Monstrosity in Lovecraftian Horror

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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Sveučilišni prijediplomski studij

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Zadar, 27. lipnja 2024.

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1. Introduction

Monsters have haunted the human imagination for millennia, manifesting in mythologies, folklore, and literature across different cultures and eras. From the chimeric beasts of Ancient Greece to the gothic horrors of the Victorian era, these creatures have symbolized humanity's deepest fears and societal anxieties. H. P. Lovecraft (1890 – 1937) stands as one of the greatest horror fiction writers of the 20th century, with his ancient gods, eldritch beings, and otherworldly dimensions influencing many of today's great writers.

In this thesis I will analyze how Lovecrafts monsters are portrayed, by applying J .J. Cohen's seven theses, presented in his work „Monster Culture“. Cohen offers his seven theses, through which he aims to provide a framework for analysing culture thorugh the monsters they create. These theses point out the roles that monsters play, from embodying societal fears and anxieties to challenging norms and boundaries.

The first part of this thesis will begin with a concise overview of some historical depictions of the monstrous. Examining the history of monsters, can give a better understanding of their roles and significance in various societies throughout history. After that, the peculiar subgenre of speculative fiction known as the weird tale will be explained. Defined by its departure from conventional horror and fantasy, the weird tale delves into the inexplicable. The weird tale is central to Lovecraft's work, as his mastery of the genre has left a permanent mark on literature.

Finnaly, I will will apply Cohen's seven theses to a selection of Lovecraft's stories, such as "The Call of Cthulhu", "At the Mountains of Madness", and "The Shadow over Innsmouth". Through this analysis, I aim to shed light on the deeper meanings and implications of Lovecraft's monsters, exploring how they reflect the contemporary anxieties of his time.

2. The History of Monsters

Throughout history, monstrous births have been met with a wide range of reactions, from reverence and awe to fear and disgust, largely dependent on the cultural and temporal contexts in which they occurred. For instance, in ancient Greece, Rome, and Etruria, deformed infants were often seen as ominous signs or divine retributions, resulting in their immediate destruction (Hanafi 2). In Sparta, Athens, and Rome, deformed births were regarded as ill omens, with infants being disposed of by throwing them into the Tiber or hurling them off cliffs. The Etruscans, on the other hand, disposed of

such infants by drowning or incinerating them, while the Lombards and ancient Germans employed methods like suffocation or burning(Hanafi 2). This severe treatment extended to the mothers of these infants, who were often held responsible for the monstrous births as signs of divine displeasure or personal wrongdoing. Things seen as monstrous have always carried meaning, which was generally negative. The simplest definition of monstrous is the non-human other, something that is foreign to a civilized man (Hanafi 2). Derrida calls the monster that which appears for the first time and therefore is not recognized yet (386).

Apart from being non-human, or uncivilized, another common aspect of a monster is its hybrid form (Hanafi 2). Monsters embody hybrid forms, which combine human and animal elements, and create a sense of horror and fascination. Derrida also acknowledges that the monster may be a figure, which grafts other organisms onto itself (385). These beings, through their physical anomalies, challenge the established order and hierarchy (Hanafi 3). This perception of monsters extended to their association with divine will, where ancient societies viewed them as signs or divine messages, linking them to the supernatural and attributing to them significant religious and philosophical meaning. The Monster, coming from the Latin monere (meaning to warn or to threaten), was a sign of divine will, which foretold a coming catastrophe (Hanafi 3). Many ancient cultures, including the Greeks and Romans, incorporated monsters into their mythological narratives as symbols of chaos and disorder, through monsters such as the Gorgons, Chimera or Minotaur.

The Renaissance period marked a significant shift in the understanding of monsters. Readings of monsters at that time were propagandistic, and interpreting the monstrous became a political science (Hanafi 3). During this time the monster's association with divination, transgression, sacrifice and terror was mostly erased, rather the monsters served as fascination in the form of decorations or garden ornaments (Hanafi 5).

In the modern era, the concept of the monster has continued to evolve, shaped by new scientific discoveries and technological innovations. In the 19th century scientists began to be more curious than terrified of the, previously considered monstrous, deformed infants (Hanafi 4). Teratology, the study of congenital abnormalities and monstrous births, became a distinct field of inquiry. By giving birth defects, which would previously be considered monstrous, scientific backing as well as constructing a strong lexical foundation, a sense of normalcy was given to the monstrous (Hanafi 4).

What people have considered monstrous throughout history has all derived from nature or culture. Be it birth defects, abnormal animal-like features, different skin colour, or unusual traditions (Hanafi, 7). An Aristotelian approach to defining monsters is a scientific one, which argues that monsters represent only nature's mistakes (Hanafi 7). Therefore the notions of divine intervention, punishment or warning are discarded. The monstrous infant from Aristotle's point of view is purely a defect. This defect is often a result of the struggle of the "male seed to dominate the female matter" (Hanafi 8). Aristotle's definitions of monstrosity are generally defined by his dismissal of sacred or bestial origins, concerning monstrous births (Hanafi 8).

