Staying with Lovecraft's Trouble:

Affirmation as an Alternative Approach to Lovecraft's Legacy of Racism

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August 14, 2021

ABSTRACT

This thesis maintains that scholarship at large, and Lovecraft studies specifically, have not been able to formulate an effective approach to Lovecraft's legacy of racism. The most often seen approaches—dismissal of the entirety of Lovecraft's thought and work, apologism of his racism, and the justification of his racism on aesthetic grounds—suffer from disastrous flaws, leading me to proclaim their bankruptcy. Yet Donna Haraway, who takes the dismissal approach, lends the tools for an alternative approach to Lovecraft's racism: an affirmative one, based on her notion of "staying with the trouble." I turn to post-Lovecraftian fiction—work in Lovecraft's "Cthulhu Mythos," his shared fictional universe—to formulate this affirmative approach, focusing on Elizabeth Bear's *Shoggoths in Bloom* (2008) and Ruthanna Emrys' *The Litany of Earth* (2012), comparing them to the Lovecraftian originals which they subvert. In the process, I refute Graham Harman's reading of Lovecraft, formulating an opposing approach based on a *bricolage* of Harawayan thought; affirmative notions such as concern, relationality, transformation, and being present; and poststructural monster theory. The result is an approach which stays with Lovecraft's trouble, because it does not fail to formulate a politics—as opposed to Harman's implicit reiteration of Western, white, racist biopolitics—and promises a way to go ahead with the legacy of a virulently racist man in our contemporary cultural moment: a time of unprecedented violence, oppression, and economic and ecological devastation, in which the question of who is human and who is not has become urgent yet again.

Keywords

Affirmation, staying with the trouble, Lovecraft studies, H. P. Lovecraft, racism, Donna Haraway, Graham Harman, Elizabeth Bear, Ruthanna Emrys, post-Lovecraftian fiction.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis departs from three observations: one, H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937), despite his rampant racism and antisemitism, has seen a remarkable scholarly and popular renaissance over the last couple of decades. Two, scholarship has been unable to formulate an effective and candid critical approach to Lovecraft's legacy that is also capable of grappling with these racist underpinnings. And three, contemporary subversive fictional work set in Lovecraft's shared fictional universe—the so-called 'Cthulhu Mythos'—*has* managed to grapple with that racist legacy, consciously working with and through his racism, antisemitism and classism; having earned the moniker "post-Lovecraftian fiction" (Phipps 2014), or, alternatively, "hacking" Lovecraft (Camara 2016, 25). I maintain these three observations lead to two important considerations: first, because of Lovecraft's now-ubiquitous scholarly and popular status, scholarship will *have* to find a way to grapple with his troubled side. And second, scholarship can be informed by post-Lovecraftian fiction in how to go about doing that critically and candidly; yet this avenue of thought is as of now barely explored (24).

The controversy surrounding the World Fantasy Award trophy in 2015 serves as an excellent illustration of these observations and considerations. The controversy constituted a watershed moment in Lovecraftiana: first, it dragged the debate on Lovecraft's racism from limited discussions in scholarship into the online limelight; and second, it foreshadowed—and perhaps, inspired—the first wave of post-Lovecraftian fiction (Saler 2020, 52). From the award's inception in 1975 through 2015, its trophy was a caricature of Lovecraft by artist Gahan Wilson, nicknamed 'The Howard' (fig. 1). Presaging the controversy were writer Nnedi Okorafor's musings on being awarded with the bust of a virulently racist man in 2011 for her novel *Who Fears Death* (2010). She asked fans on Facebook (Okorafor 2011b) and her blog (Okorafor 2011a) what to do with her prize after a friend of hers had shown her Lovecraft's

early (1912) poem "On the Creation of N-----s,"[1] which calls black people "semi-humans," created to "fill the gap" between man and animal.

> Anyway, a statuette of this racist man's head is in my home. A statuette of this racist man's head is one of my greatest honors as a writer. 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 color). I'm conflicted. (Okorafor 2011b)

Several other writers, including China Miéville (Okorafor 2011b), Jeff Vandermeer, and Steve Barnes (Okorafor 2011a), weighed in, and the discussion started rolling, although it remained mostly contained to the participating writers' blogs and social media.

Until 2014, when writer Daniel José Older started a petition to change the Howard to a bust of Octavia Butler. The controversy had simmered slowly for three years, but now quickly reached a boiling point as Older's initiative gained traction. Older's statements accompanying the petition rubbed many the wrong way: "many writers have spoken out about their discomfort with winning an award that lauds someone with such hideous opinions, most notably Nnedi Okorafor. It's time to stop co-signing his bigotry and move sci-fi/fantasy out of the past" (Older 2014). One 'Steven Stevenson' launched a counter-petition, claiming the push against using Lovecraft's likeness for the WFA was only "to be PC" (Stevenson 2014). Editors of Tor.com—a bastion for sci-fi, fantasy, and weird fiction publishing—started weighing in (Schelbach 2014); WFA winners after Okorafor started raising the issue during their acceptance speeches

[1] Despite this project's insistence on affirming Lovecraft's racism, I have chosen not to reproduce this specific instantiation. As I will discuss later, affirmation's transformative potential lays in concern and relationality, whereas here I only quote to illustrate.

Fig 1. Left, 'The Howard,' the World Fantasy Award's trophy from 1975 through 2015, designed by Gahan Wilson. Right the new trophy used since 2016, designed by Vincent Villafranca.

(Flood 2015); and media beyond weird and science fiction started to pick up on the story (e.g. Maroney 2014; Flood 2014), showcasing Lovecraft's wider appeal. Ultimately, the WFA decided to change its trophy from the Howard to a tree in front of a moon in 2015 (Cruz 2015).

This led to a reaction by none other than S. T. Joshi, eminent scholar in Lovecraft studies, who called it "craven yielding to the worst sort of political correctness and an explicit acceptance of the crude, ignorant, and tendentious slanders against Lovecraft propagated by a small but noisy band of agitators" (Joshi 2015a). He handed in his own two World Fantasy Awards and vowed to never attend a World Fantasy Convention again. He weighed in twice more on the matter, attempting to rebuke the WFA's decision. First, he pointed out other racist writers with awards named after them in a highly polemic way (2015b). Five days later, he set out a more thoughtfully reasoned argument (2015c). Central to his contention are a host of

apologisms, ranging from a call to separate Lovecraft's fiction from Lovecraft the man, to a less belligerent rephrasing of his 'other authors are racist, too' argument from five days earlier.

Although Joshi *does* acknowledge Lovecraft's racism—unlike for example, 'Stevenson,' who only "admit[s] some of Lovecraft's personal opinions were less than ideal" (2014)—the meat of his arguments dance around the actual issue at stake: the WFA trophy was, without a doubt, a bust of a virulently racist man (Flood 2015). This is a prime example of my second observation: Lovecraft scholarship has issues grappling with Lovecraft's trouble effectively and candidly. Likewise, the approach taken by the 'other camp'—exemplified by Older's statements accompanying his petition—is deeply flawed too: there is also no deeper engagement with the issue at stake at all, only an uncritical complete disavowal of the *entirety* of Lovecraft because of a single contentious issue, employing a simplified understanding of Lovecraft's racism. Although laudable in its motivations, such an approach throws the baby out with the bathwater, not to mention Lovecraft's racism is still not properly dealt with.

As such, neither of these responses to the WFA controversy furthered the argument or led to any sort of critical, affirmative way of dealing with Lovecraft's non-innocent legacy. Instead, under pressure, the WFA changed the bust (fig. 1) without an accompanying statement; sweeping Lovecraft's racism under the rug, itself yet another nonviable way to approach it. This illustrates my first consideration: Lovecraft scholarship will *have* to formulate an effective approach to Lovecraft's racism, or risk becoming irrelevant concerning the matter. Joshi, the foremost Lovecraft scholar who engaged with the issue, attempted to formulate an approach, yet his apologisms neither felt forthright nor like they got to the heart of the issue. Or, as Okorafor gives name to the feeling, such "excuse[s] . . . have never flown with me" (2011b). Accordingly, with scholarship failing, and the alternative—total dismissal—not being an attractive option to anyone wanting to *deal* with the issue at stake either, the WFA took the equally unsatisfactory approach of acting like nothing ever happened. As such, the WFA

controversy and the approaches taken by the various actors involved in it, can be seen as symptomatic of the impasse in Lovecraft scholarship concerning Lovecraft's legacy of racism, and the bankruptcy of the most commonly seen approaches to it.

Yet not *everything* was bad about the controversy. Going back to 2011, Okorafor's tentative conclusion on her feelings regarding the bust are extremely insightful contra the contentious discussion that would follow three years later:

> Do I want "The Howard" . . . replaced with the head of some other great writer? Maybe. Maybe it's about that time. Maybe not. What I *know* I want is to *face* the history of this leg of literature rather than put it aside or bury it. If this is how some of the great minds of speculative fiction felt, then let's deal with that... as opposed to never mention it or explain it away. If Lovecraft's likeness and name are to be used in connection to the World Fantasy Award, I think there should be some discourse about what it means to honor a talented racist. (Okorafor 2011b)

Okorafor expresses a desire for affirmation: facing the issue at stake *as it is*, and then dealing with it, as opposed to the approaches we have seen before. Older's dismissal ("put it aside or bury it"), the WFA's claimed ignorance ("never mention it"), and Joshi's apologism ("explain it away") are all unsatisfactory options; instead, one should approach Lovecraft's racism by *facing* it. When she asked fellow weird author China Miéville how he dealt with his Howard, he offered a similar solution, albeit considerably more Miévellesque in execution:

> Well, in my case, I have always done something very specific and simple. I consider the award inextricable from but not reducible to Lovecraft himself. Therefore, I was very honoured to receive the award as representative of a particular field of literature. And

> the award itself, the statuette of the man himself? I put it out of sight, in my study, where only I can see it, and I have turned it to face the wall. So I am punishing the little fucker like the malevolent clown he was, I can look at it and remember the honour, and above all I am writing behind Lovecraft's back. (Miéville, cited in Okorafor 2011b)

Okorafor and Miéville both propose alternative ways of approaching Lovecraft's racism, but both have in common that they want to *affirm* the racism first, and then work from there. This line of thought reverberated in the Mythos: modern historian Michael Saler notes how the WFA "stimulated an efflorescence of new Mythos fictions reflecting these debates" (2020, 54). Post-Lovecraftian fiction was born.

Works by authors such as Silvia Morena-Garcia (2015), Kij Johnson (2016), Victor LaValle (2016), Nick Mamatas (2016), Charles Phipps (2016), and Matt Ruff (2016)—note the historical moment of their publication—deconstruct and subvert the Lovecraftian master trope of fear for the unknown other (Baxter 2014); often portraying Lovecraft's racially-inspired horrors in a sympathetic light, frequently as protagonists. This is the third observation I made: these works first affirm the racism underpinning Lovecraft's entities and tropes, and then work from there to write works within the larger Lovecraftian framework that are *not* dishonestly ignorant, apologetic, or uncritically dismissive of Lovecraft's racism. It is because of this ability of fiction to grapple with a legacy which is apparently so troublesome for scholarship to deal with, that I maintain that Lovecraft scholarship can be informed by post-Lovecraftian fiction in formulating an approach to Lovecraft, warts and all, that circumvents the pitfalls of most contemporary approaches. There are a few scholars (e.g. Camara 2016; Poole 2016; Kneale 2019; Kumler 2020; Saler 2020) who have caught wind of fiction's head start in this matter, but Lovecraft scholarship at large is still in the dark.

It is here where I will make my intervention: by formulating that approach that, because it is informed by post-Lovecraftian fiction, learns from, and then circumvents, contemporary Lovecraft scholarship's pitfalls. Next to post-Lovecraftian fiction, my second interlocutor will be Donna Haraway, whose notion of "staying with the trouble" (2016, 3) is central to my alternative approach to Lovecraft's racism. I will adapt this notion to signify an affirmative approach to Lovecraft's non-innocent legacy, an approach akin to the method post-Lovecraftian fiction employs: a staying with Lovecraft's trouble. Yet my project's relationship to Haraway is more complicated than it may initially seem.

Donna Haraway and Lovecraft

In 2016's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Haraway proposed "staying with the trouble" as a response to our contemporary precarious time, the Anthropocene or Capitalocene (2). It entails "to become capable, with each other and all our bumptious kinds, of response," not only to the "troubling and turbid times" (1) of the Anthropocene, but also to *each other*. It is relentlessly focused on the present because responses to the Anthropocene are too often focused on the future, either by promising salvation from our problems by (often quixotic) technological innovation, or by an apocalyptic belief in it already being too late to do anything about the horrors of our age (2-3). Staying with the trouble instead refuses to reduce the present to "a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures," instead viewing the present "as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places times, matters, and meanings" (1).

Complementary to staying with the trouble, Haraway proposes to rename our current epoch the "Chthulucene," which is "an ongoing temporality," in which "human beings are not the only important actors" (2016, 51-5). She makes this suggestion to dethrone Anthropos and Capital as namesake for our contemporary -cene. Haraway asserts that the term Capitalocene

diverts attention from the actual entangled and complicated causes and effects of our contemporary times. Capital "is only one player in planet-transforming, historically situated, new enough, worlding relations" (48), and as such should not take the central place.

Likewise, Anthropos, or "Species Man" (Haraway 2016, 48), is not suited as master trope of the extermination and oppression that happens in our current time. Haraway notes how this "generic masculine universal . . . should not name this double-death-loving epoch" (47). That is, calling the epoch after the Anthropos repeats the problem that got us there in the first place—"the great phallic and modernizing Adventure" (47)—as it places Man at the center of things, either erasing all others on Earth,[2] or in the least once again placing them in a subjugated position. Haraway is especially critical of the "prick tale" (39-40) of Anthropos, or Man, because it also points at the possibility of alternate ways of conceiving our humanity in relation to others, human and nonhuman. If Man is *one* tale, then there must be more. Hence, she stresses "the need to change the story, to learn somehow to narrate—to think—outside of the prick tale of Humans in History" (40). In this way, Haraway's critique of Man is in powerful conversation with Sylvia Wynter's notion of "genre of being human" (2003); the "answer that we now give to the question of the who and what we are" (316-7), which I will return to chapter 2. Haraway insists that Man is *not* a good answer to that question. Instead, Haraway insists on staying with the trouble in the Chthulucene: "living-with and dying-with each other potently in the Chthulucene can be a fierce reply to the dictates of both Anthropos and Capital" (2016, 2).

Chthulucene, first coined in a keynote talk in 2014, is meant to evoke "thick, ongoing presence, with hyphae [e.g. becoming-with, response-able, living-with] infusing all sorts of temporalities and materialities" (2). It is named after the Greek *kainos*, meaning "now, a time of beginnings, a time for ongoing, for freshness" (2), and *chthonic*, "of the earth" (173). Yet

[2] That is, the term 'Anthropocene' implicates *all* of humanity in the devastation of our current timescape, yet "'Humans' as a whole are not responsible for causing the mess we are currently in, nor are they perpetuating it at equal rates" (Luciano 2015). Haraway is hence concerned with who the Anthropos in Anthropocene is.

Chthulucene *also* eerily evokes Lovecraft's most famous fictional entity: Cthulhu, first appearing in "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928). Haraway, aware of Lovecraft's racism, repeatedly disavows any connection to the entity (2016, 101, 169, 174): her Chthulucene is "not named after SF writer H. P. Lovecraft's misogynist racial-nightmare monster Cthulhu (note the spelling difference)" (101). Yet Cthulhu's—and hence Lovecraft's—influence cannot easily be denied (e.g. Lewis 2017; Iveson 2017; Fadil-Luchkiw 2018); it appears Haraway does not shy away from "banking on his [Lovecraft's] aesthetic-political power" (Woodard 2017, 1182). In fact, Cthulhu—an ancient, unknowable, apocalyptic entity from beyond the stars—has been enthusiastically adopted by some in posthumanist schools of thinking because of its association with anti-anthropocentrism (Sederholm and Weinstock 3-8). Cthulhu's apparent plans of planetary destruction have been likened to Haraway's call for population reduction (Thompson 2016; Lewis 2017).[3] As such, Haraway's claim that "Cthulhu . . . luxuriating in the science fiction of H. P. Lovecraft, plays no role for me" (Haraway 2016, 174) becomes an untenable position. Swapping a single 'h' around does not do enough to *not* implicate Cthulhu in the Chthulucene. Or as feminist cultural critic Sophie Lewis puts it, "to paint with a homonym of HP Lovecraft's mass-murdering titan represents a choice" (Lewis 2017): undoubtably a choice to bank on Lovecraft's ever-increasing popular and scholarly appeal, and perhaps a choice to claim a stake in the discussion on who or what is human and who or what is not. I will return to the latter possibility towards the end of this project.

As such, Haraway demonstrates several of my claims: first, Lovecraft is now ubiquitous to the degree that his wider influence is felt as far as feminist science and technology studies, evidenced by Haraway's proposition to rename the Anthropocene to Chthulucene. Secondly,

[3] Matt Thompson, under the guise of "guest blogger Cthulhu, Great Old One and Special Collections Librarian," mockingly attacks Haraway's position: "sure my methods are controversial, but she and I have the same goal in mind: confronting our shared ecological crisis by addressing the problem of accelerating human population growth" (2016). 'It' also derides her denial of Lovecraft having any influence on her work: "Haraway mistakenly believes she has inoculated herself against my minions by adding a superfluous 'h' to Cthulhu in order to make her Chthulucene but yet I linger!"

Haraway's response indicates an often seen yet deficient approach to Lovecraft's racism, which we first saw being used in Older's petition: disavowing Lovecraft *tout court* because of his racist underpinnings. She simultaneously shows the bankruptcy of that approach: Lovecraft's racism is still not addressed. Thirdly, it demonstrates my claim that scholarship *has* to reckon with Lovecraft exactly because of the renaissance his work has gone through; even Haraway has justify her usage of a Lovecraftian term (Haraway 2017), in a field of study generally not concerned with Lovecraft.

This does not mean I dismiss Haraway, however. On the contrary: by theorizing *with* Haraway, I will formulate an alternative affirmative approach to Lovecraft's racism. Haraway herself notes how when we are *not* in agreement, we focus on "to hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem" (2007, 19). It is in this spirit that I engage with Haraway's thought. Central to this is "staying with the trouble" (2016), which I will view as a Deleuzian-inspired affirmative practice. Yet that is not where Haraway's influence ends. Her work on "non-innocent, non-pure histories" (Schneider 2005, 162) informs my approach to Lovecraft's racism; her emphasis on staying with these histories, on writing from within "the belly of the monster" (Haraway 1991, 188) is fundamental to the alternative approach I propose. The use of science fiction as "core part of Haraway's imaginative, theoretical practice" (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 113)—for example, her rewriting of Lisa Foo at the end of *The Promises of Monsters* (1992), or "The Camille Stories" at the end of *Staying with the Trouble* (134-168)—is highly similar to my insistence on letting post-Lovecraftian fiction inform Lovecraft scholarship. There is a great consonance between Haraway's musings on "making-with," "becoming-with," and/or "sympoiesis" (2016) and the collaborative nature of the contemporary Cthulhu Mythos. Lastly, Haraway's musings on the monster ([1992] 2003), in combination with the above-mentioned focus on writing from within the belly of said monster, speaks to the post-Lovecraftian trope of

featuring monsters as protagonists. Chapter 2 is largely devoted to the monster, and is much indebted to a Harawayan interpretation of monstrosity. As such, although I maintain she makes a mistake in the way in which she approaches Lovecraft's racism—one does not *stay* with the trouble if one dismisses Lovecraft to the literal margins of one's project—this project is hugely indebted to Harawayan thought, and can perhaps even be called Harawayan itself.

Haraway's thought and post-Lovecraftian fiction, and the interplay between these two, will be the main two pillars upon which an alternative way to approach Lovecraft's racism is built. A third pillar will be opposition to Graham Harman's work on Lovecraft (2012), but I will return to that later. First, my initial observations and their subsequent considerations, with which I started, will have to be substantiated. That is, a look at Lovecraft's contemporary ubiquity in scholarship and popular culture, and an analysis of his racism; the conspicuous undercurrent of his legacy which many seem keen to apologize, dismiss, justify, or ignore. This will also respectively clarify Haraway's motivation behind her use of a Lovecraftian term, and her strong reaction when it is suggested that 'Chthulucene' *is* a term from Lovecraftiana.

Lovecraftiana: the popular and scholarly influence of Lovecraft

The reception of Lovecraft's output, both fictional and non-fictional, has seen a remarkable trajectory. Originally regarded as a pulp author, Lovecraft died in poverty, not being able to make a living from his writing (Joshi 2001, 390). Yet after his death, his fame spread by way of the earlier mentioned Cthulhu Mythos: the shared fictional universe of Lovecraft's creation, most often set in fictional New England topography, inhabited by his many entities, and rife with now-common tropes in weird literature. Author and librarian Jess Nevins has called the Mythos the "first open-source fictional universe" (2013), and authors contribute to it to this day. The Mythos meant the endurance of "Lovecraftian horror," which is now recognized as its own subgenre of horror (Stableford 2007), extending the Mythos' lifetime into the present and

beyond. Lovecraft's friend and collaborator August Derleth was instrumental in spreading the Mythos, both through his own work in the setting, and by establishing Arkham House with Donald Wandrei in 1939, which was originally designed solely to conserve Lovecraft's work as hardcovers (Joshi 2001, 390). Arkham House publishes Mythos tales, from pastiches to parodies, to this day.

