Lovecraft Fandom(s): Racism, Denial, and White Nationalism

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Abstract

This essay examines how online groups of fans of US fantasist H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) deal with Lovecraft's racism. It analyses ways that fans' implicit or explicit political commitments inform the ways they interpret, dispute, disseminate, and suppress Lovecraft's expressions of racism. For liberal and anti-racist fans, Lovecraft's racism is a problem to address; for many centrist or reactionary White fans, it is a topic nobody need discuss, because Lovecraft was simply a 'man of his time'; but for White supremacist fans, it is a major attraction, sometimes trumping their lack of interest in Lovecraft's fiction. By analysing the discourses of Lovecraft fans, the essay draws inferences both about fans' politics and about ways that fans construct popular history. It finds significant overlap between ostensibly mainstream fans and fans committed to the rebranded US White supremacist movement that calls itself White Nationalism. Furthermore, it shows that although White Nationalist Lovecraft fans invoke liberal notions of free speech to defend persons accused of racism (including Lovecraft), the same fans also censor Lovecraft's own expressions of racism to conform to their political agenda. The essay concludes that White fans pursue various unacknowledged interests when they revise both Lovecraft's racism and US history.

Introduction

This article springs from an unexpected intersection of my work as a scholar and my work as a fan, and it examines reactionary uses of online media as well as the overlaps between fandom and White supremacy. In May 2012, I launched a Kickstarter campaign to fund a publishing project that responded to the work of Howard Philips Lovecraft (1890-1937), an American writer of speculative fiction. I had never participated in online Lovecraft fandom, and I was surprised to encounter fans hostile to my project because of its criticism of Lovecraft's racism. I was more surprised to learn that Lovecraft commands a secondary fandom of White supremacists who admire the racism that he articulated in his fiction, amateur journalism, poetry, and letters. For anti-racist and liberal fans, Lovecraft's racism is a problem; for many fans, it is something to ignore, because Lovecraft was a 'man of his time'; but for White supremacist fans, it is the attraction.

In this essay, I argue that the rhetorical practices of ostensibly mainstream Lovecraft fans overlap significantly with the rhetorical practices of White Nationalist Lovecraft fans, revealing Lovecraft fandom as a site of disputes about history, politics, and affect, where fans advance claims about how we should understand both texts and also the social world. Under the sign of Lovecraft's name, fans constitute and contest rival understandings of the past and present.

This essay assumes that speech, whether true or false, performs cultural work. The claims of reactionaries and racists have real-world consequences independent of their truth. The rhetorical strategy that blogger Nicole Cushing has dubbed the '"man of his time" defense' (Cushing 2012) of Lovecraft's racism is a dangerous meme, because it revises popular (White) memory of the early 20th century, imagining the US as a White-supremacist idyll in which racist speech was normative. Lovecraft's fiction has entered the canon; if we acknowledge that Lovecraft remains a powerful, and perhaps growing, cultural force, then anti-racists in the academy have a responsibility to contest reactionary defences of Lovecraft's racism.

Studying Reactionary Fandom

Fans perform the discursive, political, and economic work that we call culture, but their work is not necessarily progressive. Fan studies have recognized that some fandoms are not 'a counterforce to existing social hierarchies and structures but […] agents of maintaining social and cultural systems of classification and thus existing hierarchies' (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington 2007: 6). Earlier scholars assumed that fans' 'disagreements occur within a shared frame of reference, a common sense of […] generic placement and a tacit agreement about what questions are worth asking' (Jenkins 1992: 137), but my research shows instead that political and semantic rifts divide those who self-identify as Lovecraft fans. Following Derek Johnson (2007), I show Lovecraft fandom marked by 'struggle over interpretation and evaluation through which relationships among fan, text, and producer are continually articulated, disarticulated, and rearticulated' (286).

Jason Sperb's work on *Song of the South* serves as one model for my analysis. The 1946 film's depiction of the Reconstruction South, in which Blacks continue to labour happily for benevolent Whites, met protests from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Negro Congress (Bogle 2001: 136). Because of this and later controversy about the film's depiction of the past, Disney has never released *Song* uncut on home video in the United States. White fans, however, have organized online to protest Disney's suppression, to celebrate the film, and to defend it against charges of racism (Sperb 2010: 26-28). Unlike what Disney has done with *Song*, the publishers of Lovecraft's nonfiction have never attempted to hide Lovecraft's racism, so the conflict that emerges surrounding Lovecraft instead concerns the ways that fans treat elements of his work that they or others find politically problematic. As Sperb notes, 'affect, nostalgia, and convergence intersect with the political in a way underexplored thus far by fan studies' (2010: 29). Sperb's work on *Song* fandom therefore informs my exploration of ways that Lovecraft fans dispute questions of politics, history, memory, and attachment to cult media.

Henry Jenkins' work on participatory culture's relationship to collective intelligence (2006: 3-4, 27) serves as another model for my intervention. However, among many Lovecraft fans a different relationship obtains: between participatory culture and collective denial. Fans propagate the 'man of his time' (MOHT) defence, which, like any viable meme, is easy to remember and easy to copy; in contrast, the countervailing archival and historical research necessary to show that Lovecraft was out of step with his time takes work. Also, fans that create Lovecraft-inspired art, games, or merchandise have economic incentives to deny unsightly aspects of his work. Moreover, White fans' investments both in Lovecraft and in the White privilege of ignoring racism further encourage denial. Finally, the stigma of the label *racist* is enough that some fans may reject it on purely affective grounds, though we will see that others reject it on political grounds.