Another tradition related to defining monstrosity, stems from Pliny the Elder and Saint Augustine, who believed that monsters are miracles of either nature (for Pliny) or God (for Augustine) (Hanafi 10). Pliny justifies his focus on monstrous races by suggesting that discussing these extreme cases relieves him of the impossible task of cataloguing all individual anomalies, he also emphasizes the uniqueness inherent in nature, noting that even with a limited number of human features, no two faces are identical among thousands, demonstrating nature's endless creativity. (Hanafi 10). Pliny's attitude toward nature's marvels is marked by a sense of pessimism and weariness, viewing these creations as nature's amusement rather than sources of terror. He observes that creatures once considered prodigious, like hermaphrodites, have become objects of pleasure, reflecting a shift in societal attitudes over time (Hanafi 11). Hanafi also discusses the influence of Augustine's "City of God" on the tradition of monster literature, highlighting three key ideas. First, Augustine asserts that God, the ultimate creator, intentionally designs all creatures, including those that appear monstrous (Hanafi 12). Therefore, monsters should not be considered anomalies, rather creatures designed this way for a specific purpose. Second, Augustine argues that nothing is contrary to nature, as everything occurs by God's will (Hanafi 13). According to this view, what might appear as miracles is not against nature but beyond human understanding of it. Hanafi points out that this view is similar to ones in the 17th century (13). Finally, Augustine addresses the status of monstrous races, affirming their human origin and rationality despite their extraordinary appearances (Hanafi 14). This perspective dismisses pagan myths of monstrous races and underscores the importance of recognizing the humanity in all beings.

Hanafi argues that what makes up a monster depends on the context, on characteristics, which are defined by the culture that creates them (14). Derrida's remarks about how the appearance of a monster allows for the analysis of historical norms, backs up this claim as well (386). Monstrosity, thus, spans physical and moral qualities without concern for different orders of reality (Hanafi 15). Hanafi

uses an example of Giambattista Marino likening Martin Luther to a many-headed Hydra, while Luther used the image of the "monk-calf" in his propaganda, a monster whose existence is debated among historical sources, yet despite discrepancies in accounts, the monk-calf's significance in its cultural and historical context renders the question of its reality irrelevant (15).

The monster is not just a specific entity, it is also a category which varies according to cultural and historical contexts, and monsters can be found in various forms: museum exhibits, philosophical concepts, zoological taxonomies, emblem book figures, manuals of natural magic, demonology treatises, medical texts, political discussions, and theories of wit (Hanafi 15). Defining a monster is certainly not a simple task, as the definition of a monster depends on perspective and monstrous bodies are often ambiguous (Boyer 241).

3. The Weird Tale and Lovecraftian Horror

In order to understand monstrosity in Lovecraft's work, it is essential to understand what makes Lovecraft's writing unique. In his essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature", Lovecraft states: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (1). This is a theme which is obviously present in his works, and a way of achieving this is by utilizing what Mark Fisher calls "the weird" (8). Fisher explains the weird in relation to Freud's term "unheimlich" or the uncanny. While Freud's term is about the strangeness in something that is perceived as familiar, and is centred around the outside, the weird allows seeing the inside from the perspective of the outside (Fisher 10). Therefore, the weird, in contrast to the unheimlich, does not generally include the aspect of familiarity in order to create a sense of strangeness. Fisher names the montage, or the combination of multiple things that do not belong together, as the most appropriate form to the weird (11). The weird "involves a sensation of wrongness: a weird entity or object is so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist" (Fisher 15). This sensation is commonly found in Lovecraft's stories, unlike traditional monsters such as vampires or zombies, Lovecraft's monsters generally do not have an appearance that is rooted in the natural world.

Fisher argues that Lovecraft practically invented the weird tale, by developing a formula that strays from fantasy and horror fiction (16). Being that the weird is centred on the outside, so do Lovecraft's stories fixate on the outside breaking through, usually through entities that defy the structure of time or through altered states of consciousness (Fisher 16). This injection of the outside into the

inside is at the centre of Lovecraft's work, and more often than not culminates with the death or mental breakdown of the human protagonists. Lovecraft's horror comes from the strangeness, as he says in "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction": "Horror and the unknown or the strange are always closely connected, so that it is hard to create a convincing picture of shattered natural law or cosmic alienage or "outsideness" without laying stress on the emotion of fear" (1). Although, Fisher argues that this horror is also fascination, that the weird must compel attention, as well as horrify (17). Readers of Lovecraft as well as his characters share this fascination, but they do not share the terror; while the characters are often left terrified as a result of their fascination, the readers are generally not (Fisher 17). Another defining aspect of Lovecraft's horror is the lack of suspense. Readers can generally discern how a Lovecraft story will end, even if they have never read one – as the fascination present in Lovecraft's stories always clearly leads to ruin (Fisher 17).