As the Mythos picked up steam, its originator was reevaluated: first, appreciation grew within the genre of horror and weird fiction (Schweitzer 2012, 1); then within 1960s counterculture (Luckhurst 2013, xiii); and, finally, he was heralded as the quintessential writer of weird horror fiction, canonized by the Library of America in 2005. In this day, "we're having a very big weird fiction, Lovecrafty moment" (Miéville 2016, 238). The Mythos is a sprawling monster; it includes works as diverse as Chaosium's well-received 1981 tabletop roleplaying game *Call of Cthulhu*, to *A Shoggoth on the Roof* (2005)—a musical parody of, of course, *Fiddler on the Roof*—and anything in between. The latter is of particular notice: Lovecraft's antisemitism seems antithetical to *Fiddler*'s Jewish characters, playwright, and themes; yet such an odd combination is a prime example of the contemporary Mythos' status as collaborative effort full of striking contrasts. It also serves to demonstrate that the Mythos often is a heavily contested space, in which fans, critics, and authors vie for authentic status (Phipps 2014). Beyond the Mythos, Lovecraft's legacy as a person and the reception of his work are likewise heavily contested.

Criticism of Lovecraft's work started off in Lovecraft's friend circle (e.g. Leiber 1949), but moved to the academy in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Mosig 1973; Burleson 1980; Joshi 1980). By the end of the decade, Lovecraft's work—especially his output from 1926 to his death, his so-called "Cthulhu Mythos phase" (Schweitzer 2012, 52)—was perceived to be rich in philosophical themes, due to its underlying themes concerning the insignificance of humanity in relation to the greater cosmic scale of things (Price 2011, 259). This has led to him being

acclaimed as a literary exemplar of various strands of philosophy and theory, including "cosmic indifferentism" (Joshi, 1996, 260-5), misanthropy and nihilism (Houellebecq 1991), the posthumanism (Thacker 2015), and, most prominently, as championing Graham Harman's "weird realism" (2012, 231-260). In this capacity, he has been invoked in topics ranging from utopian studies (Murphy 2018), but also dystopian studies (Wicks 2018); and from feminist new materialism (Sperling 2017b) to, rather unexpected, the relationship between modernism and Pentecostalism (Shapiro and Phillip 2017). These themes of de-emphasizing the human and the fundamental inability to fully comprehend others, oneself, and the universe, combined with the racism underlying his work (Sperling 2017a), have led some to proclaim our current age "The Age of Lovecraft": our contemporary "cultural moment" in which Lovecraft's influence is ubiquitous, both his good and bad sides (Sederholm and Weinstock 2016, 26-8).[4]

Lovecraft's work has likewise seeped into popular culture. Lovecraftian horror has become an umbrella term for horror that does not deliver its namesake emotion by employing gore or shock, but by invoking existential horror of the unknowable, the cosmic, and the incomprehensible instead. His literary influence has inspired writers such as Jorge Luis Borges (Borges [1975] 1977, 51) and Joyce Carol Oates (Oates 1996). Likewise, the 'New Weird,' which counts writers such as China Miéville, Jeff Vandermeer, and Paul Di Filippo to its ranks, is heavily indebted to Lovecraft (Weinstock 2016, 196). Video games containing Lovecraftian themes and tropes are widespread (Chatziioannou 2019); with one commentator even remarking that "we're all set on H. P. Lovecraft games for a while" (Drucker 2019), because of overuse of Lovecraftian tropes in the industry. We met Cthulhu earlier, who has inspired phenomena as wide-ranging as heavy metal songs (Metallica 1984), children's books

[4] Note the similarities between 'the Age of Lovecraft' and Haraway's 'Chthulucene.' It seems Haraway was not the only one considering calling our "ongoing temporality" (2016, 51) after Lovecraft or his creations.

(Ivankovic 2017), planetary regions of Pluto (Stern et al. 2018), the taxonomic name of the spider *Pimoa Cthulhu* (Hormiga 1994),[5] and presidential campaigns (Miller 2016).

His induction into the Library of America marked a shift in Lovecraft's reception: it meant he could no longer easily be regarded as pulp, and hence could not be dismissed as easily on aesthetic grounds; it meant one can no longer easily dismiss Lovecraft's writing as "bad taste and bad art" (286) as eminent critic Edmund Wilson did in 1950. Instead, when Lovecraft's work is dismissed in contemporary times, it is often based on political and ethical grounds; in arguments which are mindful of Lovecraft the man, instead of considering only Lovecraft the writer (Saler 2020, 52). Hence Lovecraft's contemporary status consists of a huge popular appeal, large genre influence by way of the Mythos, growing scholarly attention, and a significant undercurrent in both scholarly and popular reception dismissing him based on his racist views.

What has happened here? What is behind this polarized and contested reception of Lovecraft's now-widespread scholarly and popular legacy and inheritance? And what is at stake in discussing, interpreting, and contesting his work and life? I argue that two elements of Lovecraft's legacy are largely responsible for the fluctuating discourse outlined above: the collaborative nature of the Cthulhu Mythos, and the racism underlying Lovecraft's work.[6] The latter element has become increasingly important in popular and critical discussions of Lovecraft (Saler 2020, 52), explaining the turn from aesthetic to political and ethical critique.

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[5] The spider is important for another reason: Haraway claims to have named the Chthulucene after *Pimoa Cthulhu* (Haraway 2016, 31), not after Lovecraft's Cthulhu (174). Gustavo Hormiga, the scientist who named the spider, is clear about his inspiration: he *has* named it after Cthulhu (1994). Haraway says she "take[s] the liberty to rescue my spider from Lovecraft for other stories" (2016, 174), in a way similar to her 'rescuing' the character Lisa Foo from John Varley's short story "Press Enter" (1964) in *The Promises of Monsters* (Haraway [1992] 2004). I will investigate this further in chapter 2.

[6] Sederholm and Weinstock list an additional number of causes, from the congruence between Lovecraft's philosophical underpinnings and the posthuman turn in the humanities, to the mainstreaming of speculative media (2016, 23-4). Like me, they include the Mythos' collaborative nature as cause, but do not further comment on Lovecraft's racism as contributing factor. Although I do not disagree with their analysis, I wish to stress the inclusion of the latter as main cause: I maintain our contemporary cultural moment cannot be interpreted without considering the ongoing social justice movements against all forms of xenophobia and their consequent backlash.

Yet the discussion is often uncritical and overheated. That is not to disregard other elements of his work that are influential and a rich ground for analysis and interpretation—most notably Lovecraft's philosophical undercurrents—but the Mythos and Lovecraft's racism are two elements which constitute an intersection that, I maintain, *needs* additional critical attention. Or, as cultural critic Alison Sperling tantalizingly inquires: "what does it mean that out of prejudice, fear, and a hatred of otherness was born a literary tradition that has particular merit in the contemporary moment?" (Sperling 2017a). It is this question that drives part of this project.

These two elements and the contested, widespread nature of Lovecraft's legacy inform each other: Lovecraft's immense popular appeal warrants a critical approach to his legacy of racism. If the reading and analysis of Lovecraft are "site[s] of disputes about history, politics, and affect," where we "advance claims about how we should understand both texts and also the social world" (Claverie 2013, 81), then scholarship has a stake in Lovecraft's reception. Lovecraft's marked impact on both popular culture and scholarship means we "cannot dismiss the problem of racism as irrelevant" (Sederholm and Weinstock 2016, 27). If fiction "can inform the civic imagination through vigorous discussions about fictional representations" (Saler 2020, 52), then scholarship must surely not lag behind in formulating an approach to such a contested fictional legacy as Lovecraft's. And this approach must be critical: Lovecraft's racism warrants a careful stance towards the enthusiasm with which he and his thought are adopted into various ideological and philosophical debates (Poole 2016). Additionally, because racism is inherent in Lovecraft's work (Joshi 1996, 162; Paz 2012, 3-4; Gray 2014; Baxter 2014; Miéville 2016, 241), anyone writing in the Cthulhu Mythos or in Lovecraft scholarship will *have* to deal with Lovecraft's awful side, due to the collaborative nature of the Mythos. As such, these intersections raise questions on how to deal with what Haraway calls a non-innocent, non-pure history: a history with a popularly, literarily, and philosophically influential legacy,

yet marred by despicable racism. Any continued work in the Cthulhu Mythos and/or in Lovecraft scholarship will hence have to make conscious choices about how to deal the *entirety* of Lovecraft's legacy, warts and all. But what does that history exactly entail?

Lovecraft's legacy of racism

Lovecraft's various -isms—including racism, antisemitism, elitism, and classism—are well-documented, both in his fiction and in his personal communications and essays. Whether he also held misogynist (Baxter 2014; Joshi 2016) and/or homophobic (Joshi 1996, 37) views, or not, is still debated. His racism was mostly directed towards black people. Lovecraft argued for a strong color line until his death, arguing against intermarriage between black and white people, which would lead to "miscegenation" (Joshi 2001, 358): "racial mixture" would "lower the result" of a nation (Lovecraft 1964, 17). Hence his racism has a strong biopolitical inclinationo: it attempts to postulate a biological basis on which to exclude and marginalize racial Others. Although his hatred was most strong towards black people and, puzzlingly, Aboriginal Australians (Joshi 2001, 358), it was not limited to them: he also abhorred Irish, Indian, Polish, Mongoloid, and Italian people; generally anyone who was of non-WASP descent (Steiner 2005, 55). He backed this up with an appeal to scientific racism: "*science* shows the infinite superiority of the Teutonic Aryan over all others" (1964, 17, emphasis mine).

Jewish people were not exempt. In a letter to his friend Rheinhart Kleiner, Lovecraft recalls his first exposure to Jewish people when he went to high school in 1904:

> It was there that I formed my ineradicable aversion to the Semitic race. The Jews were brilliant in their classes—calculatingly & schemingly brilliant—but their ideals were sordid & their manners coarse. I became rather well known as an anti-Semitic before I had been at Hope Street many days. (Lovecraft 2005a, 74-5)

Although Lovecraft was still spouting slogans such as "oppressive as it seems, the Jew must be muzzled" (2005a, 19) in 1915, four years later he would meet his first Jewish friend, Samuel Loveman. He endorsed Loveman in the amateur journalism movement, noting how "Jew or not, I am rather proud to be his sponsor for the second advent of the Association. His poetical gifts are of the highest order, & I doubt if the amateur world can boast his superior" (119). He later also befriended the Robert Bloch and Kenneth Sterling, both Jewish; but most perplexing is perhaps his two-year marriage to Sonia Davis Greene in 1924, a Jewish businesswoman, a marriage I will return to shortly.

This racism and antisemitism consequently led to some rather deplorable political associations. Lovecraft infamously called the Ku Klux Klan "that noble but much maligned band of Southerners" (2004, 56), although later in life he repudiated the KKK (Joshi 2001, 98). A similar trend can be observed in his endorsement of Nazism: in a 1933 letter to J. Vernon Shea he stressed "a great & pressing need behind every one of the major planks of Hitlerism—racial-cultural continuity, conservative cultural ideals, & an escape from the absurdities to Versailles," concluding "I know he [Hitler] is a clown, but by God, I *like* the boy!" (1976, 257). As with the KKK, there is evidence his admiration for Hitler also dissipated later in life when Nazism's excesses became better known (Joshi 2001, 359), but his views are no less reprehensible because of that.

This apparent 'softening' of his racist views is often ascribed to a shift in ideology (Joshi 1996, 22, 162; Steiner 2005, 54). The young Lovecraft saw biology as basis for his views, often resorting to claims of natural order, genetics, biological purity, and evolution: at 25 years of age, Lovecraft noted in the self-published amateur journal *The Conservative* that "race prejudice is a gift of Nature, intended to preserve in purity the various divisions of mankind which the ages have evolved" (2013, 45). Yet this biologically inclined racism appears to have

shifted later in his life to an ideology in which "it is culture rather than blood" that is the determinant (Joshi 2001, 361). This alleged shift has been suggested as the explanation for a self-professed antisemite having Jewish friends and marrying Greene: Lovecraft regarded them as well-assimilated, and hence culturally Aryan (221). Greene recalls in her 1985 memoir that "H.P. assured me that he was quite 'cured'; that since I was so well assimilated into the American way of life and the American scene he felt sure our marriage would be a success" (26). Therefore, in Lovecraft's eyes, Greene "no longer belonged to these mongrels" (368). Yet this belief was not consistently held to, as evidenced by Lovecraft's later begrudging respect for the Orthodox Jewish community in New York City:

> Here exist assorted Jews in the absolutely unassimilated state, with their ancestral beards, skull-caps, and general costumes—which make them very pictureseque [*sic*], and not nearly so offensive as the strident, pushing Jews who affect clean shaves and American dress. (Lovecraft 2005b, 74)

Such instances have led some (e.g. Poole 2016, 220; Sanford 2016) to claim that Lovecraft's racism never softened, and others that Lovecraft's main consideration was a focus on the perceived 'purity' of a culture (e.g. Joshi 2015d, 109),[7] yet both sides appear too generalizing to me. Instead, I assert that claims concerning the softening of his ideology should be met with nuance, and that Lovecraft's racism should not be oversimplified: it does appear that cultural, not biological, matters seem to preoccupy him most later in life, but that does not necessarily lead to a consistent worldview which can be schematically laid out for critique. Biological or cultural, Lovecraft's political ideology remained fixated "to see the Anglo-Saxon race and psychology remain dominant in America" (Lovecraft 1968, 308). Furthermore, no matter to

[7] Based on comments of Lovecraft's such as "a real friend of civilization wishes merely to make the Germans more German, the French more French, the Spaniards more Spanish, & so on" (Lovecraft 1976, 253).

what degree this softening or his racialized admiration for 'unassimilation' were consistent and/or true, they remain extremely noxious ideas, and do not exculpate Lovecraft's bigotry.

These views, including their gradual shift, found a way into Lovecraft's fiction. The absolute bottom is the earlier mentioned "On the Creation of N-----s," (1912) which showcases his biological racism at its most despicable. *Herbert West—Reanimator* (1922) is one of the few instances in which a Black person appears in Lovecraft's fiction—they show up often enough in his epistolary communication, cast in a bad light at best, or called "flabbing, pungent, chattering n-----s" (Joshi and Schultz 2000, 179) at worst—in which he is described as "a loathsome, gorilla-like thing, with abnormally long arms which I could not help but call fore-legs, and a face that conjured up thoughts of unspeakable Congo secrets and tom-tom poundings under an eerie moon" (44). "The Horror at Red Hook" (1927) describes New York City's multicultural Red Hook neighborhood as "a maze of hybrid squalor," from which "the blasphemies of a hundred dialects assail the sky" (150-151). "He" (1926) is a lesser-known tale dealing with the same subject matter written from first person. The true horror in the ghost-written "Medusa's Coil" (1939) is not the fact that the Medusa of the title, Marceline, has a "hateful crinky coil of serpent-hair," but rather that "though in deceitfully sleight proportion, Marceline was a negress" (68). The also ghostwritten novella *The Mound* (1940) features a scene of craniometry (237), showcasing Lovecraft's belief that his racism was scientifically confirmed (Paz 2012). The three robbers who meet a gruesome end at the hands of the eponymous "The Terrible Old Man" (1921) happen to be named Angelo Ricci, Joe Czanek, and Manuel Silva; who are respectively Italian, Polish and Portuguese; at that time the three largest minorities in Providence, Rhode Island, Lovecraft's hometown (Joshi 1996, 77-8).

Two of his better-known and longer tales, the novellas *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1936) and *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936), are significant in regard to Lovecraft's racism for multiple reasons. First, because they espouse his views more allegorically than the examples

stated above: *Innsmouth* deals with miscegenation between humans and the fish-like Deep Ones, a theme that appears to mirror Lovecraft's own fears of marriage and sex across the color line (Joshi 1996, 162-63). *Mountains* tells of an ill-fated scientific excursion to the Antarctic, which uncovers the remains of an eons-old alien civilization, the Old Ones.[8] Yet, the initial awe and terror associated with this discovery are ultimately overshadowed by discovery of the shoggoths, the aliens' mind-controlled and purposely-bred slave race. Or, as weird fiction author Fritz Leiber—who knew Lovecraft as a friend—put it, "the author shows us horrors and then pulls back the curtain a little farther, letting us glimpse the horrors of which even the horrors are afraid!" (1949, 75).

The second reason why *Innsmouth* and *Mountains* are important are because they reveal the tension in Lovecraft's shifting views, between biological racism and cultural classism. *Innsmouth* contains a surprise ending which reveals protagonist Robert Olmstead as a human-Deep One hybrid himself, and ultimately has him embracing that heritage: he feels "queerly drawn towards the unknown sea-deeps instead of fearing them" (504). The tale concludes with Olmstead deciding to "dive down through black abysses o Cyclopean and many columned Y'ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we [Olmstead and his hybrid cousin] shall dwell amidst wonder and glory forever" (505). Although this evokes a sort of "strange sympathy" (Emrys 2018) for the hybrid Olmstead, one should keep in mind Lovecraft's racial views extended to *himself* as well: he regarded himself as "essentially a Teuton and barbarian; a Xanthroic Nordic from the damp forests of Germany or Scandinavia" (Lovecraft 1964, 156). Therefore, *Innsmouth*'s ending could also be read as attempting to evoke non-ironic racialized terror at discovering one's bloodline is 'tainted' by hybridity.

[8] Also known as the Elder Things in Lovecraft scholarship, to avoid confusion with the 'Great Old Ones,' a classification of entities which includes Cthulhu. Yet the characters in *Mountains* refer to the civilization they find as Old Ones, hence I have chosen to use that name so as to not become embroiled in the naming debate.

Mountains' sympathy for the Old Ones, after the initial horror has subsided, is likewise striking. Protagonist Professor William Dyer demonstrates Lovecraft's late-life culturally inclined racialism when he ponders the Old Ones' cultural and intellectual achievements and deduces that "they had not even been savages" (Lovecraft 1936a, 495). Instead, he comes to the conclusion that "radiates, vegetables, monstrosities, star-spawn—whatever they had been, they were men!" (495). Yet this apparent moment of empathy toward a decidedly alien race is overshadowed by the shoggoths: the true horror of the tale lies in the overthrow of a scientifically and technologically advanced civilization by way of slave revolt. Dyer's moment of kinship with the Old Ones is not extended to their slaves: the climactic scene of horror toward the end of the tale tellingly involves Dyer encountering a shoggoth, not a surviving Old One (494-9). Hence *Mountains,* too, lends itself to wildly diverging readings: are the Old Ones a poor stand-in for Lovecraft's Teutonic Aryans; are they "well assimilated" like Lovecraft regarded his wife Greene and friend Loveman; or is it, after all, a story about undermining humanity's self-appointed centrality in the cosmos (Joshi 1996, 158)?

The third reason why these two specific novellas are important to my claims is because these tales were used and subverted by respectively Ruthanna Emrys's *The Litany of Earth* (2014) and Elizabeth Bear's *Shoggoths in Bloom* (2008); both emblematic post-Lovecraftian short stories. The former takes a Deep One hybrid as its protagonist, and the latter concerns a black professor investigating docile shoggoths in Maine. Both confront Lovecraft's racism in different ways, yet both subvert it in an affirmative gesture. These two tales will be the primary—although not only—post-Lovecraftian works I look at to help inform an approach to Lovecraft's racism. They are prime examples of fiction's head start in taking an affirmative stance in relation to the matter, and comparing them with Lovecraft's original works on which they are based, the larger context in which they were written, and with each other, can lead to some illuminating insights in how scholarship and criticism may proceed in formulating a

candid and critical approach. And that approach is sorely needed, because most contemporary approaches suffer from serious drawbacks, if not outright nefarious consequences.

Approaching Lovecraft

The second observation I opened with—scholarship has been unable to formulate an effective and candid critical approach to Lovecraft's legacy that is also capable of grappling with his racist underpinnings—warrants substantiation. It is not a claim I wish to make lightly, because much of the scholarship referred to in this observation includes scholars and works I am greatly indebted to; yet the shortcomings of these most common approaches to Lovecraft's legacy of racism are too big to ignore.

Donna Haraway and her approach to Lovecraft's racism were already discussed: dismissing or disavowing *the entirety* of Lovecraft—the man, his correspondence, his thought, his fiction, and sometimes, the entire Mythos—because of his "misogynist racial-nightmare" (Haraway 2016, 101) underpinnings. Haraway's approach is emblematic of a larger group, most commonly seen in the cultural blogosphere (e.g. Cruz 2015; Contreras 2017). I do not wish to argue that there is no merit in disavowing racist ideology; but calling for 'canceling' Lovecraft because of his views (e.g. Gault 2018; Ball 2020; Coulombe 2020) is throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I maintain that especially for *scholarship* this move is a faux pas which risks losing the critical finesse fundamental to scholarship: first, one also loses potentially useful or productive aspects of Lovecraft by dismissing him entirely, such as his philosophical side; and second, the problem itself, Lovecraft's racism, is still not dealt with.

But the dismissal itself is not the only problematic aspect: the critical silence that follows after leads to another problem. If scholarship refuses to treat a subject, the (re)signification of what is kept silent about is left to other parties with potentially nefarious agendas. Various apologisms for racism can fill the void, including what weird fiction scholar Ezra Claverie has

dubbed the "man of his time defense" (2013, 81).[9] It is apparently unassuming in its main proposition: 'yes, Lovecraft was wrong, but everyone was back then.' Yet claiming his abhorrent views were not unusual for his time, opens the way for a revision of the past: painting a past in which racist speech and thought were normative, and in this way it reconstitutes the status of present anti-racist discourse as an unjust and oppressive deviation from tradition and a supposed natural hierarchy (81-2). This approach to Lovecraft's racism is seen in academic criticism (e.g. Joshi 1996, 41-3; Lovett-Graff 1997, 175; Newitz 2006, 97), in fandom (e.g. Claverie 2013, 86-9; Stevenson 2014), and keeps returning in biographical scholarship (e.g. De Camp 1975, 275; Joshi 2001, 358-60).