Audience studies often blur the lines between subject and object. Ellen Seiter, in discussing her ethnographic research on television audiences, calls this 'an ambiguous relationship of alterity' to the object of study (1999: 31). Audience studies done by scholars who self-identify as fans - 'aca-fans', in Henry Jenkins's phrase - run the risk of descending into mere justifications of their authors' tastes. Ian Bogost (2010) has argued against scholars' embrace of the 'aca-fan' identity

> because it's too great a temptation. Those of us who make an enviable living being champions of media, particularly popular media, must also remain dissatisfied with them. We ought to challenge not only ourselves, our colleagues, and our students - but also the public and the creators of our chosen media. We ought not to be satisfied.

I confess that my self-identifications as a White anti-racist scholar and as a fan of Lovecraft's fiction make me far from neutral, but I would still argue that my work on Lovecraft emerges from the kind of oppositional stance that Bogost prescribes. Lovecraft's fiction, at its best, makes its protagonists' research into archives just as dizzying as their expeditions into catacombs, lost cities, and alien worlds; yet the racism that informs Lovecraft's fiction and nonfiction mixes the worst of 19th-century 'scientific' racism with the overconfidence of an autodidact. Like Howard Lovecraft, I did not finish high school - though I went on to get a GED, then to community college and public universities. Maybe Lovecraft fascinates me because I fear I am like him in some ways, yet I wish I were like him in others. At any rate, I am far from 'satisfied' with Lovecraft and his work.

Rescuing a Racist

The Providence-born Lovecraft cultivated the diction of an English gentleman, despite his family's genteel poverty. In the 1910s he became active in amateur journalism, a precursor of fanzines and blogs; later writing for pulp magazines earned him negligible money but built him a following and a circle of correspondents. He left no binding

instructions for his literary estate (Joshi 1996: 633), but fans kept his work in print through fanzines and small-press anthologies (635-636). Correspondent August Derleth established Arkham House, a press named for Lovecraft's fictional city (Joshi 1996: 634-635), through which Derleth 'rescued' Lovecraft's work (646). Arkham House published clothbound editions of Lovecraft's fiction and amateur journalism as well as the five-volume *Selected Letters*. Penguin increased Lovecraft's prestige by releasing Modern Classics editions of his stories in 1999. In 2000 the non-profit Library of America included Lovecraft in *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century* and in 2005 released the stand-alone volume *H. P. Lovecraft: Tales*.

Identifications of Lovecraft as a racist are common in biography (Joshi 1996; De Camp 1975), academic criticism (Newitz 2006; Lovett-Graff 1997), and popular criticism (Nevins 2013; Phillips 2013; Cushing 2012; Cooper 2009; Oates 1996). He read widely, but he ignored the anti-racist anthropology that transformed the discipline during his lifetime. According to Joshi,

> by 1930 every 'scientific' justification for racism had been demolished. The spearhead of the scientific opposition to racism was the anthropologist Franz Boas (1857-1942), but I find no mention of him in any of Lovecraft's letters or essays. The intelligentsia - among whom Lovecraft surely would have wished to number himself - had also largely repudiated racist assumptions in their political and social thought (Joshi 1996: 588).

Expressions of racism, ranging from ethnic slurs to debates on craniometry, appear throughout Arkham House's editions of Lovecraft's nonfiction. The prestige of these editions among fans is such that the racism they contain merits attention before I move into the ways that fans respond to it.

'The Teuton', writes Lovecraft in his amateur journal *The Conservative*, 'is the summit of evolution' (1915a: 253-254). In contrast, 'The negro is fundamentally the biological inferior of all White and even Mongolian races' [sic] (Lovecraft 1915b: 424). The same

article praises the Ku Klux Klan, who did 'what the law refused to do, removing the ballot from unfit hands and restoring to the victims of political vindictiveness their natural rights' (Lovecraft 1915b: 424). Where Lovecraft's journalism calmly advocates White supremacy, his letters fulminate. In 1922 he calls New York's Chinatown as 'a bastard mess of stewing mongrel flesh without intellect […] would to heaven a kindly gust of cyanogen could asphyxiate the whole gigantic abortion' (1922: 181). In 1924, he describes Manhattan's Lower East Side: 'The organic things - Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid - inhabiting that awful cesspool could not by any stretch of the imagination be call'd human' [sic] (1924: 333). He considered Jews a 'problem': 'there is only one thing we can do as an immediate expedient to save ourselves; *Keep them out of our national and racial life*' [Lovecraft's emphasis] (1924: 67). He discusses New York's 'Mongoloid problem',

> beside which the negro problem is a jest - for in this case we have to deal not with childlike half-gorillas, but with yellow, soulless enemies whose repulsive carcasses house dangerous mental machines warped culturelessly in the single direction of material gain by stealth at any cost. I hope the end *will* be warfare […] let us shew our physical power as men and Aryans, and conduct a scientific wholesale deportation… [Lovecraft's emphasis] (1924: 68)

Gardiner (2005/2006: 75) calls this trope of Whiteness imperilled by immigrants 'demographic dystopia'. It thrives in Internet-era racist discourse.

Young Lovecraft saw Whiteness as a hierarchy of racial types, but as he grew older he came to see it as a unity. Europeans shared 'absolute biological superiority […] as distinguished from the negro, australiod, neanderthal, rhodesian, and other primitive human and humanoid types' [sic] (1931: 277). He admired some of the Nazis' goals but considered their thinking crude: 'The problem of race & culture is by no means as simple as is assumed either by the Nazis or by the rabble-catering equalitarian columnists of the Jew-York papers' [sic] (1933: 247). Even so, he foreshadowed Nazi methods: 'the Indian people represent such an abyss of degeneracy that extirpation & fumigation would seem to be about the only way to make Hindoostan fit for decent people to

inhabit' (1933: 252). Wars 'like the snatching of the two Americas' had been 'of the greatest value to the White race and its culture [...] giving it ampler room for development and expansion' (1936: 249). Where Whites lack *Lebensraum*, they employ a 'colour line', and where Whites constitute a minority, they employ 'extra-legal measures such as lynching and intimidation when the legal machinery does not sufficiently protect them', for 'anything is better than the mongrelisation which would mean the hopeless deterioration of a great nation' (1934: 77).