Everything mentioned means that Lovecraft's stories do not align with the structuralist definition of fantasy – that the fantastic is constituted by a suspension between the uncanny and the marvellous (Fisher 18). The marvellous refers to the supernatural elements of a story, and Lovecraft's stories, even though they deal with beings or events that might seem supernatural at first glance, generally use a different explanation. The deification of the beings in Lovecraft's stories is purely a vain attempt of humans to rationalize and anthropomorphize in order to make sense of the externality of the cosmos (Fisher 18). Lovecraft himself had expressed that he wished to create the illusion of a violation of the natural law and frustrate the curiosity about the cosmos beyond the reach of humans (Notes on Writing Weird Fiction 1). Another factor that distinguishes Lovecraft from fantasy is the world. While fantasy worlds are inherently different from the real world, Lovecraft's works present a collision of our world with another, external one. "With Lovecraft, there is an interplay, an exchange, a confrontation and indeed a conflict between this world and others" (Fisher 20). Therefore, there is a certain element of realism in Lovecraft's stories, which invokes the weird. In a letter to the editor of Weird Tales, Lovecraft wrote: "Only the human scenes and characters must have human qualities. These must be handled with unsparing realism, (not catch-penny romanticism) but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown – the shadow-haunted Outside – we must remember to leave our humanity and terrestrialism at the threshold" (qtd. in Fisher 20). This interaction between the terrestrial, real world and the outside is at the core of Lovecraft's work. Lovecraft uses the human world in order to present a sense of scale to the reader (Fisher 21).

In order to invoke this sense of the outside, Lovecraft has to rely on the creation of new, rather than relying on already existing figures or lore (Fisher 21). Unlike Derrida's definition of a monster,

which is a species that is a hybridization of other already known species (386), Lovecraft's creations are mostly unique, in the sense that they are not rooted in the natural world. Although, in his stories, Lovecraft tends to include characters with the knowledge of the mythologies he created, in that sense he pretends that his concepts and approach is not utterly new (Mieville, qtd. in Fisher 21). While Lovecraft's unique entities are often described as indescribable, that is often a misinterpretation. Fisher notes that encounters with those entities often follow a distinct pattern – after the initial proclamation of the indescribable, comes the actual description, although that description is unvisualisable (23). Characters in the stories often describe in so much detail that starts to lack sense and makes the readers unable to form an image of what is being described.

The final defining element of Lovecraft's works is something that happens outside of them. Even though the often-referenced mythos was not created by Lovecraft himself, his stories did feature elements of interconnection. Lovecraft set his stories in New England, and by setting them in a real place, he creates a relationship between fiction and reality (Fisher 24). Fisher goes to state that Lovecraft de-realises the factual and realises the fictional, by giving existing phenomena the same ontological status as what he himself created. His constant referencing of a fictional book, which was his creation, The Necronomicon, would start to create a sense that it truly existed. As fisher notes, "Lovecraft seemed to have understood the power of citation, the way in which a text seems more real if it is cited than if it is encountered in the raw" (24).

4. Analysis of Lovecraft's monsters

H.P. Lovecraft's literary work is filled with monstrosities that lurk in the shadows of our deepest fears and the farthest reaches of our imagination. These creatures, whether they emerge from the depths of the ocean, or the vastness of the universe, serve as more than mere embodiments of horror; they are complex symbols that challenge and reflect the anxieties of Lovecraft's time. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Seven Theses provided in his work "Monster Culture" should serve as an excellent framework for the analysis of Lovecraft's monsters. Cohen presents seven thesis by which he explains how cultures can be understood through the monsters they create. These theses explore the cultural functions of monsters, proposing that they are not just figments of fiction, but profound reflections of societal norms, fears, and desires. Monsters created in history have a certain tie to that time (Hoffman 65). Lovecraft's creations are also tied to the early 19th century, when they were created, but some of the themes they embody are relevant even in today's culture. In this analysis multiple monsters from stories such as

“The Shadow over Innsmouth", “The Call of Cthulhu”, “At the Mountains of Madness” and others, will serve as examples.

4.1 Thesis 1: The monster’s body is a cultural body

J.J. Cohen’s first thesis, "The Monster’s Body is a Cultural Body," posits that monsters are manifestations of the cultural, social, and political climate of the time and place in which they are created. “The monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again” (Cohen 4). The monsters embody the collective fears, anxieties, and desires of the society that spawns them.

Lovecraft wrote during a time of mass immigration, and this immigration led to many cultural changes as well as xenophobia and fear of the Other. Lovecraft is known to have had many xenophobic views himself, but that time in general saw many racial tensions become more prominent. The early 20th century also saw the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, which had expanded its targets beyond African Americans, to Catholics, Jews, immigrants and other groups. The immigration had gotten out of hand, and restrictions had to be placed. The fear of the Other was also becoming more prominent, with the immigrants being viewed with increased suspicion and hostility. In terms of literature at the time, J. Halberstam notes that in twentieth century gothic, race had become a “master signifier” of monstrosity (5). All these societal tensions are clearly evident in Lovecraft’s work, which often reflect the anxieties of the time.

