "degeneration" aligns too neatly with early twentieth-century racial thinking for us to treat its politics as accidental. Critics have linked Lovecraft's horror directly to nativist and eugenic anxieties in which mixture is narrativized as civic and biological collapse (Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192; Frye 2006, 237–254). Any reading that treats the tale as merely "critiquing" racism risks laundering the text's own investments in racial hierarchy and hereditarian fear. At the same time, one hazard of postcolonial interpretation is **anachronism**: importing a later critical vocabulary into a text without attending to the historical specificity of the racial discourses it mobilizes. A more defensible approach is to treat postcolonial theory as a *diagnostic tool* rather than a moral verdict, using it to track how the story manufactures "internal foreignness," borders, and contamination narratives, while keeping the period's nativist-eugenic framework in view (Wöll 2020, 233–235; Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192). Another hazard is **over-allegorization**: reducing the Deep Ones to a one-to-one symbol of colonized peoples can flatten the story's representational mechanics and ignore how the narrative's othering operates through physiognomy, spatial quarantine, and heredity rather than through sustained engagement with any actual subaltern history (Pettersson 2016, 7–13; Kneale 2006, 106–126). In this sense, postcolonial reading is most productive when it explains *how* the text produces alterity, not when it forces the monsters to "stand for" a single historical population.

Even with these limits, the novella remains analytically rich because it contains **formal and affective contradictions** that complicate a purely straightforward racist reading. The story certainly works to make the Deep Ones repulsive and degenerative, yet it also grants them a disturbing kind of power, futurity, and attraction, especially at the end. The narrator's eventual identification with Innsmouth does not dissolve the text's racism; rather, it exposes the instability of the purity fantasy the narrative has been defending. Price's account of Lovecraft's "weird politics of history" helps articulate this: the past returns not as neutral background but as coercive inheritance that undoes the narrator's sense of self as autonomous and "untainted" (Price 2016, 135–158). Pettersson's discussion of the "Innsmouth look" similarly clarifies why this reversal is so effective: because the story has trained the reader to treat appearance as genealogical proof, the discovery that the stigma might be carried by the narrator becomes the story's most radical collapse of boundaries (Pettersson 2016, 7–13). This is also where interpretive ambivalence becomes unavoidable. The narrator's turn toward the sea can be read as a kind of release from the dominant gaze, but it can also be read as the final triumph of hereditarian determinism. Lampe's Atlantic framework is useful here because it positions the sea as the medium of contact and history, the element that makes "purity" untenable even as the narrative tries to reimpose it as fear (Lampe 2016, 166–167). Herrmann's argument adds a sharper caution: degeneration narratives often carry an exterminatory pressure, making populations imagined as "bothersome forms" available to containment and elimination (Herrmann 2019, 304–305). From this perspective, the ending's allure does not redeem the politics of the text; it intensifies the horror by showing how deeply the narrative has yoked identity to bloodline, and by implying that the "solution" to mixture can only be quarantine, purging, or flight into an inhuman elsewhere.

A postcolonial reading does not need to redeem Lovecraft in order to be valuable. Its task is to expose how the story's fears are historically legible and politically structured. Read

alongside scholarship that situates *Innsmouth* in eugenic/nativist discourse (Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192; Frye 2006, 237–254), in the production of internal "Orientalized" space (Wöll 2020, 233–235), and in a haunted Atlantic history of contact and exchange (Lampe 2016, 165–210), the novella becomes a case study in how racial ideology can be aestheticized as cosmic horror without ever ceasing to be ideology.

VI. Conclusion

In the end, "The Shadow over Innsmouth" is brutally efficient at converting Atlantic contact and economic exchange into hereditary catastrophe: the town's history of trade is re-described as biological doom, and the hybrid body becomes the privileged sign of civic threat. Read alongside scholarship on eugenic/nativist discourse and genotypic horror, the novella's fear of mixture functions as a racial technology that makes quarantine and violence feel narratively reasonable (Lovett-Graff 1997, 175–192; Frye 2006, 237–254; Herrmann 2019, 304–305). The ending's shift from disgust to attraction does not redeem the text; it exposes the instability of purity fantasies while still binding identity to bloodline fate (Price 2016, 135–158; Lampe 2016, 166–167). Precisely because the narrative makes "the Innsmouth look" readable on bodies, the narrator's recognition of kinship collapses the distance on which othering depends (Pettersson 2016, 7–13; Lovecraft, "The Shadow over Innsmouth").

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