Organised racist violence requires the support of genteel racists like Lovecraft. Those who engage in political violence, as Halavais notes, 'recognize that their ideology is representative of a group' who support 'their cause, if not their means' (2010: 95). Lovecraft expressed support both for the Klan's cause and for their means. We should take seriously the implications of any claim that Lovecraft's racism reflects the norms of his era rather than its phobic and homicidal extremes.

White Backlash 2.0

Where fans once had to beg or borrow to publish volumes of fan fiction, today they use crowd-funding websites. Kickstarter.com allows one to create a timed fundraising campaign and to offer rewards for those who pledge, and it only charges backers if the campaign reaches its goal. On 24 May 2012, I launched a Kickstarter for *The Shadow out of Providence: A Lovecraftical Metatext*, a hardcover book comprising two illustrated short stories and one play that each offer a different fictional response to Lovecraft's writing.

Then on 28 May, at 1:21 PM, horror fan Joe Kontor posted a link to it on the Facebook page of the H. P. Lovecraft Historical Society (HPLHS), a fan group that has produced two Lovecraft-inspired movies on shoestring budgets. In the body of his status update, Kontor quoted my 122-word description of the project, which does not mention racism. However, the 22-word blurb, which I had also written, appeared beside the *Shadow out*

of Providence thumbnail in Kontor's post, calling *Shadow* 'A book inspired by H.P. Lovecraft, but critical of his politics and racism. Erol Otus, Dan Zettwoch, and Timothy Hutchings illustrate'. Of the book's three parts, only the play deals explicitly with Lovecraft's racism, yet I chose to foreground this element in the blurb because it differentiated my book from others. Despite the increasing discussion of Lovecraft's racism in fan and literary circles, fictional responses to Lovecraft that even obliquely address his racism, let alone critique it, are rare (for an example, see Elizabeth Bear's 'Shoggoths in Bloom'). I therefore listed the topic along with the names of the book's illustrators, hoping to attract backers interested in the book's distinctive features.

The backlash began eight minutes after Kontor posted his status. A White fan named Bryan Moore led: 'Why on earth this group wants to demonize Lovecraft for his "racism" is beyond me. Screw that. I wouldn't give these people a penny'. Others 'liked' Moore's comments and joined his defence of Lovecraft against the charge of racism. Reber Clark, for example, praised Lovecraft's 'open-mindedness' as 'A fine example of a mind fully engaged with life'.

Leland Rhodes wrote, 'HPL told some off colored [sic] jokes, had some opinions that reflected the mindset of the day […] Big deal!' This chorus surprised Kontor: 'I've been posting links to Kickstarter project for awhile now and I've never seen such a negative response' [sic]. Moore explained:

> I draw the line when I see the PC hypersensitive cult of victimhood of today thrust upon [Lovecraft] unfairly. We cannot put our moralistic standards of today on a man who was from another time. If he was burning crosses in a Klan uniform, fine. But, he wasn't. He was echoing sentiments quite common for the day whether we agree with it or not by today's social mores. I don't like anything that trashes HPL for it's [sic] own socio-political agenda.

Although fictional critiques of Lovecraft's racism are rare, I had not imagined that merely calling him a racist would be controversial. Unversed (then) in White mainstream denials of racism, and annoyed at what I took as wilful obtuseness from Moore, I demanded,

'what's with the scare quotes on "racism"? HPL lamented immigration to the US by non-Anglo-Saxons, called African Americans "chimpanzees", and praised the KKK. In what parallel universe is that not racist?' Moore replied:

> I stand by my earlier comments because frankly, I'm tired of the PC social mores of today passing judgement on a man who, based upon my reading on the subject, did nothing more than write or verbalize the equivalent of off color humor. He wasn't burning crosses in a field in a Klan robe. We live in an age of PC hypersensitivity and winning through victimization these days by people being 'offended' on behalf of others. HP Lovecraft is one of my heroes for the obvious reasons and I resent anyone who would try and elevate their own sense of morality on a man who passed away in 1937 [sic].

Some defended me or the project, but most joined Moore in defending Lovecraft. Joanna Norton praised and defended the *Shadow out of Providence* Kickstarter, saying 'I applaud the gentlemen who are behind this for doing their own thing'. Kontor advocated my position, proposing that fans 'celebrate the artist without canonizing the man' because Lovecraft's racist beliefs 'are there in his own words. You can't ignore them and you can't excuse them'. Moore, however, replied,

> Sorry, but I don't agree. Reading about ALL aspects of the man's life made him an endearing figure of his time to me and to see the typical 2012 moralistic tongue clucking apologia just makes me roll my eyes. I could care less about his personal views as they don't change his great fiction in the least, but they shape who the man was and I don't see any tragedy if he didn't recant those personal views based on the hysterical PC rantings of today. Any group that suddenly tries to paint HPL as a 'racist' is doing so for their own agenda [sic].

The word *racism* has multiple, overlapping, and competing definitions. In liberal discourse, the word most often denotes negative prejudice, defamation, or mistreatment of a particular racial group, whereas in the discourse of critical race theory, it denotes an

entrenched cultural system that both privileges Whites and also functions more or less independently of individuals' conscious or self-reported beliefs about race. In my Kickstarter description, I used the term in the liberal sense, as I generally do throughout this article. Nevertheless, critical race theory's insights on racism as a system of privilege inform my subsequent analyses.