"The Shadow over Innsmouth" serves as a perfect of the racial anxieties present during the times in which Lovecraft wrote. In the story, the protagonist uncovers the dark secret of the town of Innsmouth: its inhabitants have interbred with a race of underwater beings known as the Deep Ones. This interbreeding has resulted in generations of hybrid offspring who, over time, transform into fully aquatic, monstrous creatures. This story is a direct reflection of the era’s fear of racial mixing and the perceived threat to racial purity. Quotes from the story point at the obvious alienation of foreigners – while describing one of the inhabitants on Innsmouth the main protagonist says: “His oddities certainly did not look Asiatic, Polynesian, Levantine, or negroid, yet I could see why the people found him alien” (Lovecraft 876). Through this it is made explicit that any non-white American/English person is seen as racially impure. This hybrid nature of the monstrous Innsmouth residents symbolizes the fear of

losing cultural and racial identity amidst the influx of immigrants and the resulting cultural changes. What further underscores this is the protagonist's horror upon discovering his own mixed heritage and eventual transformation into a monster, a Deep One, which again reflects the anxiety about racial impurity and the loss of one's identity. The protagonist contemplates suicide after the realization, which could be taken that, being what is considered the Other, means that one is not fit to live alongside the dominant white population. Lovecraft's depiction of the Deep Ones, who could be seen as immigrants, and the hybrid inhabitants of Innsmouth the consequence of immigration, resulting in racial impurity reflects the broader societal fear of the Other.

Apart from racial tension, Lovecraft wrote many stories during the Great Depression, a time of economic upheavals in the first part of the 20th century. Lovecraft's commercial success came only after his death, and it is safe to say that he spent most of his life in poverty. Lovecraft's stories often embody these economic anxieties through themes of decay and corruption. He wrote "The Shadow over Innsmouth" in 1931, during the Great Depression and in addition to the racial themes discussed prior; the story also reflects the economic fears of the time.

The town of Innsmouth is depicted as economically isolated and decaying, a reflection of the broader economic instability of the time. As the protagonist is entering the town, he remarks: "Soon cross streets and junctions began to appear; those on the left leading to shoreward realms of unpaved squalor and decay, while those on the right shewed vistas of departed grandeur" (Lovecraft 878). It is evident that Innsmouth is a town ravaged by poverty, and while there may be narrative reasons for this, it clearly reflects the economic state of the time in which the story was written. The residents' secret pact with the Deep Ones, trading their humanity for wealth and prosperity, represents the moral and ethical compromises made under economic duress. The Deep Ones, as monstrous entities, embody the consequences of these compromises. The story's portrayal of Innsmouth's economic decay and the moral degradation of its inhabitants into monsters, highlights the deep anxieties about the unstable economic conditions and the desperate measures people take for survival.

Lovecraft's "The Shadow over Innsmouth" epitomizes how societal issues of race, immigration, and economic instability can manifest as monstrosity in literature. J.J. Cohen's thesis, which suggests that monsters symbolize the cultural climates of their times, is clearly illustrated in Lovecraft's work. The Deep Ones and their human hybrids represent the fears of racial impurity and cultural change, as well as how immoral choices resulting from economic instability can turn one into a monster. Lovecraft's use of monstrosity directly reflects on the broader societal problems of the time.

4.2 Thesis 2: The monster always escapes

Cohen's second thesis states that the monster always tends to escape. Cohen explains that the damage that the monster has caused always remains and is visible, but the monster itself disappears, only to reappear in another time and place (4). This suggests that monsters have a perpetual presence in cultural consciousness, constantly re-emerging in new forms and contexts. Lovecraft's work, with its pantheon of cosmic horrors, offers prime examples of how these creatures escape both in literal and metaphorical senses.

In a literal sense, Lovecraft's monstrous entities often defy finality, the reappear across multiple of his stories, be it in person or through name only. In this way, they are not confined to their original stories. This literal escape can be seen in the recurrent presence of certain entities, as well as in the ambiguous conclusions of many of his narratives.

As was discussed before, Lovecraft's stories are often interconnected. His body of work is populated with entities that recur, which creates a sense that these beings are ever-present. For example, one of Lovecraft's most popular inventions, Cthulhu, introduced in "The Call of Cthulhu" in 1928, is not confined to that single story. The references to Cthulhu in other works by Lovecraft and illustrate the monster's escape from its original narrative. While the monster might not appear physically, it is often referenced, sometimes multiple times in a story, such as this line from "The Whisperer in Darkness": "You know they were here long before the fabulous epoch of Cthulhu was over, and remember all about sunken R'lyeh when it was above the waters" (Lovecraft 761). Similarly, Nyarlathotep, an entity capable of assuming innumerable forms, appears in multiple of Lovecraft's stories such as "The Haunter of the Dark" and "The Dreams in the Witch House." Nyarlathotep's ability to manifest in various forms allows it to escape the bounds of a single story, making it a persistent figure in Lovecraft's stories.