Many have pointed out that the man of his time defense is historically incorrect (e.g. Miéville 2005, xviii; Guran 2016, vi; Mercure 2019), and Lovecraft's friends often pointed out his racist views to him (Sanford 2016). Although it is true that Lovecraft grew up in a time dubbed "the nadir of American race relations" (Logan [1965] 1997, xxi), he went above and beyond what was considered normal for the time. Hence the man of his time defense either sketches a false image of Lovecraft's convictions, or claims that the average American 'of his time' was virulently racist. Both are wrong. As for the former, Lovecraft himself was aware of the fact that his views were not average, noting in a 1924 letter to his aunt, Lillian Clark, not to "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). As for the latter, one can hardly state that the average American regarded—for example—New York City's Chinatown as "a bastard mess of stewing mongrel flesh without intellect," hoping that "a kindly gust of cyanogen could asphyxiate the

[9] The man of his time defense is far from the only apologism of Lovecraft's racism. In fact, so many defenses—from the earlier mentioned alleged biological/cultural racism difference, to redirecting attention to other authors who also have non-innocent legacies, to calling for a separation of Lovecraft the man from his fiction; all of which deflect and dance around the issue at stake—exist, that a tongue-in-cheek Lovecraft apologist bingo card exists ("Lovecraft Apologist Bingo!", n. d.).

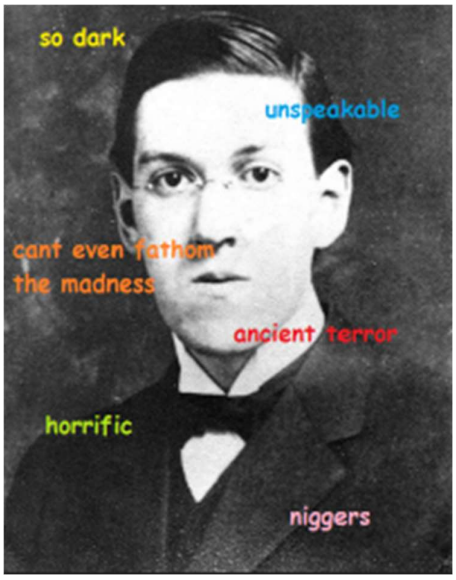

Fig. 2. Alt-right Lovecraft meme, posted on 4chan's /pol/ board, 1 February 2015.

whole gigantic abortion" (Lovecraft 1964, 181). In fact, such reasoning disregards and trivializes the anti-racist movements of the time, including the writings of Lovecraft's friend and correspondent James F. Morton (1870–1941), who actively advocated for racial equality (Morton 1906). It also erases Lovecraft himself, as if he had no choice in his racism; which makes the defense all the more ironic when it is used in tandem with the claim that later in life Lovecraft became less xenophobic (e.g. Joshi 2015c).

Untruthful revision of the past is not only wrong for obvious reasons, but Claverie has also shown how the man of his time defense has become a bulwark for subsuming Lovecraft's legacy under a white nationalist agenda (2013, 92), demonstrating its profound bankruptcy. Much of this takes place on website comment sections, niche magazines such as *Instauration* (Claverie 2013, 93-4); discussion/imageboards such as 4chan (e.g. "the most red pilled author ever" 2017) and Stormfront (e.g. Bimmler 2010); alt-right meme culture (fig. 2); Facebook comments (Claverie 2013, 86-7); white nationalist 'race realist' blogs (e.g. Pechorin 2015; "Cosmic Horror" 2014); and, strikingly, the recommended reading list of the American

National Socialist White People Party, which claims that "Lovecraft was one of us, all right!" (Covington 2004). In this capacity, a white nationalist "secondary fandom" (Claverie 2013, 80) of Lovecraft—which exists parallel to fandom and criticism which is liberal or apolitical—takes Lovecraft's legacy of racism not as something to be affirmed, dismissed, or apologized; but takes it as the *main attraction* to Lovecraft. He is enthusiastically embraced by some white nationalists as herald of their views and prime disseminator of their agenda:

> 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. (Bimmler 2010)

The meme pictured (fig. 2) illustrates this biopolitical reading of Lovecraft: even though his work is ostensibly about cosmic indifferentism and horror, the white nationalist secondary fandom claims Lovecraft's work is *really* about 'race realism'; about the inferiority of those other than white, and this makes Lovecraft a paragon of the white nationalist agenda and a perfect disseminator of their views.[10]

The capability of some approaches to Lovecraft's racism to implicitly advance white nationalist agenda unquestionably demonstrates their bankruptcy. The fact that Lovecraft has been adopted in some white nationalist circles emphatically demonstrates the need for this project: an alternate way of grappling with his racism that does not lend itself to revising the past, by way of the man of his time defense or otherwise.

[10] There is, of course, debate in white nationalism on Lovecraft's short-lived marriage to a Jewish woman, and what that means for his status within the movement (Bimmler 2010). This can make for simultaneous amusing and detestable reading.

Less directly nefarious, yet nonetheless complicit in giving wide berth to odious revisions of the past, is approaching Lovecraft's racism by claiming ignorance of the issue at stake. This happens most often in connection to commercial and/or public enterprises: these have a vested interest in leaving out the deplorable parts of Lovecraft, while attempting to sell or otherwise bank on Lovecraft's other qualities. Book blurbs, webpages, and sales pitches often leave out the fact that the author whose work is being sold was a virulent racist and antisemite. Browse, for example, Amazon's search results for "Lovecraft" and one will not encounter mention of racism in the summaries and blurbs provided.[11] The Library of America's 2005 collection of Lovecraft stories makes no mention of Lovecraft's racism; on the contrary, it summarizes "The Horror at Red Hook" as being about "the fascination and revulsion felt for New York City" (Library of America 2005), while the tale revolves around Lovecraft's revulsion for New York City's *multiculturalism* (Joshi 1996, 104-6). The commercial and public intertwine in the bust of Lovecraft displayed in the Providence Athenaeum: as a Providence native, Lovecraft is part of the city's cultural heritage. In addition to the bust, the city sports walking tours, a film festival, and a convention themed around Lovecraft (Mercure 2019), bringing in valuable tourists. Routinely, the ignorance approach is taken: the website of the bust is sanitized, making no mention of the city's darling literary son's racism ("Providence Athenaeum Sculptures" n.d.).

Far more damning is the approach to Lovecraft's racism which justifies it as being the driving motor behind his aesthetic appeal. The argument is that he feared (Harman 2012, 59-61) or hated (Houellebecq [1991] 2005) minorities and others so much, that it inspired the horrors, fears, and entities in his fiction. On the more extreme end of the argument, it claims that without Lovecraft's racism, his fiction would suffer. Michel Houellebecq claims

[11] Quite the opposite is true when browsing post-Lovecraftian work: there one is hard pressed to find a blurb or summary that does not mention Lovecraft's racism. A comparison between these two groups would be extremely interesting, but is beyond the scope of the present project.

Lovecraft's "racial hatred" is what informs his fiction: this hatred "provokes in Lovecraft a trancelike poetic state," in which he produces "the nightmare entities that populate the Cthulhu cycle" (105, 107). As such, Houellebecq sees Lovecraft's racism as "some sort of secret key to understanding the totality of Lovecraft's literary work" (Joshi 2018, 47). Speculative realist philosopher Graham Harman claims that although "racism can only make a philosopher worse . . . in certain rare cases, reactionary views may improve the power of an imaginative writer" (2012, 59). For example, he argues that the racism prevalent in Lovecraft's *Call of Cthulhu* is "undeniably effective in purely literary" (60) terms. To his credit, Harman does disavow racism "in ethical and political terms" (60). To his discredit, his position is abominable: duplicitously, he elsewhere wonders why Lovecraft "can get away with racism" and "gets a free pass" for his racist outbursts (qtd. in Duuglas-Ittu 2009).[12] Perhaps because certain strands of Lovecraft scholarship condone his racism as having an aesthetic justification.

Hence contemporary approaches to Lovecraft's legacy run risks ranging from uncritical scholarship to revisionism, from uncandid ignorance to condoning racism as having an aesthetic justification. The bankruptcy of these approaches is readily apparent, and the need for an alternative approach is clear.

The project

The task at hand is thus essentially a project of *resignification*, yet one that does not erase, dismiss, or apologize the past in its giving of new meaning. Instead, it must first affirm that what it wishes to resignify—Lovecraft's legacy of racism—and then ascribe that new meaning without replacing one set of simplified narratives with another (Saler 2020, 52). To do so, it employs two theoretical concepts which seem disparate at first, but will be put to critical work in a sense of *bricolage* (Lévi-Strauss 1962; Derrida 1967): the postcritical notion of

[12] Harman has since deleted the original blog post, hence the need to quote him in Duuglas-Ittu. Whether the deletion is an admission of morally dubious thinking on Harman's part or not remains to be seen.

"affirmation" (Thiele 2017, 25-29) and Donna Haraway's "staying with the trouble" (2016, 3). There are surface similarities and great differences between these two, but their interplay and tension are good to think with toward the theoretical framework that is needed.

The problems encountered in approaches to Lovecraft's racism—cherry picking, uncritical scholarship, and revisionism which can help advance a white nationalist agenda—share the common predicament of dancing around the issue at stake: Lovecraft's racism. This is where the *bricolage* comes in: I deem an affirmative approach inspired by postcritical reading (Felski 2015) necessary because it first and foremost affirms the issue at stake, before attempting to work with that. One should not attempt "to get *away* from the facts [i.e. Lovecraft's legacy of racism] but *closer* to them" (Latour 2004, 231), if one wants to talk candidly and productively about Lovecraft. To do so, I will posit an approach to Lovecraft which says 'no' to Lovecraft's racism, yet "in such a way that this 'no' keeps us concerned and related to what we refuse" (Thiele 2017, 28).

This entails a Harawayan staying with the trouble: a refusal to dismiss the entirety of Lovecraft's legacy on the basis of his racism. Unlike Haraway herself (2016, 101, 169, 174), one should affirm the past first, or risk leaving the task of (re)signifying the past to those with more nefarious agendas, for example by using the man of his time defense. To avoid repeating Haraway's mistake of haphazard dismissal, the concept of affirmation will provide the tool with which to get *closer* and stay with the trouble. Affirmation obstructs attempts to revise the past by insisting on the "exteriority" of the past: by "first and foremost, insist[ing] that *this* is what was said or written" (Knittel 2019, 175). By affirming Lovecraft's legacy as a Harawayan "non-innocent, non-pure histor[y]" (Schneider 2005, 162), one can "initiate transformation in the here and the now" (Thiele 2017, 26-7). Said transformation not only entails a transformation of our approaches to Lovecraft, from those that run the risk of uncandidness and uncriticalness, to

one that can grapple with Lovecraft's trouble; but also a transformation of our understanding of Lovecraft's racism, so that we do not risk repeating his past violence in the presence.

Affirmation's focus on concern, relationality, and entanglement means it is radically opposed to approaches that preach distance, separation, and the impossibility of direct connection. This is where Graham Harman enters the scene again: in his ontology, "reality is free of relation" (2011, 47). Unsurprisingly, he is rather fond of Houellebecq's "wonderful book on Lovecraft" (2012, vi), and refers to Lovecraft as a "productionist author," meaning an author who "find[s] new gaps in the world where there were formerly none" (3). In chapter 3, I will briefly investigate whether Lovecraft found gaps or not, but I will extensively treat Harman's analysis of Lovecraft's racist passages: to claim that Lovecraft's racism is an object to which we have no direct access, is diametrically opposed to my project of staying with that racism in order to fruitfully initiate transformation. Because Harman's 2012 book *Weird Realism* renewed interest in Lovecraft as philosophical writer, and because Harman's presence looms large in contemporary philosophically inclined Lovecraft studies (Sperling 2017a), a project such as mine must reckon with his thought sooner or later. I firmly position my project in opposition to Harman's on two levels: his justification of Lovecraft's racism as having aesthetic merit—outlined earlier in the introduction—is an approach which I proclaim bankrupt; and his ontology of radical separation and distance is antithetical to my insistence on affirmation's relationality and entanglement. I maintain that to follow Harman risks a repetition of past injustice by reinstating Lovecraft's own biopolitical project of delineating who is human and who is not via an elaborate biological and/or cultural worldview, and leads to the same dead end in which contemporary approaches to Lovecraft currently exist, if not worse.

That is not to say that an affirmative alternative approach to Lovecraft's racism is itself without it risks, but risks are inherent to affirmative critique (Thiele 2017, 26; Knittel 2019, 177). The first risk lies in affirmation being a critical tool which needs *work*: it is not a matter

of "cultivat[ing] goodness in solitary isolation from the actual social world" (Hegel [1807] 2006, 642), but a matter of concern and relating to the world as it as, including its troublesome parts. Like all work, affirmation can go awry; yet the alternative, the approaches to Lovecraft's racism that are already in place, are not desirable. Nevertheless, as post-Lovecraftian fiction boldly shows, the need for *and* feasibility of an affirmative approach to Lovecraft's racism are there; scholarship only needs to follow suit. Second, affirming the subject matter of this particular project means acknowledging and engaging in-depth with a history of biopolitical injustice and oppression. Hence the project needs a nuanced approach, lest it repeats this history in the present (Knittel 2019, 177); a very tangible risk in the case of Lovecraft's legacy, as white nationalist endorsement of him shows. Hence an affirmative approach needs to *be present* to counter man of his time narratives: insisting that "we are in *this* mess all together" (Braidotti 2013, 141), not promise a narrative of redemption from the ills of the world, be it in the past or in the future.[13] Not only our approach to Lovecraft's racism must be transformed, but *ourselves* too; so we do not repeat the past. Third, any approach to Lovecraft's work which admits the influence of his racism on his fiction faces the looming risk of justifying the racism *because* of its influence on Lovecraft's aesthetic, literary, and/or philosophical achievements. Houellebecq and Harman lean too far into this line of reasoning, and end up condoning racism. Instead, an alternative affirmative approach must be formulated in a way which unequivocally denounces a direct *causation* between said racism and aesthetic merit; yet does not deny that the racism did *influence* the fiction. Do note that such a move is itself an affirmation.

This is the affirmation I propose as an alternative approach to Lovecraft scholarship. It is further influenced by Harawayan concepts in its treatment of the other element, next to racism, which causes Lovecraft's legacy to be such a contested space: the Mythos. I will focus

[13] This is another similarity to Haraway's project, despite its radically different in subject matter: Haraway notes how "staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures" (2016, 1). I will engage further with this thought in chapter 1.

on post-Lovecraftian Mythos fiction—which subverts the "pulpy, technophilic escape fantasies for boys" (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 115) trope of weird and science fiction[14]—as an affirmation of Lovecraft's racism and a subsequent narrative worlding (Haraway 2016, 13) moving from that initial affirmation. It matters which stories tell stories, and this is where fiction can inform theory. The Mythos is a place like no other in its capacity to reflect and expand on itself, as a material-semiotic space which advances claims about the social world and informs civic imagination. I maintain that the Mythos is by now entangled to such a degree that all work done in it is 'making-with,' and as such I will apply Haraway's biological-ecological concepts to a literary (and more!) phenomenon to posit the Mythos as a "complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical system" (50) capable of response to resignifications of Lovecraft's racism.

By "theorizing 'with' Haraway" (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 2) and as such basing my proposed alternative approach to Lovecraft's non-innocent legacy on her writing, Haraway's own disavowal of Lovecraft and consequent uncritical scholarship can be circumvented, while still setting the good parts of feminist-inspired Lovecraft scholarship to work. Similarly, the flaws of classical[15] biographical Lovecraft scholarship, such as its overreliance on approaching Lovecraft's racism by way of apologism, are circumvented; while its numerous strengths—exhaustive biographical analysis and valuable interpretation of the philosophical and aesthetic themes in Lovecraft's work, to name a few—can be employed. As such, the proposed alternative approach to Lovecraft's inheritance does not deny its forebears and alternatives; instead, it self-reflexively stays with the trouble.

[14] Lovecraft himself, too, was rather dismissive of the tropiness of what he called "interplanetary fiction" ([1934] 2004), yet these tropes are perhaps not entirely the same tropes identified by Grebowicz and Merrick.

[15] What I refer to as 'classical' Lovecraft scholarship, is the longest-established style of Lovecraft scholarship which focuses on biographical, aesthetic, and philosophical criticism; and which can trace its beginnings back to the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Mosig 1973; Burleson 1980; Joshi 1980). For the last few decades, it has been represented most prominently by independent weird fiction scholar S. T. Joshi.

Yet these elements do not combine as easily and schematically as it sounds. The separate elements of the *bricolage* treat vastly different topics in wildly different contexts: postcritical practices were formulated as a response to "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Felski 2015), and staying with the trouble is a term describing an attitude toward the unfolding Anthropocene (Haraway 2016). Furthermore, this project seems odd in its specificity: why Lovecraft, while the world is rife with big names with non-innocent legacies, from similar literary figures such as fellow weird author Robert E. Howard (Finn 2006, 80), to literary heavyweights such as Ezra Pound (Tytell 230, 268-269); alongside non-literary figures such as philosopher Martin Heidegger and filmmaker Woody Allen.

The specificity of the subject matter is crucial to making the disparate elements work together in formulating an alternative approach. Lovecraft exists at a unique intersection of controversy and collaboration; in large part due to his undeniable racism, the nature of the Mythos, and his work undergoing a renaissance. In addition, the central place of fictional entities in Lovecraft's own work and in post-Lovecraftian Mythos works gives Lovecraft specifically an affinity to Haraway's larger project of theorizing living-with both the human and nonhuman. The bizarre range of the Mythos means it encompasses a multitude of media and ways of expression. The Mythos' specific nature, being both collaborative in nature *and* rife with biopolitically-inclined racism, enabled post-Lovecraftian fiction to arise in the first place. Yet that is not to say that disparate theories and concepts should be mashed together uncritically; on the contrary, a careful and candid process of conceptualizing a theoretical framework with which to approach Lovecraft's legacy is the only way in which such a project can be carried out.

In chapter 1 I will explore affirmation: its central concepts of relationality, concern, being present, and transformation. I will combine these terms with the Harawayan notions of response-ability and staying with the trouble, to lay solid foundations for deeper delves into an

alternative approach to Lovecraft's racism. This chapter is interwoven with readings of Bear's *Shoggoths in Bloom*, juxtaposed with Lovecraft's *At the Mountain of Madness*. *Shoggoths* neither apologizes nor dismisses the titular shoggoths' status as slaves and crude imitators, as originally envisioned by Lovecraft in *Mountains*. Instead, it takes this "non-innocent origin" (Grebowicz and Merrick 113), and works from within it, affirming it, and by doing so, manages to effectuate change in both its protagonist, Professor Harding, who is a black man, and in the eponymous shoggoths.

Having laid out the affirmative springing board, chapter 2 analyzes specific elements and tropes of post-Lovecraftian fiction which can inform an approach to his Lovecraft's racism. Special attention is given to the monster, by comparing the Deep One hybrids of Lovecraft's original tale *The Shadow over Innsmouth* with the Deep One hybrid protagonist of Emrys' *The Litany of Earth*, Aphra Marsh. Like Haraway did in 1992 in *The Promises of Monsters*, Emrys takes a radically othered character, locked in binary difference, and unlocks the monster's "liberatory character" (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 80) by way of non-relation, radically different from binary relation. I continue to explore the significance of such a gesture for affirmative practices, analyzing the primary mechanism by which it operates: narrative worlding. I then liken the logic on which contemporary approaches to Lovecraft's racism which I criticize—primarily dismissal, apologism, and justification—operate, to the logic on which binary meaning-making operates. I assert that an affirmative approach can circumvent this logic, enabling it to prevent repeating past violence, effectuating transformation in the present.

I single out Harman's ontology at large, and his approach to Lovecraft specifically, in chapter 3. As I noted, Harman cannot be avoided in Lovecraft studies; this chapter serves to argue *against* Harman *with* Haraway: critiquing Harman's brand of speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, simultaneously shows the failure of another approach to Lovecraft's racism while showing the strengths of an affirmative one. Like I treated Haraway above, I begin by

tracing the steps Harman's thought makes, elucidating the relevance of his project to mine. I then pinpoint where his approach to Lovecraft's racism completely misses the mark politically, essentially reiterating Lovecraft's own biopolitical project of excluding a large part of humanity to ensure another's superiority. Throughout the chapter, I read Harman's reading of Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928) to illustrate my point. This political criticism is in *addition* to the criticism I have already put forward concerning the justification approach employed by Harman. These two criticisms are then combined, and juxtaposed with my own proposed approach to Lovecraft's racism, to declare Harman's use of Lovecraft bankrupt.

The relevance of this project aligns primarily with its main motivation: the bankruptcy of the approaches most commonly used in contemporary Lovecraft scholarship have dire consequences; therefore, they warrant critical scrutiny and a better alternative. Uncandid scholarship, uncritical scholarship, revision of the past, and repetition of that violent past are consequences not to be taken lightly, and as such formulating an alternative approach that does not yield these consequences is a project that is sorely needed in Lovecraft scholarship. Hence I consciously position this project as being part of the turn in Lovecraft scholarship that addresses Lovecraft's racism—instead of limiting itself to biographical and aesthetic discussion—that has taken flight since the WFA controversy. This is because Lovecraft's popular, literary, and scholarly appeal is immense and will not wane anytime soon; if anything, the presence of Lovecraft and his legacy only seems to be getting bigger. This necessitates the turn towards addressing his racism, because discussions on how to interpret Lovecraft are sites of dispute on how to understand the social world (Claverie 2013) and informs civic imagination (Saler 2020); demonstrating the turn's—and therefore this project's—societal relevance. Post-Lovecraftian Mythos fiction does not shy away from staking a claim in these discussions and dares to posit ways to go ahead: now it is time for scholarship to take that cue and follow suit, employing an approach alternative to the critically bankrupt approaches used hitherto.