What Whites Talk about when Whites Talk about Racism

After the successes of the American Civil Rights Movement, even the most racist Whites reject the label of *racist*. Van Dijk writes, 'precisely the more racist discourse tends to have disclaimers and other denials' (1992: 89). Moore offers the MOHT defence, in mitigation of the charge while using of scare quotes around the words *racism* and *racist* to suggest not mitigation but denial, because scare quotes 'connote "unfounded accusation"' (Van Dijk 1992: 106).

The phrase 'political correctness' is often used to trivialize objections to racist, sexist, or homophobic speech. Reactionaries depict anti-racists 'as politically correct ideologues who undermine the liberal principles of free speech' (Augoustinos 2010: 252). Van Dijk notes that reactionaries characterize anti-racists as 'oversensitive and exaggerating' (1992: 90). Kontor's thread instantiates Van Dijk's observation that 'Accusations of racism […] tend to be seen as more serious social infractions than racist attitudes or actions themselves, e.g. because they disrupt ingroup solidarity and smooth ingroup encounters' (1992: 90). Moore presented Lovecraft as the victim of my 'agenda' and would-be assassination. Berbrier argues, 'social problems are best understood as the "claims-making activities" of social actors regarding things they find troubling' (1998: 433). I found Lovecraft's racism troubling, so I made claims; Moore and others found my anti-racism troubling, so they made counter-claims. As Bonilla-Silva and Forman put it, interlocutors 'construct versions of the social world' (2000: 69).

My Kickstarter had blundered into a speech community in which I did not know the rules. Edna Andrews defines a speech community as 'a group of people who share language

in a particular way' (1996: 397). In the 'macro speech community' (Andrews 1996: 401), Lovecraft fits the definition of *racist*, but in the HPLHS's 'micro speech community' (Andrews 1996: 401), he does not. However, nobody in Kontor's thread defines who *would* count as racist. Moore twice notes that Lovecraft was not a member of Klan, implying that the Klan might count, but even so, Lovecraft's never joining the Klan does not exonerate him. Rather than concealing his identity under a hood, Lovecraft self-published his praise of racist terrorism under his own name.

Moore's 'not the Klan' defence is not an unusual one. As Van Dijk observes, 'selectively attributing racism to the extreme Right' denies it among the 'ingroup of moderate white citizens' (1992: 96), even when the racism espoused by the ingroup (here, Lovecraft) is identical to that espoused in the outgroup (the Klan). The terms '"racism" and "racist" in European and US public discourse are reserved for *others*, [for] extremist, right-wing, fringe groups and parties outside of the consensus' (Van Dijk 1992: 93). The Klan now lies not only outside the mainstream consensus but also outside the consensus of White supremacists that calls itself White Nationalism (WN).

Extreme Makeover: White Power Edition

Since the 1980s, many US White supremacists have distanced themselves from the theatrics of Klansmen and neo-Nazi skinheads while maintaining beliefs in the biological reality of folk categories of race as well as White superiority. WN disclaims hate and frames its activism in terms of self-defence and uplift borrowed from the US Civil Rights movement. Swain calls WN a 'repackaged, relabeled, and transformed White supremacy [...] aiming its appeal at a broader and better-educated audience' (2002: 16). The three rhetorical elements of WN most relevant to my analysis of Lovecraft fandom are (1) WN's claim of White victimhood, (2) its use of the Klan as a bogeyman, and (3) WN's claim that WN is not racist. Here the rhetoric of WN overlaps with that of (ostensibly) mainstream White conservatives. As Halavais notes, we should understand the views of the mainstream right and WN 'as existing on a broad discursive continuum

and that ideas and individuals find connections across the continuum' (2010: 86).

WN argues that Whites are the victims of non-Whites and leftists. WN uses 'the abrogation of White rights and the notion of White victimization' as 'interpretational frames or "calls to arms"' (Adams 2005: 762). Don Black, former Grand Wizard of the KKK and creator of *Stormfront.com*, the first WN website, says, 'because of massive minority organization in the past few decades in this country […] the government has become totally subservient to minority interests' (cited in Berbrier 1998: 438). Victim status strengthens ethical appeal; as Berbrier notes, victims are 'seen not as responsible for the harm that has come to them, thereby meriting sympathetic responses' (2000: 177). This has been WN's rhetorical strategy for decades. In 1974, Wilmot Robertson, who would later publish WN magazine *Instauration*, wrote, 'I propose that we adopt this tried and tested "underdog" line in an effort to recoup our losses' (cited in Berbrier 1999: 421). As I have shown in the HPLHS thread, the role of victim can also be used to attack critics of racism. Rhetors 'use the victim role as a "sword" (to achieve goals) and a "shield" (to deflect criticism), and may alternate strategies as needed' (Kenney & Clairmont 2009: 281).

Although US racists have claimed White victimhood since the Reconstruction Era, WN distances itself from the Ku Klux Klan. WN has abandoned 'the images and tactics of the older racist right, as well as some of its more bizarre rituals' (Swain and Nieli 2003: 6). Aiming for respectability, WN styles itself 'as "not the Klan"' (Gardiner 2005/2006: 64). *Stormfront*'s Don Black says the Klan

> has a reputation for random and senseless violence that it can really never overcome, and we could never on any large scale attract the kind of people we wanted. […] We are particularly interested in those people who feel that because of their jobs, or their plans for the future, they can't be in any way associated with us, can't be publicly associated that is, cannot let their true feelings be known (2003: 161).

Tactics change, but core beliefs and goals do not, despite the makeover.