Lovecraft often leaves his tales open-ended, with the implication that the horrors have not been fully eradicated. This narrative strategy suggests that the monstrous threat remains, lurking just beyond human understanding. In "The Dunwich Horror," for instance, while the immediate threat posed by the creature is dealt with, the broader implications of the monsters' presence remain unresolved. This ambiguity implies that the horror could return, embodying Cohen's idea that the monster always escapes.

Although Lovecraft monsters escape and reappear in his own works, what Cohen truly meant with his second thesis is that the monster is able to escape and reappear in order to be reinterpreted and reimagined. Lovecraft's monsters certainly achieved this, as no one can deny his influence on various media, from literature to films to video games. The themes present in Lovecraft's stories have had a great impact on modern horror, be it Stephen King whose stories often take inspiration from Lovecraft, Ridley Scott's classic horror movie "Alien", or Japanese manga authors like Junji Ito. But not only are his themes reinterpreted, so are his iconic monsters.

Cthulhu is arguably the most iconic Lovecraftian monster, whose depiction as a sleeping giant waiting to rise directly plays into Cohen's thesis. The imagery of Cthulhu lying dormant beneath the ocean, ready to awaken and wreak havoc, creates a perpetual threat. Cthulhu's influence extends beyond horror fiction into broader cultural expressions. One clear reinterpretation of the monster can be seen in the animated television series "South Park", where Cthulhu appears across multiple episodes. In "South Park," known for its satirical take on pop culture and societal issues, Cthulhu is humorously reimagined as a character who interacts with the show's regular cast. His appearance stays in line with what Lovecraft imagined and how he is portrayed in pop culture. In the show Cthulhu is portrayed as a mythical entity summoned by one of the main characters Eric Cartman to wreak havoc upon the town of South Park. However, instead of being a purely terrifying force, Cthulhu is portrayed in a comedic light, often behaving like a child or a misunderstood monster rather than an ancient incomprehensible deity. This is one of many reinterpretations of the monster in media made long after Lovecraft's death, and it clearly agrees with Cohen's thesis.

Lovecraft's Monsters continually re-emerge, both literally within the stories and metaphorically within the broader cultural and temporal contexts. Just the persistence of Cthulhu in popular culture, from literature to board games and music, illustrates how this monster continually escapes and is reinterpreted. Moreover, it is necessary to say that Cthulhu is not the only monster originating from Lovecraft's stories that is reinterpreted to this day, Dagon and the Deep Ones among others, have seen many forms in various media. Therefore, it is safe to say that Cohen's thesis is applicable to Lovecraft's monsters.

4.3 Thesis 3: The monster is the harbinger of category crisis

The third thesis that Cohen presents is the monsters' characteristic of not being able to fit into categories. Cohen calls the monster a mixed category, saying that it resists classification that is built on hierarchy or binary opposition (7). This concept suggests that monsters disrupt established categories and challenge the boundaries that define conventional reality. In Lovecraft's work, this thesis is vividly exemplified by the nature and impact of his monsters. Lovecraft's creatures frequently embody the dissolution of clear distinctions, whether they be between sanity and madness, human and non-human, or the known and the unknown.

Lovecraft's monsters are generally known to literally defy conventional reason. Fisher explains how Lovecraft's descriptions of his monsters contain an excess of details, which in turn do not allow readers to create a mental image of the creatures in their heads (23). Once again taking Lovecraft's most iconic creation, Cthulhu, as an example; he epitomizes the concept of category crisis. Described as a colossal entity with a vaguely anthropoid outline, an octopus-like head, and a grotesque, bloated body covered with rudimentary wings, Cthulhu's form defies biological classification. It is an amalgamation of anthropomorphic and animal elements. Yet, this description, at first glance, would contradict the concept of the weird that Fisher argues Lovecraft derives partly from not basing his monsters in nature. However, in "The Call of Cthulhu" Lovecraft writes, "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents" (381). It could be argued that what he meant by this is that since the human mind is limited in its capacity to connect and make sense of all the information and experiences it encounters, these mental limitations shield us from these overwhelming and potentially devastating realizations. Therefore the description of Cthulhu that is interpreted by the reader through the character's perspective, is in actuality only the attempt to rationalize the entity that the characters were seeing, this way it aligns with many other descriptions of monsters in Lovecraft's stories are stated to be indescribable in some way.