CHAPTER 1: AFFIRMATION AND *SHOGGOTHS IN BLOOM*

In an editorial on Tor.com (2009), speculative fiction writer Elizabeth Bear analyzes why authors—including herself—still write in the Mythos, despite Lovecraft's racism. "I have a complicated relationship with Lovecraft," she notes, "there is so much that is problematic about him." She is acutely aware of Lovecraft's trouble, noting his "bigotry of just about any stripe you like." Of particular note is how she views the Mythos, or, as she calls it, "the world he originated." Originated because she believes "the Lovecraftian universe [i.e. the Mythos] must be considered a collaborative effort at this point" (2009). As such, Bear explicitly claims that the contemporary Mythos is a collaborative phenomenon, unlike some classical Lovecraft scholars, who attempt to distill an originary demarcation of the Mythos from Lovecraft's own writings (e.g. Joshi 1996, 125-49; Price 2011, 259). This aligns her with the first half of my explanation for Lovecraft's far-reaching, yet contested, influence: the collaborative nature of the Mythos. How does Bear relate to the second half of my explanation; the racism underlying Lovecraft's work?

Bear is acutely aware of Lovecraft's non-innocence, and that as a Mythos writer herself, she will have to deal with that: "I think it's impossible to engage with his work without engaging with its problematic aspects, which include racial determinism and prejudice and some class issues that are just as revolting" (qtd. in Wendig 2011). The question most pertinent to this project then, of course, is on *how* to "engage"—I would say 'approach'—those problematic aspects. Bear says she wants to *argue*:

> I want to argue with his deterministic view of genetics and morality, his apparent horror of interracial marriage and the resulting influence on the gene pool . . . I want to argue with his reflexive racism, which leads me to write a story like "Shoggoths in Bloom," in which an African-American college professor confronts the immorality of slavery on

> the eve of one of our greatest modern atrocities. I want to pick a fight with him, because of what he does right, that makes his stories too compelling to just walk away from, and because of what he does wrong, and doesn't not do wrong—for example, the way he treats people as things and the way he relegates entire species to object positions. (Bear 2009)

So far, Bear is emblematic of an affirmative approach: she grapples with Lovecraft's racism, to formulate an alternate approach which does not dismiss *tout court*, justify, or apologize. Her attraction to Lovecraft, yet simultaneous rejection of his racism, makes her a typical writer of post-Lovecraftian fiction. Her claims align heavily with the claims I have advanced so far. Yet she approaches Lovecraft's legacy through fiction, not scholarship: Lovecraft's racism "leads her to write a story." It is time to turn to *Shoggoths in Boom* then.

Bear's 2008 novella tells the story of Paul Harding, who has come to coastal Maine to study 'blooming' shoggoths, which are initially introduced as a natural species, unlike in Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*. As reports of the *Kristallnacht* appear in the newspapers, Harding forms two unlikely bonds. First, over and across barriers of race, Harding befriends a local fisherman named Burt; second, Harding manages to communicate with a shoggoth. At this point in the story, the shoggoth reveals its history as having been created as as part of an artificial slave race—created as labor and as weapon—tying Bear's shoggoth to Lovecraft's depiction of the Mythos creature. Harding contemplates using the immensely powerful, yet easily controllable, shoggoths to end the stirring war in Europe before it has even started, but ultimately decides against it.

I maintain that two aspects of *Shoggoths* exemplify two concepts crucial to affirmation: relationality and concern (Thiele 2017, 28). Bear's portrayal of the shoggoths, when compared to Lovecraft's original depiction, relates to the first; the protagonist and plot of *Shoggoths* to

the second. Hence, I will first look at the titular shoggoth, because a comparison between Lovecraft's and Bear's shoggoths can help lay bare key differences tantamount to an affirmative approach of a non-innocent legacy.

Comparative shoggothology

The shoggoth (fig. 3) has become one of Lovecraft's most well-known fictional entities. They first appear as a passing reference in the weird sonnet cycle *Fungi from Yuggoth* (1929-1930), and were likewise only passingly alluded to in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936) and "The Thing at the Doorstep" (1937). It is in *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936) that they make their full appearance. From there on, they entered the Mythos and have appeared in works as varied as the typical Mythos yarns (e.g. Lumley 1974), Marvel Studios' *Avengers* franchise (Ewing 2015), and even in a children's book (Thomas and Bolton 2012).

Mountains introduces the shoggoths as the purposely bred, hypnotically controlled slave race of the Old Ones, who inhabited Earth millions of years before mankind. The Old Ones used the shoggoths' unique biology to build their cities, first under the seas and then on land. They are a rather monstrous sight to behold:

> The nightmare plastic column of foetid black iridescence oozed tightly onward through its fifteen-foot sinus; gathering unholy speed and driving before it a spiral, re-thickening cloud of the pallid abyss-vapour. It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train—a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly, self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and unforming as pustules of greenish light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us . . . (Lovecraft 1936a, 499)

Fig. 3. Artist's rendition of a shoggoth; Lovecraft himself never drew one. Joseph Diaz, *Lovecraft's Shoggoth*, 2016, Photoshop. https://www.facebook.com/J21studio.

Like all slaveowners, it is rebellion that the Old Ones fear most; especially considering the fact that the shoggoths, evolving and mutating over the ages, have acquired "a dangerous degree of accidental intelligence" (473). And indeed, multiple rebellions followed, although the Old Ones always managed to regain the upper hand. One such rebellion and resubjugation is described in a paragraph which, despite its pulpy sci-fi tropes of slime and futuristic weaponry, reverberates with imagery of the Transatlantic slave trade:

> They [the shoggoths] seem to have become peculiarly intractable toward the middle of the Permian age, perhaps hundred and million years ago, when a veritable war of re-

> subjugation was waged upon them by the marine Old Ones. Pictures of this war, and of the headless, slime-coated fashion in which the shoggoths typically left their slain victims, held a marvellously fearsome quality despite the intervening abyss of untold ages. The Old Ones had used curious weapons of molecular disturbance against the rebel entities, and in the end had achieved a complete victory. Thereafter the sculptures shewed a period in which shoggoths were tamed and broken by armed Old Ones as the wild horses of the American west were tamed by cowboys. Though during the rebellion the shoggoths had shewn an ability to live out of water, this transition was not encouraged; since their usefulness on land would hardly have been commensurate with the trouble of their management. (Lovecraft 1936a, 473)

An "intervening abyss of untold ages" is suddenly rather easy to cross when it comes to noticing the parallels between the shoggoths and the historical and contemporary plight of black people. The notion of "intractability"; the savageness evoked by the preferred way of killing their masters; their resubjugation by way of technology, by a technologically superior race; their "breaking" and "taming"; and the cold calculation involving only "usefulness" and "management": all evoke tropes of the Transatlantic slave trade and New World plantation economy.

Additionally, Lovecraft's shoggoths can also be read as reverberating with antisemitic concerns surrounding Jewish "mimicry," their alleged "expert[ise] at camouflaging their actual identity and passing as non-Jews" (Herf 2007, 584). The shoggoths' intelligence is derivative: "their self-modelling powers were sometimes exercised independently, and in various imitative forms implanted by past suggestion. They had, it seems, developed a semi-stable brain whose separate and occasionally stubborn volition echoed the will of the Old Ones without always obeying it" (Lovecraft 1936a, 473). They conversed with the Old Ones "by mimicking their

voices" (479). After they toppled their masters, they began carving their own wall decorations; yet Lovecraft is dismissive of its qualities, echoing the same concerns with mimicry:

> But now, in this deeper section beyond the cavern, there was a sudden difference [in wall decoration] wholly transcending explanation—a difference in basic nature as well as in mere quality, and involving so profound and calamitous a degradation of skill that nothing in the hitherto observed rate of decline could have led one to expect it. This new and degenerate work was coarse, bold, and wholly lacking in delicacy of detail . . . In nature it was wholly decorative and conventional; and consisted of crude spirals and angles roughly following the quintile mathematical tradition of the Old Ones, yet seeming more like a parody than a perpetuation of that tradition. We could not get it out of our minds that some subtly but profoundly alien element had been added to the aesthetic feeling behind the technique—an alien element, Danforth [Dyer's graduate student companion] guessed, that was responsible for the manifestly laborious substitution. It was like, yet disturbingly unlike, what we had come to recognise as the Old Ones' art . . . (Lovecraft 1936a, 492-3)

Note how the usage of "degenerate" is contemporaneous with Nazism's infamous notion "*Entartete Kunst*," 'degenerate art'; the term adopted by Nazi party in the 1920s to describe modernist, Jewish, and communist art. Those labeled degenerate were fined at best, and persecuted at worst (Levi 1998). The subtle but profound "alien element" covertly added to the aesthetic technique of the decorations evokes antisemitic fears of an imagined homogenous culture being supplanted with a "uniform, crude, 'Jewish' culture" (Louis 1987, 76). As such, the shoggoths are part of a larger antisemitic historical pattern concerned with Jewish mimicry, which stretches to our current times; including the likes of Voltaire (Chisick 2002, 582-3),

Richard Wagner (Weiner 1995), and contemporary white nationalist discourse (Schwarz-Friesel and Reinharz 2013). Remember that to Lovecraft, the most "offensive" Jews were those "who affect clean shaves and American dress" (Lovecraft 2005b, 74). It is exactly the horrifying imitative qualities of the shoggoths which ultimately lead to them toppling their masters: "more and more sullen, more and more intelligent, more and more amphibious, more and more imitative! Great God!" (Lovecraft 1936a, 495).

Lovecraft's shoggoths are loaded with racist and antisemitic imagery. Here, the racist underpinnings of Lovecraft's work show strongly: there are no *direct* utterances of racism toward black people or of antisemitism, but the parallels are hard to ignore. The shoggoths thus constitute a prime example of a Harawayan non-innocent, non-pure history; which is hardly unique, "given the 'polluted' history of sexist, racist, colonialist, salvation-story science fiction" (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 133). So the question becomes how to approach the shoggoth, a quintessential figure of veiled-yet-not-hidden racism, a prime example of Lovecraft's xenophobic underpinnings revealing themselves. We return to Elizabeth Bear, to see how *she* grapples with the shoggoth.

Shoggoths introduces the titular shoggoths markedly differently than *Mountains*. The story takes place in November 1938, a year before the outbreak of World War II, and 7 years after the events of *Mountains* (Lovecraft 1936a, 424). In a small, unnamed, coastal Maine village, we follow protagonist Paul Harding: a black natural historian at Wilberforce University, Ohio, who earned his doctorate at Yale, "the first school in America to have awarded a doctorate to a Negro" (Bear [2008] 2012, 187). Harding is attempting to secure tenure by researching shoggoths, who he suspects may have pharmaceutical applications due to their observed immortality. In Bear's expansion of the Mythos, the shoggoths are an elusive, yet seemingly ordinary part of the natural world. Harding is specifically researching "*Oracupoda horibilis,*

the common surf shoggoth" (181), also known as 'jellies' to the local Maine fishermen. Harding's vocation in natural history provides him with the tools first used to describe them:

> A mature specimen of *O. horibilis*, at some fifteen to twenty feet in diameter and an estimated weight in excess of eight tons, is the largest of modern shoggoths. However, the admittedly fragmentary fossil record suggests the prehistoric shoggoth was a much larger beast [hinted to be the shoggoth appearing in *Mountains*]. Although only two fossilized casts of prehistoric shoggoth tracks have been recovered, the oldest exemplar dates from the Precambrian period. The size of that single prehistoric specimen, of a species provisionally named *Oracupoda antediluvius*, suggests it was made an animal more than triple the size of the modern *O. horibilis.* And that spectacular living fossil, the jeweled or common surf shoggoth, is half again the size of the only other known species—the black Adriatic shoggoth, *O. dermadentata*, which is even rarer and more limited in range. (Bear [2008] 2012, 182)

Harding's specific mode of speech—focusing on the shoggoths themselves, their genetic ancestry, and their kin in the same genus—contrasts heavily with Lovecraft's. The latter's first mention of the shoggoths has a resolute focus on the Old Ones, stressing the shoggoths' genesis as *created*, their use to the Old Ones, and their condition as enslaved beings: "it was under the sea, at first for food and later for other purposes, that they [the Old Ones] first created earth-life," including "certain multicellular protoplasmic masses capable of moulding their tissues into all sorts of temporary organs under hypnotic influence." These "masses" are, of course, the first shoggoths: "ideal slaves to perform the heavy work of the community" (Lovecraft 1936a, 469). Although Bear's and Lovecraft's protagonists are both academics—Harding's field is natural history, Dyer's is geology—Harding sees relation, not hierarchy.

This theme is further accentuated when one considers the degree to which Harding's description of the shoggoth echoes Lovecraft's descriptions of the *Old Ones*. Unlike Lovecraft's shoggoths, the Old Ones are treated in the same scientific register as Harding's shoggoths:

> Objects [frozen Old Ones] are eight feet long all over. Six-foot five-ridged barrel torso three and five-tenths feet central diameter, one foot end diameters. Dark grey, flexible, and infinitely tough. Seven-foot membraneous wings of same colour, found folded, spread out of furrows between ridges. Wing framework tubular or glandular, of lighter grey, with orifices at wing tips. Spread wings have serrated edge. Around equator, one at central apex of each of the five vertical, stave-like ridges, are five systems of light grey flexible arms or tentacles found tightly folded to torso but expansible to maximum length of over three feet. Like arms of primitive crinoid. (Lovecraft 1936a, 437)

Also like Harding's shoggoths, Lovecraft is concerned with the Old Ones' evolution and pedigree: "fabulously early date of early date of evolution [of Old Ones], preceding even simplest Archaean protozoa hitherto known, baffles all conjecture as to origin" (438). Bear thus describes the shoggoths in a way similar to Lovecraft's Old Ones, not his shoggoths, which is highly significant considering the sympathy the Old Ones receive late in *Mountains*. In fact, they are viewed as kindred: remember Dyer's conclusion, "radiates, vegetables, monstrosities, star-spawn—whatever they [the Old Ones] had been, they were men!" (495)

As such, before the plot of *Shoggoths* is well underway, Bear has already positioned her shoggoths radically differently from Lovecraft's, although the shoggoths *themselves* are essentially the same. Bear makes several implicit claims by doing so. First, her shoggoths are initially—although this changes halfway through the story, which I will return to later—part of the natural world, which means they are comprehensible, unlike Lovecraft's shoggoths which

induce madness by way of their sheer alienness (Lovecraft 1936a, 502-3). Second, they are not viewed in light of their use, or their status as slaves; instead, they are implicitly related to Lovecraft's Old Ones, who are in turn related to men. Hence Bear flattens the formerly strictly hierarchical relation between the three, erasing their unsurpassable difference, and opening the way for a radically different approach. By positioning her shoggoths like this in relation to Lovecraft's shoggoths—and Old Ones, even though they do not show up in *Shoggoths* itself—Bear approaches Lovecraft's racism by way of *relationality*, which is one of several core concepts of affirmation which I first want to focus on.

Relationality, response-ability, and staying with the trouble

A commitment to relationality is fundamental to the possibility of affirmation as critical practice. Its importance is threefold: first, a form of relationality to Lovecraft's racism is necessary to be able to acknowledge its existence, otherwise affirmation would be blocked. This is where the claimed ignorance approach to Lovecraft's racism fails. Second, by being and staying concerned by that relation, one can prevent the affirmative gesture becoming a destructive repetition of what is affirmed, Lovecraft's racism in this. This is where dismissal fails: although it affirms the existence of Lovecraft's racism, it refuses to stay concerned and related to it, which means white nationalists can resignify it. I will return to concern later in this chapter. Third, relationality can enable an "ethical instance" formed by "a set of interrelations with both human and inhuman forces" (Braidotti 2009, 44). That is, through relationality, affirmation can enable a different sort of ethics than those based on a universal moral code. Rosi Braidotti takes Kant as exemplary of such a universal ethics, proposing affirmative ethics as an alternative: affirmation "shifts the focus from unitary rationally-driven consciousness to process ontology . . . a vision of subjectivity propelled by affects and relations" (47). This positions an affirmative approach with a focus on relationality directly opposite of an approach

to Lovecraft's racism like the one employed by Graham Harman, who refuses relationality (2011, 47). Although this may enable him to conduct an extended philosophical-aesthetic analysis of Lovecraft's work (Harman 2012), it falls short of formulating politics (Galloway 2013) or ethics (Cole 2015a; Braidotti and Vermeulen 2014), instead ending up "myopic" and "politically etiolated" (Miéville 2016, 240). I maintain this is lucidly illustrated by Harman's justification of Lovecraft's racism on aesthetic grounds. I will explore this opposition further in chapter 3, but first I will focus on the first aspect of relationality: relationality as means to be able to affirm trouble.

Although Haraway acknowledges the existence of Lovecraft's racism—contrary to for example the Library of America or the Providence Athenaeum—she refuses to espouse relationality to it. She refers to Cthulhu specifically as a "singleton monster or deity" (2016, 169), refusing to let it exist as a relational entity. More broadly, she notes how "entangling myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus" is "proper to a vein of SF that Lovecraft could not have imagined or embraced—namely, the webs of speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fiction, and scientific fact" (101) leading her to claim that Lovecraft means nothing for her. I do not wish to speculate on whether Lovecraft would or would not have imagined or embraced Haraway's figuration of SF, but I *do* wish to claim that by such a dismissal, she cuts off any possibility of relationality to his racism and therefore any possibility of affirming that racism; of staying with Lovecraft's trouble. Ironically, what Haraway suggests is exactly the approach Bear takes, entangling temporalities, spatialities, and beings—as evidenced by Bear's flattening of the differences between shoggoths, humans, and Old Ones; a "set of interrelations with both human and inhuman forces"—so as to candidly and critically approach Lovecraft's racism.

Haraway claims that "staying with the trouble" means that "we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations . . . we become-with each other or not at all" (2016, 4). This already hints at a central place for relationality in Haraway's project. An essential requirement for staying with the trouble in such a way is "response-ability" (2, 110-11) I will argue relationality—which Bear espouses through her rendition of the shoggoths—is tantamount to this response-ability, and hence to an affirmative approach to Lovecraft's racism; despite Haraway's emphatic dismissal of Lovecraft.

Haraway discussed response-ability in detail in 2007's *When Species Meet*. It riffs off 'responsibility' to indicate a "capacity to respond," which, in turn, "is responsibility" (71). Vital to the concept is its fundamental relational nature: "such a capacity [i.e. response-ability] can be shaped only in and for multidirectional relationships, in which always more than one responsive entity is in the process of becoming" (71). Haraway later made the concept central to her then-newly coined staying with the trouble: "response-ability; that is core to staying with the trouble in serious multispecies worlds" (2016, 12). Only in a relational framework can one be response-able, and only then can one stay with the trouble.[16]

What does it mean then, to stay with the trouble? What does it mean for a non-innocent legacy, like Lovecraft's racism, to be termed 'trouble'? What happens to that trouble, and to staying with that trouble, when it is dismissed, blocking relationality and hence response-ability? And what does Bear do when she positions her shoggoths as relational instead?

"*Trouble*," notes Haraway, "is an interesting word" (2016, 1). She traces its etymology: "it derives from a thirteenth-century French verb meaning 'to stir up,' 'to make cloudy,' 'to disturb'" (1).[17] Haraway then relates the term to response-ability: "[in] troubling and turbid

[16] Contrary to some (e.g. Joshi 2020; Moore qtd. in Claverie 2013, 87), I follow Haraway in maintaining that death does not preclude responsibility or response-ability: "what must be known and built together, with and for earthly beings, living, dead, and yet to come" (2016, 127).

[17] *Staying with the Trouble*'s opening recalls Judith Butler's musings on 'trouble' in the preface to 1990's Gender Trouble: "trouble is inevitable and the task, how to best make it, what best way to be in it" (xxvii). Haraway, writing in the feminist tradition, is keenly aware of this.

times . . . the task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response" (1). Hence 'trouble,' like response-ability, is inevitably relational and thus signifies a multidirectional phenomenon: the response to troubled times is to make trouble by becoming response-able. "Our task is to make trouble, to stir op potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters" (1). To *stay* with the trouble, is hence a call to remain relational and response-able, and a reminder that any stirring up necessarily entails relationality and response-ability.

To refer to Lovecraft's racism as trouble, then, carries multiple meanings, all constitutive of this project. First, Lovecraft's racism is trouble only because it exists in purely relational terms. It can hence not be seen apart from Lovecraft itself, its target, its historical *and* contemporary context—this will become a crucial criticism of Harman's approach in chapter 3—and the ways in which it is approached in Lovecraft scholarship. Hence explicitly referring to it as 'Lovecraft's trouble' is a denunciation of apologisms attempting to separate Lovecraft's racism from the rest of the man (e.g. Joshi 2020), and explicitly rejects the man of his time defense. Second, to refer to it as trouble necessitates a response. It is hence a reminder that his racism *can* not be ignored; and as such a call for scholarship to formulate an appropriate approach to it.

We have already looked at how Bear positions the shoggoths, humans, and Old Ones relationally; and how this entangles histories and contemporary systems of oppression against black and Jewish people across Antarctica, Maine, and the Atlantic. The initial affirmative gesture is made: Bear acknowledges Lovecraft's racism and stays related to, and relates it to the world at large. It is time to look at how this *concerns* her, and what that could entail for *transformation* in the *present*. Concern is the second aspect of relationality I outlined above, the aspect Haraway refuses by way of her dismissal of Lovecraft. A lack of concern can give others *carte blanche* to resignify what one is not concerned about, which can lead to a repetition

of past harm; in Lovecraft's case specifically, the resignification of his legacy by white nationalists, by way of revisionism. Therefore, "the radical critical edge of saying 'no'," to Lovecraft's racism remains necessary, yet "in such a way that this 'no' keeps us concerned and related to what we refuse" (Thiele 2017, 28).