Part of this makeover is semantic. White Nationalists seek 'to legitimate and destigmatize' themselves by claiming 'they are not racists' (Berbrier 1998: 433). Former Klansman David Duke says, 'I'm not a racist. A racist […] hates other people or wants to oppress other races, and that's not my opinion of the race problem' (2003: 180). Jared Taylor, editor of WN magazine *American Renaissance* rejects the term *racist* 'because it's pejorative, and I think that my views on race are perfectly natural, normal, and healthy […] my views on race are those that have always been the mainstream' (2003: 105-106). The latter claim is akin to the MOHT defence, which holds that Lovecraft's racism was normative, rather than a stigmatized position that he revealed only selectively. Furthermore, WN rejects the terms *racist* and *racism* as ideological attacks against Whites. The word *racist*, says Black,

> was first used by Leon Trotsky in a speech in the early twenties, but didn't really become popular until the fifties and sixties. So I reject the term 'racist' simply because of the connotations that have been ascribed to it by our opposition (2003: 164).

To call someone a *racist* is therefore to adopt the discourse of WN's enemies, with Trotsky serving as a metonym for Jewish conspiracy and socialist internationalism within the White Nationalist imaginary. White Nationalist blogger Dustin Stanley writes that Trotsky invented *racist* for his 1930 *History of the Russian Revolution*, to 'slander traditionalists, shut down debate, and leave opponents running for cover' (2010). *Metapedia.org*, a White Nationalist *Wikipedia*-lookalike, defines *racism* as 'a Europhobic epithet' and 'part of a Jewish group evolutionary strategy to maintain hegemony' (n.d.). Note the borrowings, from anti-racist identity politics, of *phobic* and *epithet*, to re-define WN as victim. *Metapedia*'s 'Mission Statement' claims that anti-racists have succeeded in 'stigmatizing previously natural and sound values and attitudes and making them seem pathological' (n.d.). WN learns from perceived enemies and constructs anti-racism as an unjust and oppressive departure from the norms of an idyllic, racist past.

Contrary to WN's revisionists, the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives 1926 as the year of first appearances of *racist* and *racism* in English. Neo-Nazi blogger Hadding Scott debunks the Trotsky myth, pointing to French uses of *raciste* from the 19-Aughts, yet he sides with WN in rejecting the word: 'Why should I accept the value-judgments of my enemies?' (2012). Notwithstanding Scott's archival work, few White Nationalists do more than ape the methods of mainstream scholars.

Instauration, Lovecraft, and *Stormfront*

Wilmot Robertson's magazine *Instauration* (1975-2000) set a higher standard. To distance WN from older White supremacy, *Instauration* created 'an image devoid of hatred, irrationality, or violence' (Berbrier 1999: 412). The magazine constructs its own respectability through its 'paucity of demeaning racial slurs, the emphasis on correct spelling, proper grammar, and sophisticated vocabulary' (Berbrier 1999: 415) all connotes respectability. Even the difficulty of its title connotes intellectualism. Robertson, its editor, advised writers to avoid fulfilling stereotypes: 'never refer to racial superiority or inferiority, only talk about racial differences, carefully avoiding all value judgments' (cited in Berbrier 1999: 420). Despite this respectable image, Robertson allowed writers to publish anonymously. *Instauration* was thus part of what Simi and Futrell (2004: 37) call the 'infrastructure of free spaces' that racists use 'to maintain activist networks and movement identity within a generally hostile context'.

Instauration's 100th issue devotes its cover story to Lovecraft, whose portrait fills the cover. We can understand this as one far-right amateur journalist's homage to another: from 1915 to 1923, Lovecraft published *The Conservative* as sole editor and primary contributor (Joshi 1996: 111). *Instauration*'s anonymous cover story quotes from Lovecraft's journalism and letters, showcasing Lovecraft's belief in the demographic dystopia facing American Whites (Anon. 1984: 5-7). The author praises Lovecraft for 'independent thinking' (Anon. 1984: 6) and for not being 'an hysterical anti-Nazi' (1984: 7). Lovecraft's correspondence

> boils with thoughts which, though not too uncommon in the 1920s and early 30s (his *floruit*), now represent the rankest heresy. Such ideas, if even whispered today by an established writer, would put a permanent end to his royalty checks (Anon. 1984: 5).

Rather than characterize Lovecraft's thought as typical, the author hedges, calling it 'not too uncommon', but still nostalgically contrasts Lovecraft's era with the 1980s. However, despite admiring Lovecraft's 'heresy', the article omits his racist epithets, animal metaphors, and exterminationist rhetoric (Anon. 1984: 5-8). It quotes from Lovecraft's 1926 screed about Jews and New York's 'Mongoloid problem' (1926a) but omits his references to lice, 'half-gorillas', and 'yellow, soulless enemies' (1984: 7). Moreover, the article omits Lovecraft's proposed 'solutions' - segregation, deportation, and war. In keeping with *Instauration*'s editorial policy, the article bowdlerizes Lovecraft's racism.

*Stormfront.*org has a more catholic editorial policy but still participates in WN's discursive makeover. Halavais calls the site 'the most significant hub of communications not only for the White Nationalists but for White supremacist organizations of all stripes' (2010: 89). *Stormfront*'s editorial policy aims to keep the site's discourse 'civil and productive': 'DO NOT advocate or suggest any activity which is illegal under U.S. law […] No profanity. Avoid racial epithets. […] No attacks against other white nationalities' (Black 2001). Members use asterisks to sanitize epithets and profanity; thus when Heimlich Bimmler posts Lovecraft's infamous ode to polygenism, its title appears as 'On the Creation of N****rs' (2010: 8). Discussion threads are visible to search engines and to unregistered visitors, but users divulge only as much personal information as they want. This quasi-anonymity 'perpetuates and makes visible processes that have always been at play' but were hitherto invisible to outsiders (Baym and Boyd 2012: 322). Unlike online fan spaces in which rhetors deliberately adopt harsh and offensive discourse as a means of shocking outsiders or presenting a non-conformist alternative to mainstream discourse, *Stormfront* adopts an ambiguous approach: by censoring the most inflammatory elements of racist speech, the site creates a space that is inclusive rather than exclusive, at least by the standards of the White supremacist scene. This both

avoids frightening away fellow travellers and also keeps the authorities from shutting down the site for sedition. *Stormfront* offers a free yet carefully policed space for White Nationalist discourse that makes outsiders privy to conversations that they could not otherwise witness.