Another monster of Lovecraft's making that can serve as an example of a category crisis, is one mention before, the Deep Ones. In "The Shadow over Innsmouth", Lovecraft introduces the Deep Ones, amphibious humanoid creatures that live beneath the sea. These beings frequently interbreed with humans, resulting in hybrid offspring who, as they age, transform into Deep Ones themselves. The inhabitants of Innsmouth exhibit physical deformities and characteristics that blur the line between human and monster. This hybridity causes a crisis of identity. Cohen states that the monster usually appears as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes, and opposes binary categories (6). In this case the hybrid offspring of the Deep Ones and humans, clearly represents a clash of

extremes, it is a combination of “us” humans and the monsters representing “the Other”. Through this the inhabitants of Innsmouth present a scenario where the boundaries between human and non-human are not just blurred but erased, and in doing so they represent a clear example of a refusal to submit to a binary categorization. "The Shadow over Innsmouth” puts forward a narrative that uses the breakdown of categories, through its monsters, in order to reflect on the anxieties of racial purity, which would align with both the first and third of Cohen’s thesis.

4.4 Thesis 4: The monster dwells at the gates of difference

Monsters generally embody difference, be it cultural, racial, political, economic or sexual. Through portraying a certain group that is perceived as different, as monstrous, this difference is made even more prominent. Through history, different groups were given monstrous attributes in order to exaggerate their deviancy. Yews, African-Americans, people not conforming to normative gender roles, among others were all victims of this. Halberstam explains this by saying that “monstrosity (and the fear it gives rise to) is historically conditioned rather than a psychological universal” (6). Applying this thesis to Lovecraft’s stories, while it is hard to find explicit examples where a certain group was given monstrous qualities because of their differentness, there are multiple cases where this is implied through a more thorough reading.

As was examined before, Lovecraft's work is deeply intertwined with themes of cultural and racial Otherness, often reflecting both his personal prejudices and the xenophobic tendencies of his era. In the discussions on previous theses, I have already explained how Lovecraft portrays immigrants of different race and cultural background as monstrous, through the example of the Deep Ones from “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. Therefore, even though this confirms that Cohen’s fourth thesis can be applied to Lovecraft’s monsters, I will examine how Lovecraft might have used monstrosity to amplify the difference of other deviant groups.

Lovecraft’s monsters could be seen as metaphors of class difference. An example of this are the Shoggoths from the novella “At the Mountains of Madness”. In the novella, the Shoggoths are depicted as monstrous, amorphous beings created by the Elder Things to serve as labourers. Initially obedient, the Shoggoths eventually revolt against their masters, leading to the downfall of the Elder Things' civilization. This narrative could be read as a metaphor for the fear of the working class rising up against the elite, a common anxiety during Lovecraft's time due to the increasing labour unrest and

the rise of socialist and communist movements. Therefore, the Shoggoths could be seen as the working class given a monstrous depiction in order to perpetuate their oppression. Lovecraft's depiction of the Shoggoths' rebellion reflects the fear of the masses gaining power and the potential for violent unrest that could result from economic inequality and exploitation.

Lovecraft's work is generally not concerned with sexual differences, given the lack of sexual diversity in his stories, whose characters are in most cases heterosexual white men. Despite that, there are certain narrative elements relating to the monsters in his stories that could be read as metaphors for sexual difference. To once again use "The Shadow over Innsmouth" as an example, the Deep Ones engage in mating rituals with humans, producing hybrid offspring that blur the lines between species. This interbreeding is depicted as unnatural and horrifying, which could be reflective of the discomfort with sexual deviance and the breakdown of traditional sexual norms. The hybrid beings are hidden away or ostracized by regular humans, which could symbolize the societal rejection of those who do not conform to accepted sexual and gender norms.

While the depiction of certain races and cultures as monstrous is evident in Lovecraft's stories, the portrayal of other groups in the same way might be less overt. Stories such as "The Shadow over Innsmouth" show how, albeit in an implicit way, giving a deviant group monstrous attributes can exacerbate the difference inherent to those groups. "At the Mountains of Madness" can shift the perspective of this, by demonizing a group that is considered deviant not by the dominant culture, but rather by a select elite.

4.5 Thesis 5: The monster policies the borders of the possible

In his fifth monster thesis, J.J. Cohen posits that monsters function as warnings against exploration, reminding humans of the risks inherent in stepping beyond established borders. Monsters, aside from defying or breaking cultural norms, also serve as guardians and prohibitive figures (Boyer 241). This thesis finds resonance in Lovecraft's narratives, where characters often encounter monstrous beings when they delve too deeply into forbidden knowledge or seek to uncover secrets best left undisturbed.

Lovecraft's monsters frequently embody the concept of cosmic borders; unimaginable limits beyond which human knowledge cannot safely venture. Encounters with these beings often results in madness or death for those who dare to summon or study them, illustrating the peril of crossing into forbidden territories. For instance, in "The Call of Cthulhu", Cthulhu lies dormant beneath the sea, waiting for the stars to align and allow its return. The mere knowledge of Cthulhu's existence drives those who uncover it to madness, demonstrating the dangerous consequences of probing too deeply into the mysteries of the universe.