An unconcerned and unrelated 'no' is what Donna Haraway accomplishes by dismissing Lovecraft to the sidelines of her project. Hence, she employs "critique as negation" (Thiele 2017, 26), rather than affirmative critique. That is not to say that she should condone or support Lovecraft's racism; rather, she *should* say 'no' to this trouble, but keep "an essential relationship *with* the No that *concerns* it" (25). Although Haraway acknowledges Lovecraft's racism, acknowledgement alone is not enough (Miéville 2016, 242). Bear *does* manage to formulate such a No with which she remains related, and that concerns her. To see how she does so, I return to *Shoggoths in Bloom*'s protagonist.

Professor Harding

Bear's protagonist, Harding, is a black man; a detail that cannot be insignificant in a post-Lovecraftian tale. The story engages with this aspect straight away, and its potentiality for relationality, trouble, or both. Harding is taken out to Penebscot Bay by Burt, a gruff Maine fisherman, to take his first samples of dormant shoggoths luxuriating on the rocks in the water. Harding sees a potential for relationality, because he guesses both him and the fisherman must have fought in World War I. Yet he also sees trouble:

> He's [Burt] not much older than forty . . . Professor Harding's age, and Harding watches him with interest as he works the *Bluebird*'s [Burt's ship] engine. He might be a veteran of the great War, as Harding is. He doesn't mention it. It wouldn't establish camaraderie: they wouldn't have fought in the same units or watched their buddies die in the same

> trenches. That's not the way it works, not with a Maine fisherman who would shake his head and not extend his hand to shake, and say, between pensive chaws on his tobacco, "*Doctor* Harding? Well, huh. Never met a colored professor before" (Bear [2008] 2012, 180)

Note how Bear, again, "entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities" (Haraway 2016, 101): a French World War I front (Bear [2008] 2012, *192*) and Maine, the interwar period, and as we will later see, World War II. Yet Harding's status as a black person becomes even more significant a bit further into the plot, when the shoggoths' engineered nature is revealed.

Bear's common surf shoggoths mysteriously 'bloom' in the late autumn: they heave themselves on remote coastal rocks, become torpid, and produce "colorful fruiting stalks" ([2008] 2012, 185), which shed mysterious transparent nodules the size of a walnut. These nodules, when they fall from the stalks, bounce off of the originating shoggoth's skin, yet "on those occasions they fall onto one of its [the originating shoggoth's] neighbors, they stick to the touch transparent hide, and slowly settle within to hang in the animal's body like unlikely fruit in a gelatin salad" (192).[18] Harding knows of the shoggoths' "apparent functional immortality" (183), and suspects their gelatinous flesh or the nodules may have pharmaceutical use; a discovery which would get him well on his way to tenure. Although Burt warns him that "the jellies don't trouble with us, and we don't trouble with them" (180), Harding soon gets to into plenty of relational trouble.

After several expeditions to the docile shoggoths out in the bay and having read news of the *Kristallnacht* happening in Germany, Harding finds himself in the local inn, pondering the research problem he is facing. "If a shoggoth is immortal, has no natural enemies, then how

[18] This is an invention of Bear's: there is no mention of blooming, stalks, or nodules in At the Mountains of Madness. shoggoth (re)production is mostly left to the readers' imagination in Lovecraft's own work; he only mentions how the shoggoths were "created" and "manufactured" (Lovecraft 1936a, 469).

is it that they have not overrun every surface of the world? How is it that they are rare, that the oceans are not teeming with them?" (Bear [2008] 2012, 194). He figures out the answer while absently playing with a shoggoth nodule: "it's not the shoggoth species that evolves, it's the individual shoggoths, each animal in itself" (194). As he has his epiphany, the nodule in his hand shocks him. Distressed, he goes to sleep.

He wakes up inside of a shoggoth, either "insensibly sleepwalking" to the sea, or perhaps "the shoggoth [had] called him" (Bear [2008] 2012, 197). Harding does not dissolve or drown inside the shoggoth; instead, he can see through the shoggoth's eyes, or rather through the *shoggoths*' eyes:

> Harding opens his eyes and sees as if through thousands. The shoggoths have no eyes, exactly, but their hide is *all* eyes; they see, somehow, in every direction at once. And he is seeing not only what his own vision reports, or that of this shoggoth, but that of shoggoths all around. The sessile and the active, the blooming and the dormant. *They are all one*. (Bear [2008] 2012, 196)

The diffractively perceiving, hive mind-like shoggoths telepathically speak to Harding, too: "*command*" (195, 196). Harding is able to communicate back, asking "what are you?" (196) "*Created to serve*," the shoggoths answer, "*purposeless without you*" (196). They telepathically show Harding their history: their creation as slaves by the Old Ones, unfree in their own minds, hypnotically controlled to build the Old Ones' cities and wage their wars. It turns out the shoggoths *were* not a part of the natural world—being created by the Old Ones—but have *become* part of it over the millennia, after the extinction of their masters. After the Old Ones' demise, the shoggoths "retreat[ed] to the fathomless sea while warm-blooded mammals overran

the earth. There, they were free to converse, to explore, to philosophize and build a culture. They only returned to the surface, vulnerable, to bloom" (197).

Their history of slavery strikes a chord in Harding. "He remembers beaded ridges of hard black keloid across his grandfather's back, the shackle galls on his wrists" (Bear, *Shoggoths* 197). He commands the shoggoth to put him back on shore, which it does, once more pleading Harding for "*your command*" (197). Harding refuses, although he does consider the possibility of employing the shoggoths to end the brewing war in Europe before it can even begin:

> Harding thinks of himself, swallowed whole. He thinks of a shoggoth bigger than the *Bluebird*, bigger than Burt Clay's lobster boat *The Blue Heron*. He thinks of *die Unterseaboote* [*sic*]. He thinks of refugee flotillas and trench warfare and roiling soupy palls of mustard gas. Of Britain and France at war, and Roosevelt's neutrality. He thinks of the perfect weapon. The perfect slave. (Bear [2008] 2012, 198)

In the end, he hesitates. "Who is he to condemn a world to war? To the chance of falling under the sway of an empire . . . who is he to impose his own ideology over the ideology of the shoggoth?" (198) He ultimately decides against it, and communicates his first and last *command* to the shoggoths, before crushing the nodule: "*I want you to learn to be free*, he tells the shoggoth. *And I want you to teach your brothers*" (199), allowing the shoggoths to bloom in a different way. The story ends with a telegram from Harding to Wilberforce, resigning from his post. He remembers a bonding moment with Burt—who *did* fight in World War I (192), and whose grandfather's house was on the Underground Railroad (189)—earlier in the day, and the suggestion he offered: "Well, if you want to fight the Krauts so bad, you could join the Foreign Legion" (192). Harding leaves for France the next day.

Pulp and weird scholar Bobby Derie notes how "it is notable that in *At the Mountains of Madness*, none of the characters are explicitly African-American. There is no one in that story who might sympathize with the shoggoths through the lens of their personal history. No one like Paul Harding" (2020). I believe he is correct, although I wish to extend his argument. It is not only Harding's personal history, but Bear's even wider-reaching entangling of "myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, [and] meanings" (Haraway 2016, 1) which makes *Shoggoths in Bloom* such a powerful affirmative text: slavery, the Holocaust, the Underground Railroad, the shoggoths, Jim Crow, the Old Ones, and both World Wars; Antarctica, Maine, France, Germany, the Atlantic Middle Passage, and Wilberforce. Bear relentlessly entangles these, lets them converse with each other, makes them capable of response; without dismissing, apologizing, or justifying them. Instead, through Harding, she emphatically says 'no' to Lovecraft's—and other's—racism; Harding has "a *concern* for, a *relationality with* the situation [he is] already participating in and entangled with" (Thiele 2017, 28). Because he refuses a "messianic promise or need for a 'beyond'" (27), Harding affirms the world as it is—he stays with the trouble—and can instigate transformation.

Concern, to be present, and transformation

Vital to the possibility of an affirmative approach is not only the notion of relationality, but also of concern. That is, a focus on not only *how* something is accounted for, but also on *what* is accounted for. The former Bruno Latour refers to as "matters of fact," the latter "matters of concern" (2004). He pleads for a form of critique in which "the question was never to get *away* from facts but *closer* to them" (231), because moving from matters of fact to matters of concern acknowledges the matters' relational status, and as such enables the possibility for change:

> Considering something a matter of fact assumes that reality is a given and subject to unchanging universal laws or truths and that there is nothing to be done about it, whereas viewing a phenomenon as a matter of concern implies that it is a construct, the contingent effect of multiple causes and actors, and it is subject to change. (Knittel 2019, 179)

Do note the similarity between Latour's 'matters' and Braidotti's shift away from unitary universalism: both call for a system of thought based on relations and affects, not unchanging 'truths.' Also note that this is where Haraway misses the mark: she acknowledges Lovecraft's racism as a matter of fact, but refuses to consider it a matter of concern. Hence an affirmative approach "both adds to thought a *concern* from which it emerges and with which it stays *related*," by way of which it can "do the work of envisioning transformation and change" (Thiele 2017, 26). But what exactly is this concern *for* then? *What* is accounted for?

Inspired by Spinoza and Deleuze (Thiele 2017, 26-8), affirmative critique initiates a "belief in the world, as it is" (Deleuze [1985] 2000, 172). That is, a refusal to look 'beyond' for answers and solutions, but a radical insistence that "we are in *this* mess all together" (Braidotti 2013, 141). It concerns not only the how, but the what: the brute and often brutal fact, which is a fact that concerns us. Hence affirmation demands a persistent focus on the present: a focus on *staying* with the trouble. Although the trouble can be acknowledged, it cannot be affirmed it one is not concerned for it.

Although she misses the case in Lovecraft's specific case, Haraway *does* share this concern: "staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present" (2016, 1). This focus on the present, on concern, and on what is, is espoused because the alternatives do not lead anywhere:

> The idea of "staying with the trouble" [is] especially impatient with two responses that I hear all too frequently . . . The first is easy to describe and, I think, dismiss, namely, a comic faith in technofixes, whether secular or religious . . . The second response, harder to dismiss, is probably even more destructive: namely, a position that the game is over, it's too late, there's no sense trying to make anything any better, or at least no sense having any active trust in each other in working and playing for a resurgent world. (Haraway 2016, 3)

Although the first response, if feasible, would lead to transformation, it has yet to manifest. And even if it would manifest, it would be a continuation of "the great phallic and modernizing Adventure" that got us into this mess in the first place. The second response stops any potential change or transformation cold in its tracks before it can get underway. I share these concerns and—in the context of approaching Lovecraft's racism—add to them uncritical dismissal *tout court*, that is, saying 'no' which is *not* concerned and related with what is dismissed; apologism, which refuses to deal with the world *as is*, with the bare and often brutal fact; and justifying, which condones racism. Do note that all these approaches, too, block change and transformation. Even well-meaning critique, mindful of Lovecraft's trouble, can precipitate this block, by not stopping and *first* taking the moment to affirm the trouble *as it is*.[19] Yet it is exactly change and transformation we need to be able to grapple with Lovecraft's legacy, considering the nigh-unavoidable presence of Lovecraftiana, in both popular culture and scholarship.

[19] For example, Jed Mayer's (2016) otherwise excellent analysis of Lovecraft's implicit critique of speciesism and significance to contemporary posthumanist thought is marred by too hastily treating Lovecraft's racism, blocking an affirmative approach: "without seeking to escape the implications of Lovecraft's racism, I would like to propose an alternative way of contextualizing the author's racial prejudices within a broader posthumanist perspective" (119). Note that this does not affirm the bare, brutal fact: instead, it too dances around the issue at stake. Likewise, Alison Sperling (2017b) notes how her thorough analysis of Lovecraft's significance to feminist new material thought resists "a reading methodology that risks allowing for this racism to escape unnoticed," yet that is the last mention of Lovecraft's racism.

This change or transformation does, however, not promise salvation, or it would fail to be present. Instead, it requires work, in the Foucauldian (Keulen 2017, 219) sense: "work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings" (Foucault 1984, 47). In this sense, transformative work is a "task and an obligation" (Keulen 2017, 219), an obligation that the likes of classical Lovecraft scholarship, Haraway's Chthulucene, and those calling for Lovecraft's cancellation refuse to do. Staying with Lovecraft's trouble instead proposes a different project: by affirming his racism, the transformative work which can enable us to grapple with this non-innocent history can be engaged. As such, an affirmation on Lovecraft's racism 'as is'—not explained away or apologized for, for example by way of the man of his time defense—is necessary to move ahead candidly and critically. Hence Lovecraft's racism must be affirmed by saying no to it, but a no which has a concern for what it is said to, and stays related to that concern. This enables "movement, process, becoming" (Braidotti 2009, 50); that is, transformation. Transformation is necessary, because if not, affirming Lovecraft's racism would simply become a repetition of it.

Post-Lovecraftian fiction shows us how to commence this transformative work, in this case by way of Paul Harding and the shoggoths. Harding affirms the world, as it is: he affirms the trouble brewing in Germany, and refuses to believe in a technofix—employ the shoggoths as weapon, repeating the Old Ones' script of violence—or to give up. Instead, he says 'no' to that trouble, yet he maintains an essential relationship *with* the No that *concerns* it (Deleuze [1968] 1994, 218), rendering both himself and the shoggoths response-able. He refuses to send in the shoggoths, because he relates to them by way of his own past, and he decides to take the work of transformation into his own hands: he joins the French Foreign Legion. Never throughout the tale is the trouble—be it Lovecraft's racism, the shoggoths' status as slaves, racism in the United States, or the gathering storm in Europe—dismissed, apologized, or justified. Harding stays with Lovecraft's trouble.

Latour notes how moving from matters of fact to matters of concern, so crucial to affirmation, "would require that all entities . . . cease to be objects defined simply by their inputs and outputs and become again things, mediating, assembling, gathering many more folds" (2004, 248). Latour rehabilitates Heidegger "*Ding*" (1971) to refer to entities as "neither a fixed property nor an essence but rather an ongoing, dynamic process" (Driscoll 2018, 44). Bear's shoggoths are an example of such entities—of matters of concern—*but so is Bear's approach* to Lovecraft's racism. Because *work* is put in, the former are transformed from unthinking, fixed, engineered slaves to complex entities with relations and entanglements; to "gatherings" (Latour 2004, 232-37; Heidegger 171). This opens up the possibility for them to be free—although they themselves will also have to put in work to truly achieve that—rendering them capable of responding and hence able to affirm their past and contemporary trouble. The latter, Lovecraft's racism, is transformed from a matter of fact into a matter of concern; and approaching it is transformed from a uncritical and uncandid affair—like most of the approaches to Lovecraft's racism outlined in the introduction—into a relentless staying with the trouble, in the sense in which Haraway defines it: "staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal [or immortal, in this case] critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (2016, 1).

CHAPTER 2: MONSTERS AND *THE LITANY OF EARTH*

Science fiction and fantasy writer Ruthanna Emrys is best known for her Innsmouth Legacy series, a series of one novella and three books published by Tor.com. The novella *The Litany of Earth* started off the series, subverting Lovecraft's fear of miscegenation by taking a descendent of *The Shadow over Innsmouth*'s unseen antagonist Obed Marsh as its protagonist. This is a conscious post-Lovecraftian choice by Emrys, who claims she intends to write Lovecraftian horror, "but inverted from the horror he [Lovecraft] intended" (Pillsworth and Emrys 2014a). Emrys, who comes from a family of Reform Jews and is in a same-sex marriage, asserts she does so because although Lovecraft's "creations are rich in wonder and yes, in terror," she simultaneously realizes that "I am one of Lovecraft's monsters," which "shapes [her] reading inescapably" (Pillsworth and Emrys 2014a).[20]

It also shapes her writing. The first time she read *Innsmouth*, she was furious at Lovecraft's treatment of the fictional town's human-Deep One hybrid inhabitants—they end up dead or, perhaps worse, in internment camps (Lovecraft 1936b, 504)—which led to *Litany*: "my first novel resulted from yelling at the story [*Innsmouth*] until I put my fury down on paper" (2018). Her "sympathy was squarely with the interned frog-monsters," because Emrys saw parallels between their depiction and negative depictions of Jewish people (2017). Emrys became "a Deep One apologist" (Pillsworth and Emrys 2014b) and *Litany* was born, which takes the post-Lovecraftian angle of "cosmic horror written from the position of oppression, rather than privilege" (Pillsworth and Emrys 2020).

It tells the story of Aphra Marsh, together with her little brother Caleb, sole Deep One hybrid survivors of a governmental internment camp. They were interned after the government raid on Innsmouth following the events of the original tale. Released after 17 years, she tries to

[20] This comment parallels Nnedi Okorafor's comments on the subject: "many of The Elders [i.e. great artists influential to Okorafor] we honor and need to learn from hate or hated us" (2011b). Although Okorafor does not write in the Mythos herself, this shows again that issue is larger than Lovecraft only.

pick up her life again in late 1940s San Francisco, where she lives with the Kotos, a Japanese American family who were interned in the same camp as Marsh after Imperial Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Here, Marsh focuses on her work in a bookstore, where she has found several volumes of Deep One religious texts, known as Aeonism. As she copes with the loss of her family, town, and culture, she is approached by an FBI agent, Ron Spector, who wants to recruit her: the government has found a local human cult practicing Aeonism and—refusing to repeat the past—wish to know more before springing to action. Aphra has to weigh her curiosity to find out whether any part of her culture lives on against willfully working with the same government that murdered her family. In the end, she goes along with Spector's plan, finding out the all-too-human cult believes they too can gain immortality via Aeonism, by 'taking to the water' like the Deep One hybrids do. Deciding that the cult leads to more harm than good, she passes this information on to Spector, who organizes a raid on the cult—reminiscent of the raid on Innsmouth—yet ultimately, take a more humane approach to the cultist than internment camps. The story ends with Aphra reminiscing on her choices.

The Litany of Earth playfully contrasts Lovecraft's depiction of the Deep Ones with an experiment in viewing the events from the monsters' side. In this way, Emrys *literally* writes from within "the belly of the monster" (Haraway 1991, 188); a perspective which I will maintain is an affirmative practice significant to staying with the trouble. Emrys asserts that writing in the Mythos—including its racist underpinnings—means "a responsibility" for the Mythos author, "both to speak meaningfully about things that people have been talking about for decades, and to speak beyond those things" (2017). Hence Emrys does not dismiss or apologize Lovecraft's racism; instead, she affirms it, and *from there* attempts to go "beyond" it. By taking a Deep One hybrid perspective, Emrys explores the possibilities of a monstrous viewpoint. By explicitly likening the fate of Innsmouth to that of interned Japanese Americans, and implicitly to the fate of the Jewish people, and by contrasting different viewpoints on the

government's actions, Emrys reminds us that it is important which stories make worlds. But before I unpack that further, a look at monsters is in order: Lovecraft's Deep Ones, and later, Emrys' Aphra Marsh.

Lovecraft's Deep Ones and their hybrids

In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the titular marine town has fallen on hard times after the war of 1812 led to a decrease in shipping. Prominent captain Obed Marsh, who once sailed as far as the Caroline Islands, convinces the townsfolk to start worshipping the Deep Ones to avert this crisis. He had first learnt of their existence from a Kanak tribe on Pohnpei, who offered human sacrifices to the fish-like creatures and interbred with them. With the added crisis of the fisheries going barren, Innsmouth is quickly turning decrepit, and hence the townsfolk agree to let Marsh invite the Deep Ones to the reef just outside of the harbor. The "Esoteric Order of Dagon," a "debased, quasi-pagan thing imported from the East" (Lovecraft 1936b, 511) is founded to worship the Deep Ones, quickly supplanting the local churches. Human sacrifice commences,[21] and Innsmouth waters flood with fish. Yet when the Deep Ones start demanding interbreeding, the townsfolk revolt against the Order and Obed Marsh. Unsurprisingly, this revolt is quickly and violently shut down by the Deep Ones themselves, who swim up the river coursing through town. From this point on, Innsmouth is entirely under the shadow of the Deep Ones.

It turns out that the human-Deep One hybrids born from the interbreeding can pass as human when they are born, but quickly start developing fish-like qualities as they age. This constitutes "the Innsmouth look," quickly noticed by *Innsmouth*'s protagonist, Olmstead, when seeing a hybrid for the first time:

[21] This is relayed to Olmstead by Zadok Allen, a drunk nonagenarian and one of the very few fully human inhabitants of Innsmouth. It appears Lovecraft has intended him as reliable narrator (Pillsworth and Emrys 2014b), yet no one else confirms nor denies actual human sacrifice. This becomes an important worldbuilding detail for Emrys, as we will later see.

> His age was perhaps thirty-five, but the odd, deep creases in the sides of his neck made him seem older when one did not study his dull, expressionless face. He had a narrow head, bulging, watery-blue eyes that seemed never to wink, a flat nose, a receding forehead and chin, and singularly undeveloped ears. His long thick lip and coarse-pored, greyish cheeks seemed almost beardless except for some sparse yellow hairs that straggled and curled in irregular patches; and in places the surface seemed queerly irregular, as if peeling form some cutaneous disease. (Lovecraft 1936b, 512)

In typical Lovecraft fashion, Olmstead wonders "just what foreign blood was in him," finally settling on "biological degeneration rather than alienage" (512-13). Yet it is not purely disgust at the Innsmouthers' *look* he feels, because "even before I noticed any details there spread over me a wave of spontaneous aversion which could be neither checked nor explained" (512). He remembers what the train ticket agent of neighboring Newburyport told him before he left for Innsmouth: "but the real thing behind the way folks feel is simply race prejudice – and I don't say I'm blaming those that hold it" (507).