Sceptics of my research might object that the anonymity of *Stormfront* makes it impossible to tell how much of the speech there is genuine; after all, I drew the line at creating a profile, the prerequisite for posting to the boards and viewing members' profiles. I would counter that insincere racist speech performs essentially the same cultural work as sincere racist speech. The use of racist 'sockpuppets' (false online identities), or White Nationalist 'concern trolling' (the feigning of 'concern' that an interlocutor's speech is damaging to their supposedly shared cause, in order to actually undermine that cause), or other forms of play with identity would still require users to adopt the premises of WN if they wish to be understood as White Nationalists. Moreover, they would still generate web traffic for *Stormfront*. Even my own visits as what Jesse Daniels would call an 'oppositional lurker' (2009: 50) arguably benefitted WN, insofar as they the generated page views that allow Don Black to charge advertisers like David Duke for banner-ad space.

At the time of writing, Lovecraft appears in 451 discussion threads on *Stormfront*. Heimlich Bimmler created the most popular dedicated thread, 'H.P. Lovecraft—Writings on Race and Culture', and posted scores of Lovecraft quotations. As Bimmler explains,

> Lovecraft's ever increasing influence in the artistic community, coupled with the eloquence and logic with which he is able to articulate positions that the PC world may find distasteful, make him, in my opinion, an ideal instrument for disseminating WN ideas (2010: 1).

The thread became a site of both praise and disagreement. Many found in Lovecraft a fellow traveller:

Phoenix: It's sobering to realize just how long we've faced these issues (Bimmler 2010: 3).

Shivaji: He was clearly one of us (Bimmler 2010: 3).

brianboru89: I have great respect for Lovecraft as an author and now greater respect for the man he was (Bimmler 2010: 4).

smuckers: I do not think Lovecraft would be considered 'racist' in any sane society […] Lovecraft wrote in a different time, when freedom of speech really existed […] People were not as sensitive then and critical analysation unhindered by PC thought control was possible [sic] (Bimmler 2010: 20).

Bimmler remarks that despite Lovecraft biographer S.T. Joshi being 'very "anti-racist" he is determined to publish every word Lovecraft ever wrote' (2010: 21). Forum member Aquilifer responds, 'I've heard about that Joshi character, but I wasn't sure if he had an agenda of his own, like many other "scholars" of well-known writers and thinkers' (2010: 21). The same rhetoric appears here as in the HPLHS thread: the MOHT defence, invocations of (liberal) freedom versus stultifying 'political correctness', the suspicious 'agendas' of anti-racists, and the word *racist* in scare-quotes. Much of the rhetoric on *Stormfront* is indistinguishable from ostensibly mainstream reactionary discourse, although the *Stormfront* pseudonyms connote Nazism (Heimlich Bimmler) and racist terrorism (Lonewulf14), and the ads lead to WN sites.

This is not to say that Lovecraft is uncontroversial here. Some reject him because of his (failed) marriage to a Ukrainian-American Jew; others dispute his criticisms of the Nazis. His early hierarchy of European races annoys some:

Werewolfblood: Lovecraft wasn't a White Nationalist. He believed all non-Germanics (including Celts) were inferior (Bimmler 2010: 1).

woody500z: Lovecraft seem's like a wanker, the Slavic people are just as white as any other 'real whites' [sic] (Bimmler 2010: 15).

Phoenix: In defense of his attitudes about Slavs and [southern] Europeans, that was just the way northern Europeans felt in those days (Bimmler 2010: 15).

Brionn333: I agree with phoenix about H.P. Lovecraft being a man of his time (Bimmler 2010: 3).

Phoenix: Maybe, in the interest of contemporary WN unity, [Bimmler] should edit out H.P.'s antidiluvian prejudices against southern Europeans and Slavs. We old timers understand the historical context in which Lovecraft wrote, but I worry that uninformed lurkers may read such things and think they are still representative of modern WN [sic] (Bimmler 2010: 12).

White Nationalists offer a MOHT defence to excuse Lovecraft not of racism but the wrong kind of racism, one that clashes with WN's notion of Whiteness as a biological and cultural unity. Even on *Stormfront*, some consider Lovecraft's racism unsightly, and in need of revision.

Lovecraft circulates widely on the racist Internet. He appears on the reading list of the National Socialist White People's Party, which notes, 'Lovecraft was one of us' (Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia 2010). A. Trumbo (2002) and the anonymous 'race realist' blogger at *Pechorin* praise Lovecraft's racialism (2012). Radio Free Northwest's literary podcaster 'Gretchen the Librarian' identified Lovecraft as 'a very popular horror writer that I had heard of on *Stormfront*', though she found Lovecraft's marriage to a Jew 'so bizarre […] I almost wanted to give up on this individual' (Episode 147, 2012). On *Vanguard News Network* (tagline: 'No Jews. Just right'), blogger Iranian for Aryans wrote an open letter to theologian and Lovecraft fan Robert M. Price for a speech that Price made at the Lovecraft Film Festival in Portland: 'You incessantly verbally punched and kicked "White America" in the teeth. […] Why not break the staid and pusillanimous

trend by attacking more potent foes, such as Jews, Blacks, and mestizos?' (2006). When Lovecraft appears in racist web spaces where the polite standards of WN do not hold, we see no attempts to edit him or to rebrand White supremacy. At the anti-Black hate site *Chimpout.com*, member AG uses a quotation from Lovecraft's poem 'On the Creation of Niggers' as his discussion-board signature (2010). At *Niggermania.net*, Ace of Spades (2009) begins a thread with the same poem, and the discussion runs for seven bilious pages; posters Rebecca S. and NoJigaboos both quote the poem in their discussion-board signatures. Some of Lovecraft's racist fans embrace his extremes.