The monsters in Lovecraft's stories can represent the dangerous consequences of pursuing forbidden knowledge. The pursuit of secrets and the desire to unravel the mysteries of existence often lead Lovecraft's protagonists to encounter entities that defy comprehension. In "At the Mountains of Madness", explorers in Antarctica uncover ancient alien ruins that reveal the existence of the so-called Elder Things, ancient beings that once ruled the Earth before humanity. The discovery of these ruins leads to a confrontation with creatures that challenge the very foundations of human understanding, which highlights the dangers of delving into knowledge that surpasses human capacity.

Outside the narrative of the stories, the monsters in Lovecraft's stories could be seen as cautionary tales warning about the dangers of cultural imperialism. Lovecraft's protagonists often encounter civilizations or entities that existed long before humanity, pointing out the dangers of intruding into spaces with foreign cultures and possibly adopting parts of those cultures, and the consequences that could have on the intruders. An example of this is evident in the short story titled "Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family". When the protagonist of the story is confronted that his ancestors interbred with a race of ape-like creatures it resulted in his suicide. The ape-like creatures of the story stood at the border, and by breeding with them, that border was crossed and consequently, ruin followed.

Lovecraft's monsters embody Cohen's fifth thesis by serving as warnings against exploration and the dangers of stepping outside established borders. Even though this element is present inside of the narratives more so than having wider cultural influence, the readings of the monsters as cautionary tales of crossing boundaries are certainly valid.

4.6. Thesis 6: Fear of the monster is really a kind of desire

Cohen’s sixth thesis posits that the fear monsters evoke is deeply intertwined with repressed desires. He explains that can act as secondary bodies, which can be used to explore possibilities that are usually frowned upon in a culture. Humans are generally attracted to forbidden desires, ones that enable us to cross boundaries set by society (Hoffman 141). Exploring other genders, sexual practices or other customs, among other fantasies, can all be done through a monstrous body (Cohen 18). While Lovecraft’s monstrous beings generally do not explore desires found in culture outside of the story itself, the narratives often incorporate themes of forbidden desires.

In "The Whisperer in Darkness," the protagonist, Albert N. Wilmarth, encounters the Mi-Go, an extra-terrestrial race capable of transporting human brains across the cosmos. The Mi-Go promise a form of immortality by offering to transport human brains to distant planets, preserving them in special canisters. This proposition taps into a forbidden desire to transcend the limitations of the human body and achieve a god-like existence. The Mi-Go's offer is terrifying, yet it holds a certain allure, a possibility of existing beyond the physical and temporal constraints of human life. The fear of the monstrous Mi-Go and their frightful methods is undercut by a deep, almost unconscious longing to explore the cosmos and achieve a form of immortality.

The second story that explores a desire is “Cool Air”. In "Cool Air," Lovecraft explores the fear and desire associated with the defiance of death through scientific means. Doctor Muñoz would be considered the monster in this story, even though his appearance in not monstrous, at the end of the story the readers discover that he was a corpse the entire time. Dr. Muñoz's use of extreme cold to stave off death exemplifies the forbidden desire to conquer mortality through unnatural means. The protagonist's initial fascination with Dr. Muñoz's scientific prowess gradually turns to horror as he realizes the full extent of the doctor's condition. This narrative captures the allure of scientific advancements that challenge natural limits. The fear of Dr. Muñoz's condition is intertwined with a deeper curiosity and admiration for his ability to defy death.

"The Thing on the Doorstep" explores themes of control, domination, and the defiance of natural death through forbidden sorcery. In the story, Asenath Waite, possessed by her father Ephraim, uses dark magic to swap bodies and extend his life. This ability to transfer his consciousness into his daughter's body and extend natural life explores the same desire Dr. Muñoz in “Cool Air”, but it also

reflects a desire for absolute control and domination. This act of possession is both horrifying and fascinating, as it defies the natural order and displays an ability to completely dominate and control others.

Through these stories, Lovecraft demonstrates how the monstrous serves as a mirror to humanity's deepest, most taboo desires, even though they might not be achievable outside of his narratives. The fear evoked by his monsters in the stories is not merely a reaction to their otherness but a reflection of the complex, often hidden desires that lie beneath the surface of human consciousness.

4.7. Thesis 7: The monster stands at the threshold of becoming

Cohen's idea is that monsters, as creations of human imagination and cultural fears, embody the boundaries of the known world and challenge people to reconsider their place within it. “They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, out tolerance toward its expression” (Cohen 20). His seventh thesis is a culmination of the ones before, as it posits that monsters ask us to consider why they were created. And if monsters are creations of culture, they can have a lot to say about that culture, its past and present (Hoffman 66). In Lovecraft's stories, monsters frequently emerge from the unknown depths of space, time, and the subconscious, embodying the outside. These entities are not merely horrifying but also deeply symbolic, reflecting some of Lovecraft's own anxieties about race, otherness, and the limits of human understanding, as well as cultural fears and anxieties of the time.

Cohen’s thesis presents the idea that monsters exist to question and destabilize our rigid perceptions of difference. The very nature of Lovecraft's monsters, which are so radically different and often incomprehensible, presents readers the opportunity to consider their own reactions to difference and the unknown. These monsters ask us to reflect on our tolerance for the Other and what it means to encounter something that defies familiar categories and established norms.