When the hybrids age, they become increasingly Deep One-like, until eventually they take to the water themselves to live under the sea with their Deep One kin. There they are immortal, unless they die violently or of disease. This is reason enough for the government—when it finds out by the actions of Olmstead—to raid Innsmouth, burning and dynamiting its buildings and torpedoing the reef, although this does not destroy the Deep One city of Y'ha-nthlei lying beneath. "For the present they [the Deep Ones] would rest . . . It would be a city greater than Innsmouth next time" (Lovecraft 1936b, 554). As for Innsmouth hybrid inhabitants, they are arrested without "trials, or even definite charges," being sent to "concentration camps" and "various naval and military prisons" (504). Nothing is heard of them

after. After Olmstead's eyes start bulging, he discovers his own Innsmouth heritage, and focuses on getting to Y'ha-nthlei, rather than finding out about his captive kin. This is the plotline Emrys picks up on, exploring the latter's internment in government camps.

Innsmouth's ending has been hotly debated (e.g. Joshi 1996, 166-7; Evans 2005, 125; Bealer 2011, 45; Pillsworth and Emrys 2014b; Mayer 2016, 123-6). Olmstead's "lovingly, even erotically, described" (Miéville 2016) conversion has led to wildly differing interpretations. Olmstead appears to be a stand-in for Lovecraft (Joshi 1996, 165) adds yet another dimension to the scene. Animal studies scholar Jed Mayer provides a reading which argues for a relational view of the Deep Ones: "while Lovecraft's narrators experience fragmentation of their human identities, they also encounter a sense of kinship where once they knew only difference" (2016, 120). Although such a reading is appealing, I maintain it smooths over Olmstead's initial disgust too easily; Mayer's non-affirmative approach means his assertions run the risk of being "philosophical appropriations that ignore the author's [Lovecraft's] own interests and dismaying beliefs" (Poole 2016, 221). Considering Olmstead's status as author surrogate, Lovecraft's own views should not be swept under the rug. Therefore, I follow the likes of Tracy Bealer (2011) and Joshi (1996, 162-3, 167) in their readings of *Innsmouth* being predicated on racial hatred and difference rather than kinship; the Deep Ones being "racially marked immigrants overtaking . . . polluting and degrading Innsmouth's Anglo Saxon stock" (Bealer 45); and Olmstead's conversion a non-ironic evocation of horror predicated on finding out one's bloodline is 'tainted.'[22] That is, *Innsmouth* has a biopolitical undercurrent: it is a tale of the dangers of miscegenation, predicated on the notion of the possibility of "biological

[22] It has also been suggested that the ending can be read as Lovecraft's "coming to terms" with mental illness running through his family (Emrys and Pillsworth 2014b). His father died in 1898 in the psychiatric ward of Providence's Butler Hospital, after having been institutionalized for five years due to psychotic episodes. This event left a lasting mark on the young Lovecraft, who remained worried about his own mental health throughout his adult life (Joshi 2001, 22). In this reading, Olmstead *is* Lovecraft, and Olmstead's spectacular conversion at the end of the tale is Lovecraft embracing the possibility of suffering a mental breakdown. Note that this reading does not exclude a reading centering on biological degeneration—mental illness could be regarded as a 'tainted' or 'degenerate blood' by Lovecraft—but this reading fails to consider the racial element of miscegenation, which is why I will not focus any further on it.

degeneration," which exists in a larger historical—and sadly, contemporary—worldview which needs to exclude a construed Other to validate its own existence and possession of power. Nevertheless, parts of *Innsmouth*'s ending remain ambiguous. Emrys, for example, has read "moments of strange sympathy for its monsters" in Lovecraft's original tale (Emrys 2018), which inspired her to enter the Mythos and create a monster herself.

The first axis of the monster: the biopolitical boundary marker of Man

Aphra Marsh, as "something more than human, or less," (Emrys 2014, cha. 3) is a monster. Emrys, by her own account, also is "one of Lovecraft's monsters." What does it mean then, to be a monster, and how does that relate to Lovecraft's racism? "Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imagination," argues Haraway in 1991's *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (180). The monster as the by now well-known Other that signifies the limit of the community, and because of that, is constitutive of that community; there would be no community without a boundary marker. This is the axis on which Lovecraft's Deep Ones—and by extension, Lovecraft's racial hatred—operate. Olmstead's unexplainable spontaneous aversion is very suddenly very explainable through the lens of binary meaning-making: the Deep Ones constitute the very limit of Olmstead's self-perceived community of humanity. The community Haraway was speaking of in 1991 meant the "polis of the Greek male human," and "modern identity," and the "multiple boundaries of late twentieth century industrial identities" (180). I add to that Olmstead's self-perceived human identity bounded by and constituted of the non-human Deep Ones. That is, grand, invented narratives focusing on (male) universality predicated on the exclusion of others; or, the (re)invention of Nature of Haraway's *Simians*' subtitle. Nature is invented and reinvented by the likewise invented and reinvented category of the monster.

Lovecraft's Deep Ones are the invented non-human, or monster, as binary opposite of the human. They are horrible because they are different. Their hybrid offspring are disgusting *because* they are hybrid. They are locked in difference, constitutive of the human. Emrys is keenly aware of the invented nature of this boundary marker, and likens it to other marginalized groups who were also portrayed as binary other, to define the community excluding them:

> Human sacrifice? Demonic deals? Plague and murder? Check, check, check. Can't you be more original with your blood libel? And it's preserved by a combination that Lovecraft portrays perfectly: fantastic, sordid rumor encourages people to avoid direct contact, and shards of ambiguous experience are used to shore up rumor (Pillsworth and Emrys 2014b).

Emrys' own Jewish background makes *Innsmouth* a painful reflection on the historical fate of the Jewish people, who were accused from bringing plague to killing Christian children to make Passover meals from their blood (Cohen 1996b, 8). The inhabitants of Innsmouth, like the Jewish people, are othered into being monsters by hearsay and a grand narrative or two. There is no actual evidence of human sacrifice, only rumors. To Aphra Marsh, Cthulhu is a benign deity, whose tentacles "were reaching to draw me in and keep me safe" (Emrys 2014, cha. 7), not a demon one makes deals with. The tale—although written two decades earlier—is also a painful prediction of the fate of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. The inhabitants of Innsmouth also end up in internment camps, their culture decimated. The Jewish people and the inhabitants of Innsmouth mark the boundary of the community, and as such lose their humanity to become monsters.

The monster is therefore "a kind of limit case, an extreme version of marginalization, an abjecting epistemological device basic to the mechanics of deviance construction and

identity formation" (Cohen 1996a, ix). This is the first axis on which the monster operates: as the ultimate Other, used to define humanity; by implication, the monster is therefore *not human*, or at least not human in the same way as those who dominate the discourse define it. In this sense, the monster can be seen as enabling what Sylvia Wynter calls a "genre of being human" (2003): the way in which subjects know "Self, Other, as well as their social, physical, and organic worlds" (269). She uses the word "genre" consciously: it stresses the *invented* nature of the biopolitical project of demarcating the human. Do note it also implies its changeability. This potential for changing the dominant genre of being human is both a horizon of hope—other genres may be possible, "humanness" might be given "a different future" (Wynter 2015, 9), reminiscent of Haraway's "need to change the story . . . of Humans in History" (2016, 40)—and a critique of the invented monohumanist narrative of 'the human,' similar to Haraway's critique of Anthropos. If multiple genres of being human are possible, a single, generic, universal Man was never the answer to the question of who we are. Man is a genre of being human, not to be equated with *the* human.

Lovecraft does not ascribe to such a malleable conception of the human. Rather, he is deeply invested in positing Man as the human; specifically, that genre of being human that Wynter has coined "Man2," which is "secular and biocentric" (2003, 282), or "the ethnoclass or Western-bourgeois answer that we now give to the question of the who and what we are" (316-7). That is, a self-representation which is grounded in the idea of a liberal *homo oeconomicus*—as opposed to the previous more religious and political "Man1" (Wynter 2015, 10)—framed in a Darwinian evolution paradigm which differentially, monstrously, categorizes those of non-white descent to constitute itself:

> Modeled on the natural organism, the Western bourgeoisie's liberal monohumanist self-narrating descriptive statement . . . called for all peoples of black African descent to

> reoccupy . . . the naturally dysselected Native / N----- figure, ostensibly bioevolutionary situated between ape and humans. This is a figure barely evolved and wholly subhuman that is Other to the fully evolved, thereby only True Human Self . . . Western bourgeois liberal monohumanist *homo oeconomicus*. (Wynter 2015, 47)

Lovecraft's racism represents Wynter's description of how Man functions in its self-constitution. One need only think back to "On the Creation of N-----s."

The paradigm of Man is "overrepresented as the singular narrative through which the stakes of human freedom are articulated and marked" (McKittrick in Wynter 2015, 11): Man can only function because it excludes other potential narratives, and as such is "monohumanist" (9). This focus on self-narration, on the stories told, is crucial; Man, as *genre* of being human ultimately functions on the basis of narratives. Humans at large are characterized as "*storytellers who now storytellingly invent themselves*" (McKittrick in Wynter 2015, 11), reminiscent of Haraway's "prick tale" of Anthropos: "a tragic story with only one real actor, one real world-maker, the hero, this is the Man-making tale" (2016, 39). Lovecraft is a storyteller in his biopolitics inventing who is human and who is not, but he is of course also a literal storyteller in his tales. The two combine in tales with racist underpinnings such as *Innsmouth*.

Lovecraft's narration of the Deep One hybrids mobilizes the first axis of the monster to self-constitute Man. He answers the question of "who and what we are" be explicitly stating what we are *not*: monstrous. And the monstrous, in Lovecraft's case, is that which is racially marked, degenerate, hybrid, and tainted.

It is important to note, however, that the monster does not arise *ex nihilo*: rather, it is the product "of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (Cohen 1996b, 4). The monster should be examined in opposition to the moment that generated it: the monster returns

"each time to be read against contemporary social movements, or a specific, determining event" (5). Lovecraft's time—again, "the nadir of American race relations"—was hardly a serene cultural moment. For Lovecraft specifically, the influx of foreigners in his beloved Providence, and his horror at a previously Anglo-Saxon—or 'Teuton' to Lovecraft—neighborhood like New York's Red Hook 'devolving' into a multicultural one[23] signaled a decline in the Western civilization generally (Joshi 1990, 314-20), and the United States in particular: "United States history is one long panegyric of the Teuton, and will continue to be such if degenerate immigration can be checked in time" (Lovecraft 2006, 14). Hence Lovecraft's biopolitical project was "to see the Anglo-Saxon race and psychology remain dominant in America" (1968, 308). To this goal, he had to demarcate the human among Anglo-Saxon lines; those free of 'degeneration,' so the rest could be classified as monstrous and hence disposable: "representing an anterior culture as monstrous justifies its displacement or extermination by rendering the act heroic (Cohen 1996b, 7-8). Hence I read Lovecraft's Deep One hybrids as a reaction against what Lovecraft perceived to be his homeland, culture, and 'race' in crisis by increasing hybridization, immigration, and miscegenation.

Although this axis of monstrosity is an extremely potent—and hence dangerous—boundary marker and adjudicator of who is human and who is not, there is more to the monster than meets the eye. Emrys labeling herself "one of Lovecraft's monsters" seems like an odd move if this is the only way in which the monstrous operates. There is *also* something appealing to the monster; Cohen already hinted at this aspect when he called the monstrous "an *abjecting* epistemological device" (1996a, ix, emphasis mine). The idea of abjection took flight in poststructuralist thought after Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* (1980), for its ability to trouble

[23] "Red Hook is a maze of hybrid squalor near the ancient waterfront . . . The population is a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and negro elements impinging upon one another, and fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant. It is a babel of sound and filth . . . Here long ago a brighter picture dwelt, with clear-eyed mariners on the lower streets and homes of taste and substance where the larger houses line the hill" (Lovecraft 1927, 150-51).

binary oppositional thinking. That is, the abject is something which simultaneously horrifies and attracts, because there is *something of us* in it. *Innsmouth* shows this dimension clearly: Olmstead's status as author surrogate and his decision to join the Deep Ones at the end of the tale operates on the simultaneous affects of attraction and rejection. The abject deconstructs the invented barrier between the Self and the Other (Kristeva [1980] 2018, 68), and as such enables a powerful reading of *Innsmouth*'s ending.

There is another dimension—a second axis—to the monster, one which troubles binary identity making, one which turns the monster's destructiveness into deconstructiveness (Cohen 1996b, 14-5). It is this axis of the monster in that Emrys detected in *Innsmouth*, what made her feel "a strange sympathy," and this is the axis that is the central motivator behind Aphra Marsh and *The Litany of Earth*. The abject inherent in the monstrous has two main effects: it "accounts greatly for its continued cultural popularity, for the fact that the monster seldom can be contained in a simple, binary dialectic" (17). This dimension of the monster can enable it to tell a different story from Man, to "narrate—to think—outside the prick tale of Humans in History." Hence when Emrys calls herself a monster and writes the monstrous Aphra, there are two main things to keep in mind: its deconstructive powers and its popular appeal, which both operate on the second axis of the monster.

The second axis of the monster: the inappropriate/d troublemaker

The second axis of the monster, the abject inherent in it, has been developed further in poststrucuralist, feminist, and posthumanist thought. Nikita Mazurov notes how for the latter the monster signifies more than the unhuman Other to the human community: "the monster is not an abstract conceptualization, but an instantaneous, enacted entanglement . . . concrete and relational, it is a practiced hybridity of form which eludes conceptual formalization, existing as it does as a state of contestation and troubling" (2018, 262). Entangled, relational, hybrid, and

troubling, the second axis of the monster appears to be a figure very useful to affirmation and staying with the trouble. Indeed, Haraway stresses "the liberatory character of monsters" (Grebowicz and Merrick 2013, 80). Eluding "conceptual formalization," instead "existing . . . as a state of contestation and troubling" means the monster can *not* be caught in a grand narrative. The axis this side of the monster operates on—elusive and troubling, unable to be caught in invented, unitary, and universal narratives—exists in a radically different relation to the community than a binary one.

If this sounds familiar, it is because my short treatment of Haraway in the introduction dealt with similar topics. 25 years after *Simians*, in 2016, Haraway extended the argument she had made there to encompass her ecological thinking. The grand, male, universal narrative, now "the great phallic and modernizing Adventure" (47), is still there; and it is still troubled by monsters: the "Chthonic ones," from which Chthulucene allegedly derives, "are monsters in the best sense" (2). They are troubling because "they writhe and luxuriate in manifold forms and manifold names," unable to be caught in any sort of unitary universalism, contrary to Olmstead's Deep Ones. That is exactly why, for Haraway, Cthulhu cannot serve as a namesake for her Chthulucene: she needs a namesake that "led to diverse and bumptious chthonic dividuals and powers," instead of to any "singleton monster or deity" (169). Although seemingly paradoxical, the addition of 'singleton' to 'monster' destroys its "liberatory character" because it locks it in a binary, as limit of the community and humanity: it locks the monstrous in its first axis, unable to access its liberatory potential. This is also true for Lovecraft's depictions of the Deep One hybrids, whose second axis is only unlocked in post-Lovecraftian fiction, as we will see later. In that sense, to Haraway, Cthulhu—and by extension the Deep One hybrids, although she has not written about them—is a monster in the worst sense.

The monster, in its abject form, holds liberatory potential exactly because it is *not* the "*negation* of this narrative, but a 'non-relation' to it" (Mazurov 2018, 262). It cannot be caught

in the conceptual formalizations of the narrative of which it is simultaneously part and not part; "not me. Not that. But not nothing, either" (Kristeva [1980] 2018, 68). In this way, it is not the antithesis of the human, but it is the "unhuman" (263): it showcases how invented nature is invented, and how it could potentially be imagined otherwise. In this capacity, the monster offers potential "new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world" (Cohen 1996b, 7). Haraway picks up on this monstrous ability, too: "monsters in feminist science fiction define quite different political possibilities and limits from those proposed by the mundane fiction of Man and Woman" (Haraway 1991, 177). I wish to extend this argument to post-Lovecraftian fiction; more specifically, *The Litany of Earth*. Rephrasing Haraway, I argue that monsters in post-Lovecraftian fiction, Aphra in particular, define quite different political possibilities and limits from those proposed by the mundane approaches to Lovecraft's racism. But first, a look at how Haraway envisions these quite different political possibilities and limits is in order.

Non-relation is not "immune to situational interaction or relationality," but rather is a "rejection of the stifling non/human binary entrapment" (Mazurov 2018, 262). It thus rejects the monster's first axis. Haraway borrows the term "inappropriate/d other" from filmmaker and theorist Trinh Minh-ha to offer an interpretation of non-relation as being "inappropriate/d":

> To be 'inappropriate/d' does not mean 'not to be in relation with' – i.e., to be in a special reservation, with the status of the authentic, the untouched, in the allochronic and allotopic condition of innocence. Rather to be an 'inappropriate/d other' means to be in critical, deconstructive relationality, in a diffracting rather than reflecting (ratio)nality – as the means of making potent connection that exceeds domination. To be inappropriate/d is not to fit in the *taxon*, to be dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives, not to be originally fixed by difference. (Haraway [1992] 2004, 69)

This is the promise of monsters: they represent an alternative way of thinking about and with the human, different from Man and its marginalized Other. They offer a potential non-binary genre of being human; one which needs not marginalize. Instead of being the negative from which the positive gains its meaning and vice versa, the monster *diffracts* meaning: "a practice of reflecting back and splintering chauvinist epistemes" (Lewis 2017). The monster diffracts—remember the shoggoths' hide which "is *all* eyes; they see, somehow, in every direction at once"—by way of a connection to the human different from a binary relation. This relation is one of contestation and troubling—that is, response-able and multidirectional—and in this way it points at "an absent, but perhaps possible, other present" (Haraway [1992] 2004, 63): a different way to "narrate . . . outside of the prick tale of Humans in History." In this sense, the monster's liberatory character is affirmative: affirmation is not *the opposite* of negation, the negation of negation (Thiele 2017, 25); instead, it is the Deleuzian gesture which says 'No' but keeps "an essential relationship *with* the No that *concerns* it" (Deleuze [1968] 1994, 218). The monster says No to "attempts to include them in any systemic structuration," it "refus[es] to participate in the classificatory 'order of things'" (Cohen 1886b, 6). Nevertheless, as non-relational, it stays concerned and related to that No. The monster can stay with the trouble.

At the end of "The Promises of Monsters" (1992), Haraway examines the character of Lisa Foo, the Vietnamese cyborg deuteragonist in John Varley's Nebula and Hugo award winning short story "Press Enter" (1984). In Varley's original tale, Foo is the sexualized, racialized Other to the story's white protagonist Victor Apfel. She dies an extremely violent death toward the end of the story, after having been in a stormy sexual relationship with Apfel, who describes in an extremely racialized—"leaving out only the moustache, she was a dead ringer for a cartoon Tojo. She had the glasses, ears, and the teeth. But her teeth had braces, like piano keys wrapped in barbed wire" (Varley 1984, 241)—and sexualized way, never failing to

note “her breasts, so improbably large on her scrawny frame” (242). The mix of sexual and racial othering is not uncommon, or, as Cohen states it: “feminine and cultural others are monstrous enough by themselves in patriarchal society, but when they threaten to mingle, the entire economy of desire comes under attack” (1996b, 15). That is, Foo has the potential for abjection, as Apfel is both attracted and repulsed by her race and sex. Yet this axis of Foo is quickly locked away by Varley.

Before her abject side is explored, Foo dies after sticking her head in an oven, which makes her breasts melt. Haraway notes how:

> It is possible to read ‘Press Enter’ as a conventional heterosexual romance, bourgeois detective fiction, technobic-technophillic fantasy, dragon-lady story, and, finally, white masculinist narrative whose condition of possibility is access to the body and mind of a woman, especially a ‘Third World’ woman, who, here as elsewhere in misogynist and racist culture, is violently destroyed. Not just violently—superabundantly, without limit. (Haraway [1992] 2004, 109)

It *is* possible to read “Press Enter” as “conventional,” in this case meaning operating on the first axis of the monster, in which Foo is excluded form humanity, and hence “justify[ing] [her] displacement or extermination.” Yet Haraway is not content with this. In typical Harawayan fashion, she insist on “rewriting [the story] as one reads” ([1992] 2004, 108), in the hopes of ‘saving’ Foo from the racist, heteronormative narrative she is trapped in.

To this end, she recasts Foo as inappropriate/d other, using Lynn Randolph’s painting *Cyborg* (fig. 4), painted “in conversation with” (Haraway [1992] 2004, 121) Haraway’s “A

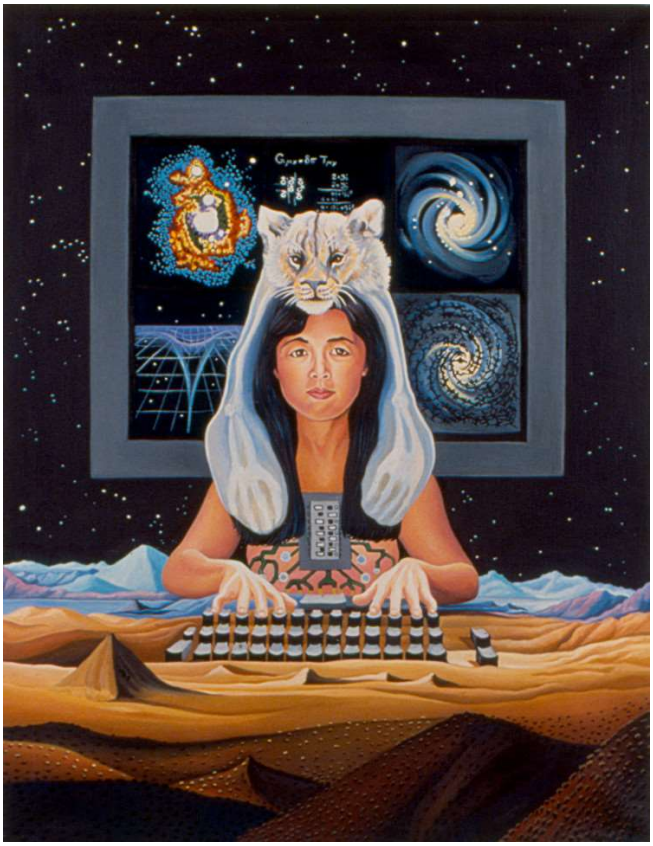

Fig. 4. Lynn Randolph, *Cyborg*, 1989, oil on canvas, Cambridge: Bunting Institute.

Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1987).[24] Yet this "rewriting is not to make the story come out 'right,' whatever that would be," but rather, "to rearticulate the figure of Lisa Foo to unsettle the closed logics of a deadly racist misogyny" (Haraway [1992] 2004, 110). Foo, now recast, is now longer locked down as sexualized Other. Her race is undefinable, her breasts are not a focal point. She is entangled with nature, technology, and the Earth; she is "in myriad unfinished configurations of places times, matters, and meanings." Where the woman ends and where nature or technology begin, is incomprehensible. She embodies "the still oxymoronic simultaneous statuses of woman, 'Third World' person, human, organism, communications technology, mathematician, writer, worker, engineer, scientist, spiritual guide, lover of the Earth . . . S/he is

[24] Do note that this is not Haraway's famous "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985). Randolph's *Cyborg* also functions as the front cover for Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), which I have referred to earlier.

not finished" (112). She is now inappropriate/d: in relations with all of the categories Haraway lists, yet *diffracting* them all; not locked in difference with any of them. This presages Haraway's later insistence on the need for "diverse and bumptious chthonic dividuals and powers," as opposed to "singleton monster[s] or deit[ies]"; Foo is rewritten to unlock her monstrosity to operate on the second axis. In the process, Foo can now inhabit a different genre of being human. Although this rewriting might not save her from violent death, it does open up the possibility of Lisa Foo "mov[ing] differently" (108). That is, it opens up the possibility of staying with the trouble.

Returning to Lovecraft, I follow Haraway's approach to Foo to investigate the post-Lovecraftian monster and its liberatory character in regard to the impasse in contemporary Lovecraft scholarship. Taking the monster as the affirmative inappropriate/d other opens up a whole new way to approach the racist biopolitics inherent in Lovecraft's monsters, unlocking them from their original inability to operate on the monster's second axis. I maintain it points to a possible, other present: an alternative way of approaching Lovecraft's trouble, a way which is troubling and troubled—remember Haraway's etymological investigation: 'to stir up,' 'to make cloudy,' 'to disturb'—in itself. Contemporary approaches to Lovecraft's racism are "originally fixed by difference," too: said racism is either bad (dismissal, apologism) or good (aesthetic justification) in comparison to their respective opposites, giving rise to a lack of nuance and critical edge. An affirmative approach which says 'no' to Lovecraft's racism, but keeps "an essential relationship *with* the No that *concerns* it" can help us approach Lovecraft's racism by way of "potent connection that exceeds domination," potentially preventing a repetition of that harm.

Emrys takes a similar approach to Lovecraft's monsters. Like Haraway rewriting Lisa Foo into a cyborg figure, Aphra rewrites the Deep One hybrids into Aphra Marsh. Marsh, as post-Lovecraftian monster, opens up the possibility of staying with the trouble, because of her

status as non-relation to the invented human community, to Man and Anthropos, hoping to exclude her by way of the first axis of the monster. Aphra presents another genre of being human. Yet, like Haraway's Foo, this is not an attempt to make *Innsmouth* come out 'right,' but an attempt to make it move differently: such an affirmative approach is full of risk. To take an affirmative approach to Lovecraft's Deep Ones, to let them move on the monster's second axis, that of abjection, deconstruction, and non-relation, to stay with Lovecraft's trouble, is a risky proposition: it is troubled itself, too.

The promises of Aphra Marsh

Bear's shoggoths and Professor Harding made potent connections exceeding domination, but Aphra Marsh has the added dimension of being a monster, operating on its abject second axis, an inappropriate/d other. As such, she exists in a non-relation with the community which attempts to other her into their boundary marker: a genre of being human hoping to "to see the Anglo-Saxon race and psychology remain dominant in America" (Lovecraft 1968, 308). Aphra exists in the liminal space of always being pulled from non-relation to binary difference, both by others and by her own thinking, yet ultimately resisting appropriation by way of affirmative practices. Because the entirety of *Litany* is written in first person, the reader is limited to Aphra's thoughts, and her own insecurities about what genre of the human she is in.

Aphra is keenly aware of the way she looks, how it makes her stand out, and how many attempt to use that look to mark her as definite other. "The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" (Cohen 1996b, 4). That is, monstrosity is often corporeally inscribed, in Aphra's case by way of the Innsmouth look. When she comes face to face with Ron Spector, the FBI agent sent to recruit her, she imagines what she must look like to him: "bulging eyes; wide mouth; long, bony legs and fingers. 'The Innsmouth look,' when there was an Innsmouth" (Emrys 2014, cha. 3). She knows how her looks mark her as

unmistakable other, although she is not quite sure how that otherness is interpreted by a man representing the government, 17 years after the raid on Innsmouth. “Did it [the Innsmouth look] signal danger to him? Something more than human, or less?” Or perhaps it signals the other great Other to Spector, a man: “an ugly woman, someone whose reactions he could dismiss until he heard what he wanted” (cha. 3).

Aphra, despite her reluctance to entertain a representative of those who murdered her family, destroyed her town, and took her culture from her, decides to hear Spector out. He beseeches her to infiltrate a very human San Francisco cult practicing Aeonism in a bid to become immortal themselves. The cult believes that worshipping Cthulhu will make it grant them they ability to take to the water like the Deep One hybrids. Spector wants Aphra to investigate so assuage his government’s kneejerk reaction to the resurgence of Aeonism. “In ’26, the whole religion were declared enemies of the state, and we started looking out for anyone who said the wrong names on Sunday night, or had the wrong statues in their churches. You know where it goes from there . . . Eventually, it occurred to the government that they might have overgeneralized” (Emrys 2014, cha. 3). He reassures her, that now they “try to separate out the bad guys” (cha. 3), and that *this* is the government that Spector represents; he presents a radically different narrative of the government than the one Aphra knows. She remains suspicious but realizes that “the people [she] could help [them] stop are truly hurting others,” (cha. 3) and she agrees to Spector’s offer. The second reason—which she does not tell Spector—for her assent is a relational yearning: “I still missed Innsmouth. These mortals [the cult] might be the closest I could come to home” (cha. 5).

Hence Aphra, somewhat like Lisa Foo, carries multiple markers of difference: she is a woman; she is marked different by her looks, the main denominator for racialized othering; she practices a strange religion, one marked as enemy of the state before; and she is of a distinct culture, with Innsmouth’s cultural practices having ties to Y’ha-nthlei. Cohen notes how such

a “polesemy” of differential markers are often combined to signal the monstrous as ultimate, dangerous Other:

> One kind of difference becomes another as the normative categories of gender, sexuality, national identity, and ethnicity slide together . . . naturaliz[ing] the subjugation of one cultural body by another by writing the body excluded from personhood and agency as in every way different, monstrous. A polysemy is granted so that a great threat can be encoded. (Cohen 1996b, 11)

Yet, as we have seen with Bear, “entangl[ing] myriad temporalities and spatialities” can enable powerful affirmative transformation. Can biopolitical boundary markers such as sex, race, culture, and more be added to the list of temporalities and spatialities? Cohen continues: “a danger resides in this multiplication [of boundary markers]: . . . the possibilities of escape, resistance, disruption arise with more force” (11). That is, there is liberatory power in Aphra’s intersectional differences, provided she can unlock the secondary axis of her monstrosity.

When visiting the cult’s makeshift cellar shrine for the first time, she meets Oswin Wilder, self-styled high priest, “although probably not a very traditional one by your [Aphra’s] standards” (Emrys 2014, cha. 7) She also meets Mildred Bergman, Wilder’s protégé and first up to ‘take to the water,’ which is, of course, lethal for non-hybrids. Wilder welcomes Aphra—he knows the significance of the Marsh family to his rites—but Bergman remains suspicious. “Look at me,” Aphra demands. Bergman “looked me up and down, making a show of it. Her eyes stayed narrow, and if I had studied long enough to hear thoughts, and done the appropriate rites, I was sure I would have heard it: *anyone can be ugly*” (cha. 7). Her Innsmouth look and last name simultaneously make her desirable and repulsive: abjection starts to enter the stage.

Abjection, for Aphra, means remaining in a monstrous liminal space: simultaneously wanted and rejected because of her Innsmouth look. Spector, Wilder and Bergman other her when it suits them, yet she immediately deconstructs these conceptual formalizations of her otherness because of her non-relation to them. Being a Marsh is simultaneously a marker of danger to the government, yet a great attraction to Wilder. She is ugly, undesirable, by Spector's and Bergman's standards, *and* that same ugliness is the Innsmouth look, which is a sign of her immortality to come and a thing desired by Wilder and Bergman. As a Deep One hybrid, the government both wants her dead and needs her; she is simultaneously an ally and an enemy. Aphra "lies there, quite close, but . . . cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva [1980] 2018, 68); that is, she is "dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives," although that does not mean she is not related, or partly, temporarily, fits into any of these 'maps.' These attempts to put her on a map, to simultaneously other *and* exclude her, are self-internalized, too: Aphra keeps doubting on whether she makes connections or is excluded, variously because of her looks, her culture, her in/un/humanity, her last name, her perceived ugliness, her religion, or a combination thereof. Being a monster is itself troubled, too; abjection is not without risks, ontologically *and* emotionally. Non-relation was never said to be easy.

Aphra's fate connects her to the Kotos. Emrys connects the internment of Innsmouth's residents to the internment of Japanese Americans during and after World War II, which was based more on racism than military considerations (Commission on Wartime Relocation of Civilians 1997). The United States' knee-jerk reaction after Pearl Harbor, interning circa 120,000 Japanese Americans, of which about two-thirds held American citizenship, is reminiscent to what happened to fictional Innsmouth: racism, rather than military consideration, led to the crime. Spector makes this connection conspicuous: "so now, as with the Japanese American community, we find ourselves shorthanded, ignorant, and having angered the people least likely to be a danger to the country" (Emrys 2014, cha. 3).

Hence Aphra is connected to the Japanese American community in a potent way mirroring Bear's shoggoths and Professor Harding's relationality to the plight of those made slave during and after the Transatlantic slave trade. But Aphra's relationality, as a monster, is "critical, deconstructive" (Haraway [1992] 2004, 69). During internment, camp guards sometimes forced themselves on Japanese American girls, but this never happened to Aphra or her kin, due to her Innsmouth look (Emrys 2014, cha. 3). The Kotos will never take to the water. And although Aphra and the Kotos are both trying to build a new life after their ordeals, in an affirmative way, the latter never lost their entire hometown. "'They took your whole town,' said Anna [Koto], almost gently. 'They can't take all of San Francisco, can they Mama?' 'Of course not'," (cha. 3) Mama Rei Koto answers. Even though the Deep Ones' and the Japanese American's fates are related, Aphra simultaneously remains inappropriate/d, even to those she loves.

A great part of what enables the non-relation of Aphra to the dominant genre of the human, are the stories told about her and by her. Like Lisa Foo, by (re)writing a different narrative of a marginalized other, the Deep Ones hybrids are enabled to "move differently" from the way in which they were originally locked. In *Innsmouth*, the Deep One hybrids were excluded from humanity to constitute humanity as an ethnoclass of Western bourgeois. In *Litany*, Aphra is either a monster, a woman, an ugly woman, an enemy of the state, an unmissable ally, a high priestess of a desired faith, an immortal goddess, or a hybrid abomination. Taken *together*, these stories agglomerate into a complex individual non-related to the invented nature into which others try to appropriate her. These stories, constituting a "worlding," in which "natures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not preexist" (Haraway 2016, 13) are enabled by the stories Emrys tells about the Deep Ones contra the stories told about the Deep Ones by Lovecraft; which is in turn enabled by Emrys' affirmative approach to Lovecraft's racism. Stories create and maintain Aphra as a being who is not "originally fixed

by difference," unlike Lovecraft's racism *and* contemporary approaches to that racism. The post-Lovecraftian monster tells a different story from Lovecraft's racism being something that warrants an approach of ignorance, apologism, or dismissal. It is stories which are a powerful tools in "entangle[ing] myriad temporalities and spatialities" *and* biopolitical boundary markers. It matters which stories are told.

It matters which stories make worlds

Haraway follows social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern in interrogating which stories are told—and consequently, which thinking practices are employed—rather than leaving them unquestioned. She stresses the fundamental invented nature of such matters: "it matters what stories we tell other stories with; it matters what knots tie knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (Haraway 2016, 12).

The notion of Chthulucene uses Lovecraftiana as a story to tell its own story. To claim that one takes "the liberty of rescuing [the term Cthulhu] from Lovecraft for other stories" (Haraway 2016, 174) is risky proposition for any scholar, and it is a snake pit for a scholar who insists that it *does* matter which stories tell stories. It may have worked to make Lisa Foo move differently, and it definitely worked to turn the Deep One hybrids from biopolitical boundary markers into inappropriate/d troublemakers. That does not mean I want to claim that Haraway should choose a different story to tell hers with; instead, I want to insist on staying with that story, telling it *as it is*, and then moving on to tell one's own story with that *affirmed* story.

It is her resignification by renaming specifically: the term Anthropocene, with its root in Anthropos, has become a contested ground exactly *because* it raises questions on who or what this human then exactly is. Hence 'Anthropocene' should be contextualized in the ongoing discussion of genres of being human, as an "answer that we now give to the question of the who

and what we are." Although different in discipline and distinct in their central concerns, Haraway's problem with the term Anthropocene recalls many of Wynter's concerns: *who* exactly is this 'Anthropos'? Although Wynter approaches the question from a decolonial angle (are marginalized people part of this Anthropos?) and Haraway from an ecological one (there are more critters than just Man living and dying-with us through this -cene), the central question is by and large the same; and both investigate the stories that are being told.

The Chthulucene tells a different story about our contemporary times than the story of the Anthropocene; Wynter asks us to consider different story about who or what is human than the story of Man; Emrys tells a different story about the Deep Ones than Lovecraft; a monster such as Aphra makes a different world—one in which Lovecraft's racism is affirmed—than the world that makes the usual approaches to Lovecraft's racism the dominant story; and the Aphra I have shown is a different story than other readings of *Litany*, which tell other stories about the tale and its significance. Aphra, in *Winter Tide*, the 2016 sequel to *Litany*, is well aware of this: "If there's one thing I've learned . . . it's to be suspicious of the stories everyone knows" (183). Suspicion, coupled with generosity, enables an affirmative approach—opposed to dismissal, which is *only* suspicious—to rewriting stories, like Lisa Foo and the Deep One hybrids. Haraway stimulates such thinking, noting how being "*both* generous and suspicious, [is] exactly the receptive posture I seek in political semiosis generally" ([1991] 2004, 108). Following this line of thought, the story Haraway tells about Lovecraftiana should also be interrogated.

Haraway's critique of the Anthropocene and subsequent proposal of the Chthulucene consists of multiple arguments (2016, 49), one of which is especially pertinent here: "the stories of both the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene teeter constantly on the brink of becoming much Too Big" (50). That is, these timescapes are grand narratives, like the (re)invention of nature Haraway was scrutinizing in 1991. In 2016, she offers a similar, yet slightly different antidote than the monster: "historically situated relational worldings" (50).

Worlding refers to the material-semiotic inhabiting and making of one's world; but with specific attention to that "the term 'world' in this case does not refer to an extant thing but rather the context or background against which particular things show up and take on significance" (Anderson and Harrison 2010, 8). For Haraway, this is an active process, and takes place as an interaction; a relational human-non-human becoming-with that is specifically *not* "grumpy human-exceptionalist Heideggerian worlding" (2016, 11). As we have seen, for Haraway science fiction (or 'speculative fabulation') is one way to go about such non-Heideggerian worlding: "SF is storytelling and fact telling; it is the patterning of possible worlds and possible times, material-semiotic worlds, gone, here, and yet to come" (31). Yet science fiction, like the abjected monster that preceded it, is not without risks. Science fiction works with "non-innocent tools and histories" (Grebowicz and Merrick 113), and is as such written from within the belly of the monster; therefore, science fiction is "a risky game of worlding and storying; it is staying with the trouble" (Haraway 2016, 13). Now, if science fiction is a risky staying with the trouble, and the monster can make potent connections which exceed domination, what does that mean for a monster *in* science fiction, like Aphra?

Emrys sets out to develop and portray a relational worlding in *The Litany of Earth*. Aphra's non-relation to stories Too Big, in this case that that of Man and Anthropos, of Anglo-Saxon man as dominant, offers the chance to reject "the stifling non/human binary entrapment" (Mazurov 2018, 262), and show how to imagine a narrative alternative to one in which humans on the one hand are locked in a differential binary with Deep Ones on the other. This latter narrative is Lovecraft's narrative—remember the first axis of monstrosity I laid out earlier—and is the one on which his racism operates. If Emrys' worlding can offer an alternative approach, one which rejects this first binary axis by way of the secondary non-relational axis of monstrosity, Lovecraft's racism can be approached affirmatively: *Litany* can stay with the trouble.

It therefore matters which stories tell stories. The “prick tale” of Man puts forward white, male, universalized humanity. Yet “all others in the prick tale are props, ground, plot space, or prey. They don’t matter; their job is to be in the way, to be overcome, to be the road, the conduit, but not the traveler, not the begetter" (Haraway 2016, 39): those who do not fit in are othered. The story of Man is a biopolitical project marginalizing a huge part of humanity; Lovecraft’s depiction and treatment of Innsmouth inhabitants operates similarly.

Exploring alternative genres of being human, like Aphra’s, matters greatly if one aims to unsettle the binary logic feeding marginalization. It matters which stories make worlds: the Deep One hybrids as biopolitical boundary markers makes a world in which Lovecraft’s racism is something to be dismissed *tout court*, the Deep One hybrids as inappropriate/d troublemaker make a world in which Lovecraft’s racism can be approached affirmatively. Staying with the trouble means the second option.

That is not to say that one should simply cherry pick a story to tell, to make worlds. That is the risk Haraway runs by dismissing Lovecraft, but naming her -cene after Cthulhu; and the tactic employed by revisionism by way of the man of his time defense. Rather, one should tell the story of the brute and often brutal fact: Lovecraft’s racism is real and it happened—it is “historically situated”—and that should be affirmed first and foremost. To prevent a new grand narrative from taking hold after, to prevent “replacing one set of simplified narratives with another” (Saler 2020, 52), a multitude of stories, an entangling of spatialities, temporalities, and boundary markers—that is, in this case, monsters operating on their second axis, like Foo and Aphra—can signal potential transformation in the world as it is: an alternative genre of being human; a now-absent, but possible, present.

Earlier, modifying Haraway, I stated that monsters in post-Lovecraftian fiction define quite different political possibilities and limits from those proposed by the mundane approaches to Lovecraft’s racism. Having laid out how monsters in post-Lovecraftian fiction *affirm* the

brute and brutal fact of said racism and simultaneously hint at other possibilities by way of their non-relation to the stories which led to the brute and brutal fact in the first place, I must argue the second part of the above statement: its political possibilities and limits. That is, because it matters which stories make worlds, the affirmative story can make a world in which that previous violence is neither revised, nor repeated. I return to *Litany*.

The transformation of Aphra and the government

Aphra's feelings toward her government are distrustful at best, and hateful at worst. With good reason to: it took her town, family, and culture. Spector, as the sole governmental character in the story, represents that violence and cruelty to Aphra. Hence every interaction she has with him is against the backdrop of what happened to Innsmouth. When Spector chases Aphra down from her work in an attempt to recruit her, Aphra violently lashes out. "He [Spector] started to offer a badge, but the confirmation of my worst fears released me from my paralysis." Realizing the man chasing her is indeed a representative of the government, Aphra tries to run, "but instead he caught his balance and grabbed my arm. I turned and grappled, scratching and pulling, all the time aware that my papa had died fighting this way" (Emrys 2014, cha. 3). After Spector calms her down, he explains his mission; all the while making sure Aphra remains aware of the fact that if she refuses to help, the government will brand her an enemy. Aphra caustically responds:

> Mr. Spector, I have no interest in being an enemy of the state. The state is larger than I. But nor will I be any part of it. And if you insist, you will listen to why. *The state* stole nearly two decades of my life. *The state* killed my father and locked the rest of my family away from anything they thought might give us strength. Salt water. Books. Knowledge. One by one, they destroyed us. My mother began her metamorphosis.

> Allowed the ocean, she might have lived until the sun burned to ashes. They took her away. We know they studied us at such times, to better know the process. To better know how to hurt us. You must imagine the details, as I have. They never returned the bodies. Nothing has been given back to us. (Emrys 2014, cha. 3)

Spector realizes he cannot maintain a threatening approach and starts to offer apologies. Although this is a step towards affirmation—remember, acknowledgement of the brute and often brutal fact is *first*—it is understandably not enough for Aphra. "If this is by way of an apology, Mr. Spector, you can drown in it. What you did was beyond the power of any apology." In fact, "I wanted him dead. I wanted them all dead, as I had for seventeen years" (cha. 3). Aphra able to be suspicious, but she is still unable to be suspicious *and* generous.