The Racist out of Time

Contrary to the myth of Lovecraft as a MOHT, even he understood that his racism was both extreme and socially stigmatized. He wrote to an aunt, 'don't fancy that my nervous reaction against alien N.Y. types takes the form of conversation likely to offend any individual. One knows when and where to discuss questions with a social or ethnic cast' (cited in De Camp 1975: 256). Elsewhere, he acknowledged the dissonance between public speech and concealed, stigmatized attitudes:

> As for this flabby talk of an 'Americanism' which opposes all racial discrimination […] It is what superficial Americans proclaim with their lips, while actually lynching niggers & selling select real-estate on a restrictive basis to keep Jews & Dagoes out. In other words, it is not part of any 'Americanism' which has any real existence [sic] (1933: 250).

Like White Nationalists, Lovecraft assumes that racist hate is actually normal. However, his selective airing of these stigmatized opinions shows that he, too, was a 'superficial American' who policed his speech.

Lovecraft's close friends in the pulp world knew that others found his racism objectionable, and some of those friends even revise or suppress the truth of Lovecraft's racism in their accounts of him. Robert Bloch, in his 1982 introduction to Del Rey's

collection *The Best of H.P. Lovecraft*, discusses Lovecraft's racism in strictly hypothetical terms, as if unwilling to treat it as a matter of record: 'If Lovecraft was a racist we must recognize that the term was not generally considered pejorative during his own time' (1982: 6). However, in this introduction Bloch says nothing about Lovecraft's actual claims about Teutonic superiority or his proposals about how Teutons ought to treat racial Others, leaving the reader no basis to evaluate the hypothesis. Bloch also asks, in extenuation, 'what sort of anti-Semitic author marries a Jewess'? (1982: 6). Lovecraft's ex-wife, Sonia Davis, was clear on this point in her 1972 memoir, wherein she reported that after Lovecraft encountered groups of persons of 'minority races', 'he would become livid with anger and rage' (1972: 27). Frank Belknap Long, in his 1975 memoir, conceded that some of Lovecraft's letters 'contain passages which today would be considered racially prejudiced', but he maintains, 'I never once heard him utter a derogatory remark about any member of a minority group who passed him on the street or had occasion to engage him in conversation' (1975: 227). At best this is dishonest by omission: even if Lovecraft never spoke venom in his friend's hearing, Lovecraft wrote to Long some of his most homicidally racist letters, including the 1924 and 1926 letters quoted above. If Long's reader does not have *Selected Letters* handy and does not already know which letters Long means (for he withholds their dates), then the reader cannot easily refute Long's account. His claim that the passages in question are problematic only 'today' constitutes an implicit MOHT defence; its corollary is that in the 1920s and 1930s, one could call for the lynching or deportation of perceived racial enemies without being 'considered racially prejudiced'.

The MOHT defence depends on two factors in its audience: first on a failure to empathize with the targets of Lovecraft's racism, and second on ignorance of the intellectual history of thinking about race during Lovecraft's lifetime. To accept the MOHT defence, one must ignore those who suffered under the practices that Lovecraft advocated. As blogger Djèlí Clark points out, it requires 'ignoring that victims of racism were also men and women of those times. Privileging the perpetrator by trying to reason away his/her actions doesn't mean one whit to those on the receiving end, then or now' (2013). Denial of Lovecraft's racism is therefore symptomatic of the deeper racism and

White privilege still operant in speculative fiction fandom(s). Tor Books' blogger Seamus Cooper suggests an explanation for this blindness: 'As a white guy, I can glide past a lot of the racism without feeling its sting' (2009) (though as we saw on *Stormfront*, even some Whites feel stung by Lovecraft's early contempt for non-Nordics). In the comments below Cooper's blog post, some offer the MOHT defence, but others reject it:

> PamK [on Lovecraft's use of *nigger*]: I'm pretty certain that word would in fact have been considered racist back then, if only by the people it was directed at. Or don't they count? (Cooper 2009).

> John Hyperion: [Lovecraft] was a vile racist, I'd say even for his times, but he's still one of my favourite authors. As a black man I find attempts by modern people to gloss over this fact far more offensive than anything H.P. Lovecraft wrote (Cooper 2009).

One of the privileges of Whiteness is reading Lovecraft without feeling personally or demographically slandered. Fantasist Silvia Moreno-Garcia writes, 'As a POC writer',

> I have two choices: to completely ignore writers like Lovecraft and [Robert E.] Howard, and the sub-genres they helped shape, or to engage them […] I prefer to engage them. I think that if we don't go into these spaces that have long been closed to us, where we have often been viewed as the alien or the exotic element, we will never be represented there (2012).

Writers also grapple with the implicit racism of the publishing industry's use of Lovecraft as a metonym for excellence. Black fantasist Nnedi Okorafor writes of her conflicted feelings upon receiving the World Fantasy Award, sometimes called the 'Howie' after the award's bust of Lovecraft:

> A statuette of this racist man's head sits beside my Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa and my Carl Brandon Society Parallax Award (an award given to the best speculative fiction by a person of colour). […] This is

something people of colour, women, minorities must deal with more than most when striving to be the greatest that they can be in the arts: The fact that many of The Elders we honour and need to learn from hate or hated us (2011).