Lovecraft’s monsters are products of his time, reflecting the anxieties and prejudices of the early 20th century. Cohen’s thesis asks the question of why Lovecraft created these specific monsters and what they reveal about his (and our) cultural context. Even though it might be impossible to answer

this with complete accuracy, the monsters can certainly be analysed through both today's context and the context of when they were created.

5. Conclusion

Lovecraft's monsters, with their origins rooted in the unknown and the incomprehensible, can certainly be seen as a mirror to humanity's deepest fears, illustrating the boundaries and limitations of human understanding. Cohen's theses, particularly the idea that monsters challenge cultural norms and represent societal anxieties, are clearly exemplified in Lovecraft's work. His creatures defy conventional classification, embodying the Other that questions our perceptions of reality and the natural order. The recurring presence of these monsters across multiple stories, as well as different forms of media, displays their symbolic immortality and the enduring nature of the fears they represent.

The thematic analysis of stories such as "The Call of Cthulhu," "At the Mountains of Madness," and "The Shadow over Innsmouth" reveals how even though Lovecraft might project his personal anxieties and prejudices, those anxieties are also rooted in the culture of the time, particularly those related to race and otherness. Lovecraft's depiction of the Deep Ones, or Dr. Muñoz's use of science to defy nature, certainly can be read as a reflection of a societies fear and desire of the forbidden.

Ultimately, Lovecraft's monsters endure in popular culture, they continually reinterpreted and reimagined in new contexts, be it literature, film or video games. This attests to the influence that Lovecraft's monsters had on fiction today. As people engage with these monsters, they can gain insight into the cultural landscape that shapes the understanding of the monstrous. Lovecraft's legacy, therefore, lies not only in his monsters and the terror they inspire but also in the critical perspective they offer for examining human nature and culture.

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7. Monstrosity in Lovecraftian Horror: Summary and key words

H. P. Lovecraft, a seminal figure in horror fiction, created monsters that reflect deep-seated fears and societal anxieties. This thesis begins with a historical overview of monstrous depictions, revealing how they symbolize societal fears and taboos. In Ancient Greece and Rome, monstrous births were seen as divine retributions and met with severe actions. The Renaissance shifted this perception, using monsters for political propaganda. The 19th century saw a scientific approach, with teratology studying congenital abnormalities, normalizing previously monstrous forms. Lovecraft's "weird tales" depart from traditional horror, invoking fear of the unknown. His monsters, unlike traditional ones, often defy natural forms and create a sense of cosmic horror. This thesis applies J. J. Cohen's 7 monster theses to analyse Lovecraft's stories like "The Call of Cthulhu" and "The Shadow over Innsmouth," highlighting how his monsters embody early 20th-century anxieties about race, immigration, and economic instability. Cohen's theses provide a framework through which Lovecraft's monsters can be analysed through the perspective of culture. The analysis underscores that Lovecraft's monsters, through their bizarre and otherworldly nature, serve as cultural symbols reflecting the collective fears and societal issues of his time.

Key words: Lovecraft, Monster Theory, Weird Tale, culture, horror

8. Čudovišnost u Lovecraftijanskom Hororu: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Lovecraft, ključna figura horor fikcije, stvorio je čudovišta koja odražavaju duboko ukorijenjene strahove i društvene tjeskobe. Ovaj završni rad započinje povijesnim pregledom prikaza čudovišta, otkrivajući kako ona simboliziraju društvene strahove i tabue. U staroj Grčkoj i Rimu, monstruozna rođenja su se smatrala božanskim kaznama i bila su suočena s ozbiljnim posljedicama. Renesansa je promijenila ovu percepciju, koristeći čudovišta za političku propagandua, a 19. stoljeće donijelo je znanstveni pristup, s teratologijom koja je proučavala urođene abnormalnosti, normalizirajući prethodno monstruozne oblike. Lovecraftove "čudne priče" odstupaju od tradicionalnog horora, izazivajući strah od nepoznatog. Njegova čudovišta, za razliku od tradicionalnih, često se protive prirodnim oblicima i stvaraju osjećaj kozmičkog horora. Ova teza primjenjuje sedam teza o čudovištima J.J. Cohena, kako bi analizirala Lovecraftove priče poput "The Call of Cthulhu" i "The Shadow over Innsmouth", naglašavajući kako njegova čudovišta utjelovljuju tjeskobe ranog 20. stoljeća o rasi, imigraciji i ekonomskoj nestabilnosti. Cohenove teze pružaju okvir kroz koji se Lovecraftova čudovišta mogu analizirati iz perspektive kulture. Analiza naglašava da Lovecraftova čudovišta, kroz svoju bizarnu i vanzemaljsku prirodu, služe kao kulturni simboli koji odražavaju kolektivne strahove i društvene probleme njegovog vremena.

Ključne riječi: Lovecraft, Monster Theory, Čudna Prića, kultura, horor