White speculative fiction writer Damien G. Walter argues that uncritical celebration of Lovecraft also reflects badly on speculative fiction fandom:

> Imagine an average non-fandom type person encountering two facts. One; H P Lovecraft is hailed as a founding figure of weird fiction, thousands of fans still adore his work, hundreds of writers have worked in his Cthulhu mythos, dozens of anthologies are published in his name every year […] all of which adds up to a remarkable kind of ancestor worship. Two; H P Lovecraft was a racist. I don't think it would be unreasonable of that average non-fandom type person to assume those fans are a bunch of racists as well (2012).

Again, one privilege of Whiteness is that the racist speech of other Whites becomes not an attack on one's humanity but a public-relations problem. However, critical discussions of Lovecraft's racism are happening in the frontier between fandom and commercial publishing.

The MOHT defence also requires ignorance of Lovecraft's era. We can understand this ignorance in terms of *habitus*, which 'includes the notion of a habitat, the habitants and the processes of inhabiting it, and the habituated ways of thinking that go along with it' (Fiske 1992: 32-33). The *habitus* of White Lovecraft fans in the US therefore includes their notions of how the US is today and how it was in Lovecraft's time. When fans defend an unsightly text as typical of its time, they are 'protecting their perceptions of history' (Sperb 2010: 36). Reactionary and White Nationalist fans have a stake in (mis)remembering American history and in re-narrating it to make White supremacy a normative, unstigmatized position, because if it was so in the past, it could be so again. Furthermore, dismissing unsightly elements of older works 'as "a product of their time"' ignores the role that 'representations of past "time" have today in reinforcing prejudices'

(Sperb 2010: 34). Normalising past racism through narratives (fictional or non-fictional) helps Whites to normalize present racism.

In 2013 the Providence *Phoenix* ran a story that instantiates the role of ignorance in the MOHT defence. Reporting on a fan's campaign to install a bust of Lovecraft in the Providence Athenaeum, writer Philip Eil interviewed Niels Hobbs, a local organiser of the Lovecraft-themed NecronomiCon 2013 convention. Hobbs says that Lovecraft kept up with 'the latest science of the time [...] that might even explain some of his racism: the fact that the '20s and '30s were the height of phrenology' (2013). Hobbs was mistaken: by 1850 mainstream physiologists had discredited phrenology, the reading of character through skull contours (Weidan 2005: 1807). Hobbs probably meant *craniometry*, but, as Joshi notes,

> classification of skulls by size or shape (dolichocephalic, brachycephalic, etc.) which Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard waste much time debating in their letters of the 1930s - had been shown to be preposterous and unscientific even by the late nineteenth century (1996: 588).

Samuel Morton's 1839 *Crania Americana* had established the so-called 'American School' of polygenist craniometric anthropology, which divided humanity into a hierarchy of 'Caucasoid', 'Mongoloid', and 'Negroid' (Harris 1968: 89-90). However, in 1912, Franz Boas's *Race, Language, and Culture* showed that crania 'responded to environmental factors within the span of a single generation' (Harris 1968: 99) and inaugurated modern, anti-racist anthropology. Lovecraft may have kept up with astronomy, but his anthropology was generations out of date. Hobbs, when interviewed as a supposed Lovecraft expert, makes a historical error, but Eil and his editors fail to catch it. Behind every successful MOHT defence lie such errors.

The fan who launched the campaign to place Lovecraft's bust in the Athenaeum during NecronomiCon 2013 is Bryan Moore. Though I did not know it when our paths crossed, Moore runs Arkham Studios, which sells statuary based on Lovecraft's work. One can

buy a $225 Cthulhu monster-idol (pictured bookending Lovecraft's *Selected Letters*) or a $300 bust of Lovecraft bearing the inscription, 'I am Providence' (Arkham Studios 2010). This inscription comes from a letter in which Lovecraft exults over returning to Providence from 'the nightmare of Brooklyn's mongrel slums' (1926b: 51). Moore's Kickstarter promises to donate a portion of its funds to the Providence Community Library's children's programs; Moore writes, 'we can help thousands of American children learn to read […] perhaps, some of them will even discover Lovecraft someday' (2013). Like the protagonist of Lovecraft's 'Call of Cthulhu', these children may be horrified by some of what they read.

Conclusion

Scholars of media and popular culture have a responsibility to study reactionary uses of new participatory media, because racism, even in the liberal sense, is not dead. At the time of writing, Heritage Foundation scholar Jason Richwine came under fire for arguing the biological reality of race as the basis for re-writing US immigration policy (Houston 2013; Weigel 2013: 1). Richwine straddles the reactionary right and WN; he has published through the Heritage Foundation and through *AlternativeRight.com*, run by White Nationalist Richard Spencer (Moody 2013; Weigel 2013: 2). Online commentators decried the criticisms of Richwine as attempts to 'lynch' him (Blount; Jacoby; Malkin; Unz; all 2013). Only in reactionary metaphor is a White, Ivy-League, 'scientific' racist the victim of Klan-style vigilantism.

A fuller study of the reception of Lovecraft's racism would examine the archives of amateur journalism, fanzines, or quasi-academic Lovecraftiana. Another approach would compare White supremacists' reception of Lovecraft and other writers of speculative fiction (utopian or dystopian). Scholars might also study Lovecraft fans as historiographers, as they create movies, fiction, and games that use 'period' settings from the 1920s and 1930s. We could analyse these as works of fan history, ranging from critical to nostalgic to revisionist.

Although the Internet allows racists to fraternize and organise, it also allows outsiders access to discourses that would otherwise remain invisible. *Stormfront* depends on this visibility to recruit new blood, but it also exposes WN to its opponents. As Halavais puts it, 'problems laid bare are more easily solved than those unobserved' (2010: 100). Anyone with a political commitment to combating racism and White privilege must stay abreast of such groups as they adapt new technological platforms and rhetorical strategies for old ends.

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