Both Aphra and the government are locked in an impasse. Without neither of them willing to change, this impasse will remain and the cycle of hatred and violence will continue. They both need a different approach: an affirmative approach. Yet this will not be easy—remember it requires *work*—but Spector made the first step by admitting the government's mistakes and offering an apology. However, he will need to emphatically "say No" to the previous of actions of the government, and to any potential repetition of those actions. He will have to stay related and concerned to said no, if he wants to complete the affirmative gesture and effectuate change—transformation—in the here and the now, not in a messianic beyond of promises.

Sadly, it is only promises he can offer at this point. "The state . . . is *changing*. And when it changes, it's good for everyone." Spector insists he is part of that change: now we're starting to have people like me, who actually study Aeonist culture and try to separate out the bad guys, but it's been a long time coming" (Emrys 2014, cha. 3). This shows Spector's *concern* to the matter at stake: he is genuinely involved in attempting to prevent a repetition of the

violence committed by the government. He reveals he is *related* to it, too; he emphasizes with Innsmouth's inhabitants because of his own background as a descendent of Jewish immigrants who fled the horror of Nazi Germany. "My mother came to the States young," he admits, "her sister stayed in Poland . . . She survived. She's in a hospital in Israel, and sometimes she can feed herself." This relation to Aphra makes him realize his mistake: "I can't think of anything that would convince me to work for the new German government—no matter how different it is from the old. I'm sorry I asked" (cha. 5). Yet this first step, Spector's 'no' to governmental violence, yet "in such a way that this 'no' keeps us concerned and related to what we refuse," makes Aphra doubt her noncompliance. The first seeds of an affirmative transformation—of both Aphra's 'no' to the government, and of the government's approach to Aeonism—have been planted.

I have summarized Aphra's eventual consent to Spector's plan, and her meeting Wilder and Bergman. After that, she decides that the Aeonist cult *is* a danger, mostly to its own members. She passes this information on to Spector. The next day she reads in *The Chronicle* that the police have raided "a few wealthy homes," and that "no reason was given for the arrest" (Emrys 2014, cha. 13), mirroring the events at Innsmouth 17 years ago. Like then, "no trials, or even definite charges, were reported," only "vague statements" were ever made (Lovecraft 1936b, 504). Aphra fears a repetition of the same violence; affirmation is not without risk. Mama Rei Koto, while mending clothes, flicking a needle through a stocking, notices Aphra reading the news article.

> 'You told him, she said. 'And he listened.'
>
> 'He promised there would be no camps.' Aloud now, it sounded like a slender promise by which to decide a woman's [Bergman] fate.
>
> Flick. 'Does he seem like an honorable man?'

> ‘I don’t know. I think so. He says that the ones they can’t just let go, they’ll send to a sanitarium.’ (Emrys 2014, cha. 13).

To mitigate the risk inherent in affirmation, one needs trust. Mama Rei bases her trust on the supposed honor of Spector, and the fact that he listened; Aphra on her awareness that Spector is concerned with and related to preventing another Innsmouth from happening.

Spector—and through him, the government—holds his word. Bergman and Wilder are committed to a sanitarium, “the best rooms and gardens . . . money could pay for” (Emrys 2014, cha. 13). Although Aphra would have rather seen the events unfold differently, or perhaps not seen them unfold at all, she stays with the trouble and makes the best out of it. Like Mama Rei’s mending, “the seam would not look new, but would last a little longer” (cha. 13). That is, Aphra embraces the present, affirms that “we are in *this* mess all together,” and works from there; she places precarious trust in Spector and the government, and this affirmative gesture accomplishes change. She effectuates change in herself, by trusting that which she hates. Likewise, Spector—after an initial non-affirmative start—affirms the government’s past violence and manages to positively transform the government’s actions in the present.

This does not mean that the actions of either party in the past are erased; nor that in the future Aphra will remain trusting toward the future, and/or that Spector can maintain the government’s non-violent line of action. These transformations are small and potentially temporary, but they are *what is needed*. Affirmation is risky, but it is better than its alternatives. It is up to Aphra and Spector now to sustain the *work* they put in, to continue “undergoing transformations in such a way as to be able to sustain them and make them work towards growth” (Braidotti 2009, 57).

Aphra and Spector tick all the boxes of staying with the trouble and demonstrate how this can lead to small steps toward actualizing a now-absent present, one which holds better

opportunities and hope for living-with and dying-with each other, human and non-human alike. Both realize "the necessity to think with the times and in spite of the times, not in a belligerent mode of oppositional consciousness, but as a humble and empowering gesture of co-construction of social horizons of hope" (Braidotti 2009, 57). Note how this humble, precarious construction can *not* happen when Spector apologizes wrongs done by the government: like Aphra notes, "what [the government] did was beyond the power of any apology." Nor does dismissing the entire government because of their past actions work toward any sort of hope: Aphra ultimately needs to trust Spector in his claims that he represents a part of the government which is worth *not* dismissing, because "times have changed" (cha. 3). Finally, justifying the government's violence toward Innsmouth also blocks any co-construction of social horizons of hope: when Spector initially takes this approach after threats, Aphra notes how "it was strange, nauseating, to hear the justifications" (cha. 3), and refuses to listen any further to this approach of recruitment. Only when both dedicate themselves to an affirmative approach, mindful of which stories make worlds, positive and actual—albeit precarious and temporary—transformation can be effectuated.

The parallel is clear, of course. Approaching Lovecraft's racism by way of dismissal, apologism, and/or justification leads to a critical impasse, being stuck in a "mode of oppositional consciousness." An affirmative approach, like Emrys', *can* lead to positive change and transformation, all the while not erasing nor revising the past. The stories told about Lovecraft's racism are tantamount to this: locking his racism in a binary good/bad narrative effectuates no transformation, like Aphra and Spector locked in argument before affirmation.

These transformations, both in *Litany* and in approaches to Lovecraft's racism, do not exist in a cultural vacuum. Like Lovecraft's Deep One hybrids being a reaction against his cultural moment, the post-Lovecraftian monster, too, does not arise *ex nihilo*. Bear and Emrys

and their writings are both products and creators of a specific cultural moment, one which evidently has need of inappropriate/d troublemakers and affirmative transformations.

I maintain it is the backdrop of current social justice movements—and its consequent backlash in many forms, of which white nationalism is most pertinent to this project—which gives birth to Professor Harding, the shoggoths, Aphra, and Spector. As marginalized people are claiming their space, speculative fiction, too, will have to reckon with its historically white male (Kane 2016; Erigha 2016) authorship, fandom, and cultural production. The WFA controversy is a manifestation of this cultural moment. Mythos authors were historically male, unlike Bear and Emrys. The race of Harding and sex of Aphra make them previously unlikely Mythos protagonists. There is a battle being fought for which genre of being human speculative fiction at large, and Mythos works specifically, wants to incorporate and espouse.[25]

The same cultural moment gives birth to Haraway's Chthulucene: the attempt to dethrone Anthropos and Man, is the same battle being fought over the WFA trophies, only on a far larger scale. It is the same question which drives the emergence of post-Lovecraftian fiction and the specificity of how it renders its monsters: they propose an answer "to the question of the who and what we are," an answer that projects an inclusive genre of being human, as opposed to Man. Naturally, Haraway and post-Lovecraftian authors are not the only ones who offer answers to that question. We have seen alternative answers from Lovecraft himself and from white nationalism. I now wish to (re)turn to Graham Harman, who, despite his own protestations to the contrary, also offers us an answer to the same question by way of his ontology. And he, like Haraway's Chthulucene, Bear's shoggoths, and Emrys' Deep One hybrids, opts for using Lovecraft to answer that question.

[25] The Sad Puppies voting campaign—and its associated slate Rabid Puppies, run by infamous white supremacist Vox Day—is another pertinent counter-manifestation of this phenomenon. From 2013 to 2017, the voter block shortlisted works for the Hugo awards, sweeping entire categories of works deemed "bias[ed] towards liberal and leftwing science-fiction and fantasy" (Barnett 2016). The Hugo award changed its voter system in 2017, and both Puppies campaigns have lost traction since. See also Okorafor 2016.

CHAPTER 3: GRAHAM HARMAN AND *THE CALL OF CTHULHU*

The affirmation of Lovecraft's racism by post-Lovecraftian fiction is a precarious process: it requires great attention to the likes of relationality, concern, response-ability, being present, and worlding; the risks involved are always present; and the transformation and change aspired to are not guaranteed to happen. This precarity questions the wisdom of taking Lovecraft as protagonist of one's intellectual endeavour, and hence gives an extra dimension to Lovecraft's rise in scholarship. That is, if taking an affirmative approach to his racism as part of one's project is already a risky business, taking a non-affirmative approach would be an extremely dicey matter. Historian Scott Poole wonders the same thing about Lovecraft's rise in contemporary scholarship: "understanding more of the intellectual influences that shaped the author's worldview calls into question the enthusiasm with which the Providence author has been drafted into various ideological and philosophical struggles" (2016, 216). I have argued that Donna Haraway's opposite reaction—a strong reaction to Lovecraft's "worldview" leading to an absolute dismissal of *all* of Lovecraft—is not the right approach either, but Poole's caution is warranted: some scholarship completely disregards Lovecraft's racism. Graham Harman is at the forefront of this movement, as he attempts to "transform Lovecraft into his guide and/or bumper sticker" (221).

Harman suggests taking Lovecraft as "the poet laureate of object-oriented philosophy" (2012, 32), claiming Lovecraft is "as great a hero to object-oriented thought[26] as Hölderlin was to Heidegger" (5). His main argument for this grand claim is the assertion that Lovecraft is a productionist author—a creator of ontological gaps in his fiction—and as such was an object-oriented thinker *avant la lettre*, because "these gaps are the major subject matter of object-oriented philosophy" (5). Because of this, Harman claims one can "work through Lovecraft

[26] Early Harman uses object-oriented philosophy more often, whereas he later shifted to a more exclusive usage of object-oriented ontology. This may be because of his later claims that ontology can be separated from other forms of philosophy, including political philosophy and ethics, which I will return to. For now, I will treat Harman's different terms as interchangeable, and use 'ontology,' as in 'OOO,' myself.

towards a deeper conception of realism than is usual" (51). Realism, in this case philosophical realism, is the claim that there is a real world independent of the human mind; although it should be noted that for Harman that does "not mean that we are able to state correct propositions about the real world. Instead, it means that reality is too real to be translated without remainder into any sentence, perception, practical action, or anything else" (16). Nevertheless, 'the real' is taken as a metaphysical given.

I have already briefly treated Harman's approach to Lovecraft's racism—justifying it based on its alleged aesthetic merits—and its bankruptcy. Nevertheless, *if* Lovecraft can truly help us gain a deeper conception of the real, or at least of realism, I would consider re-engaging with Harman despite the obvious flaws of his approach. Lovecraft's racism is a real entity and hence a deeper conception of it could help an affirmative approach towards it—remember affirmation's commitment to the world "as it is"—in spite of Harman's own approach of justification. Additionally, the rise of object-oriented ontology raises the question on why *Lovecraft specifically* has been singled out as its poet-laureate. Is there a significance of the elements I have identified as being vital to Lovecraft's renaissance—his racist underpinnings and the collaborative nature of the Mythos—to contemporary scholarship? What does it mean that a virulently racist author has apparent merit to a particular school of contemporary thought? Lastly, I maintain Harman's prominence in Lovecraft's scholarly renaissance requires critical attention from any project postulating an alternative approach Lovecraft's racism, which could be applied in Lovecraft scholarship. That is, if Harman makes "the most strident case for Lovecraft's twenty-first-century philosophical significance" (Sederholm and Winstock 2016, 4), and Lovecraft's legacy is underpinned by racism, then Harman is the figure to turn to when interrogating the uses of an affirmative, alternative approach to Lovecraft's racism to contemporary scholarship.

Object-oriented ontology and its poet-laureate

Often viewed as part of the broader speculative realism movement,[27] object-oriented ontology (OOO) insists on realism—defined earlier—and the flat ontology of all *objects*, which are taken to be "discrete realit[ies] inexhaustible by any sum total of interpretations and irreducible to any effects it might have in the world" (Harman 2012, 251). These combine in OOO's rejection of 'correlationism,' the philosophical position asserting that one cannot consider thought or the world in isolation from each other, traced back to Immanuel Kant's thought (Harman 2018, 3-4). That is, the old Kantian distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena* is left intact, but OOO opposes the assertion that access to the noumenal is merely correlated with our understanding of the phenomenal; it contends that we are "limited to discussions of the conditions of human experience" (Harman 2012, 17). Hence objects take center stage, in a bid to examine the real without needing to fall back on human perception; to examine the noumenal without correlation to the phenomenal. This makes the 'object' of OOO a rather broad category, gleefully enumerated by Harman in litanies such as "poems, philosophies, and children . . . legal documents, *lettres de cachet*, jail cells and manacles, medical clinics, insane asylums, human subjects, pianos, worms, notebooks, and pieces of butterscotch candy" (245-6). Do note that according to this definition, 'Lovecraft's racism' is also an object, which will become important later.

OOO discerns two different objects, following Kantian *noumena* and *phenomena*: "the real object that withdraws from all experience, and the sensual object that exists *only* in experience" (Harman 2011, 49). "Real objects" are never encountered as such, but instead

[27] This is contested, for example by Ray Brassier, a big name in speculative realism since the publication of *Nihil Unbound* (2007) and after translating Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude* (2006)—itself a foundational work in the movement—in 2008. Brassier has noted how "the 'speculative realist movement' exists only in the imaginations of a group of bloggers promoting an agenda for which I have no sympathy whatsoever . . . whose most signal [*sic*] achievement thus far is to have generated an online orgy of stupidity" (Brassier 2011). The thing that does bind the original speculative realists (Brassier, Meillassoux, Harman, and Iain Hamilton Grant) is not sharing "a single philosophical hero in common," but "hav[ing] been admirers of Lovecraft" (Harman 2018, 33).

always as "sensual objects." Likewise, we only ever encounter their "sensual qualities," never their "real qualities" (Harman 2018, 97). In these encounters—be they human human, human non-human, or non-human non-human encounters—the real object always withdraws because it is inexhaustible: its real presence can never be fully grasped, be it in thought, physical interaction, language, a combination thereof, or anything else. Objects therefore always experience tension in four[28] different object-quality pairings: real object-real qualities, real object-sensual qualities, sensual object-real qualities, and sensual object-sensual qualities (Harman 2011, 49-51). As such, "the basic OOO model of the cosmos" is a cosmos "packed full of objects that withdraw from each other, incapable of direct contact" (95).

When human objects come into play, they, too, are incapable of direct contact, although they may understand that there *is* a real, noumenal dimension to things. Yet this real remains untranslatable in full: "a remainder" of real objects will never be fully exhausted and will therefore withdraw. As a human, any object we encounter is not fully translatable to the sensual realm, even though we may be able to grasp *some* of its qualities. Therefore, Harman makes a case against representational realism: the literal cannot capture the real, because "*reality is not made of statements*" (2012, 15). Hence paraphrase, "our technical term for the attempt to give literal form to any statement, artwork, or anything else" (9), is a doomed endeavor: the representational, the literal, paraphrasing, will always fail to exhaust the reality of objects. Another way of approaching the real is therefore necessary.

This leads Harman to state that "when it comes to grasping reality, illusion and innuendo are the best we can do" (Harman 2012, 51). The focus on "illusion and innuendo" means a centrality for metaphor and allusion, over the now-suspect literal paraphrase. Hence Harman reserves a special place for the aesthetic, which is often more capable of grasping "weird reality" in an asymptotic way: "OOO sees aesthetic experience – not just in the arts, but in

[28] This appears to be modelled after Heidegger's "Geviert" (Heidegger 1949) structure of things; Harman calls his quadruple object "the clearest restatement of this fourfold" (2018, 110).

philosophy too – as the most important form of cognition" (2018, 91). This explains Harman's need for a "poet-laureate" in the first place: if the aesthetic is more capable of grasping the real—which is weird, not representational—OOO's hero must be a poet, not someone invested in the literal and in paraphrase. This is, of course, where Lovecraft comes in: "when OOO speaks of *weirdness*, it is trying to capture the gap between reality and its explicit manifestations, one that is found . . . in the writings of Lovecraft" (2012, 92).

That is, according to Harman, Lovecraft's productionist qualities present a strong case against representational realism. The failure of paraphrase is very prominent in Lovecraft's writing; Lovecraft has a distinctive "ontography," the term Harman uses for the mapping of the interaction between objects and their qualities (2011, 33-37; 2012, 237; 2018, 119). This explains Harman's earlier claim that Lovecraft, by exploring ontography, can help us work towards a deeper conception of realism than is usual. He even goes as far as to claim that "Lovecraft writes stories about the essence of *philosophy*" (33).

His focus on the aesthetic enables Harman to focus on style, rather than content, because the latter is ultimately "free-floating immediate fact, not grounded in anything real" (2012, 257).[29] Content is always an attempt at paraphrase, an attempt at grasping reality in literal statement; leading Harman to proclaim that "*reality itself is not a content*" (14). Because of the status of aesthetic experience as "the most important form of cognition," content is subordinate to style at best, and inherently stupid at worst. This "inherent stupidity of all content" (12)[30] leads Harman to conclude that Lovecraft's productionist qualities do not come from the content of his work, but from his *style*:

[29] If this sounds evocative of the work of Marshall McLuhan (1964), it is not a coincidence. Harman discusses the relevance of McLuhan's thoughts on content and medium to OOO briefly (2012, 18-9).
[30] This is adapted from Slavoj Žižek's "inherent stupidity of all proverbs," which showcases the reversibility of proverbs, and hence their inability to convey philosophical truths (1997, 71-2). Harman extends the argument "across the entire field of literal statement" (2012, 12).

> Extensive attention has never been paid to Lovecraft's style. He has been treated instead on the level of *content*, as a horror writer whose plots might be summarized and sifted for insights into his general world-view. The problem with all such efforts is their excessive literalization of the author, which reduces him to someone who happens to express certain views about the cosmos in the form of short stories in the mixed genre of horror/science fiction. This leaves him open to the dismissive charge of writing adolescent pulp, as lodged by Edmund Wilson among others, while also leaving him vulnerable to admirable but half-correct praise from those who happen to love such fiction rather than hate it. (Harman 2012, 232)

Lovecraft's content includes his racist underpinnings, of course. By focusing on content, Harman can sidestep the question on how to approach Lovecraft's legacy of racism; it is also the mechanism with which he can assert that Lovecraft's racism (the content) has aesthetic merit (the style). By proclaiming the inherent stupidity of content, a racist "statement" is not necessarily coterminous with "reality" (Harman 2012, 14).

This approach is a double-edged sword: although it enables an attempt to stay with Lovecraft's trouble—Harman needs not apologize nor dismiss Lovecraft, since he is not concerned with content—it also leads to his justification of a legacy of violence and oppression. Or, as historian Kurt Newman encapsulates it: "[by] wanting to focus on Lovecraft's 'style' rather than on the allegorical meaning of 'content' . . . Harman finds himself affirming [in the literal sense] Lovecraft's racism" (2015). As is fitting for a double-edged approach, I will analyze Harman's readings of Lovecraft in a double way: first, by looking at the merits of Harman's object-oriented approach to Lovecraft, and how it *could* be read as an attempt at staying with the trouble. Second, by looking at how Harman's best attempts fail because, ultimately, his approach lacks a crucial element of staying with the trouble: his a-relational

approach blocks any attempts at affirmation. To do so, I will focus on Harman's treatment of Lovecraft's best-known tale, *The Call of Cthulhu*, scrutinizing four passages analyzed by Harman.

Calling Cthulhu 1: the production of gaps and staying with the trouble

The Call of Cthulhu is narrated by Francis Wayland Thurston, who investigates the death of his great-uncle. The latter, a professor of Semitic languages at Brown University, died "after having been jostled by a nautical-looking Negro" (Lovecraft 1928, 202). Among his belongings, Thurston discovers a "queer clay bas-relief" (202): an idol of Cthulhu. The passage that follows is the most elaborate description of Cthulhu in all of Lovecraft, crucial to Harman's appreciation of Lovecraft, as we will see later:

> It seemed to be a sort of monster . . . of a form which only a diseased fancy could conceive. If I say that my [Thurston's] somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing . . . but it was the *general outline* of the whole which made it the most shockingly frightful. (Lovecraft 1928, 204)

Thurston visits the idol's sculptor, who admits he based it on a horrible dream, and insists the being depicted is called 'Cthulhu.' Concurrently, news clippings of "outré mental illnesses and outbreaks of group folly or mania" (204) start filling the news: "voodoo orgies multiply in Hayti [*sic*], and African outposts report ominous mutterings. American officers in the Philippines find certain tribes bothersome about this time, and New York policemen are mobbed by hysterical Levantines on the night of March 22–23" (207-8).

Thurston follows the trail by investigating his great-uncle's manuscripts. It notes the first time his great-uncle heard the word Cthulhu: he was approached by a certain inspector Legrasse in 1908, who led a raid on a cult in the bayou close to New Orleans. The raid on these racially-marked "mongrel celebrants" (Lovecraft 1928, 212)—I will return to this later—yielded five deaths, forty-seven arrests, and an idol similar to the one Thurston has in his possession. Although Thurston's great-uncle could not help Legrasse further in his investigation, it did remind him of a colleague of his, a professor of anthropology at Princeton, who "had encountered a singular tribe or cult of degenerate [!] Esquimaux" (210) in West Greenland using the same fetishes and chants as the bayou cult. Thurston's great-uncle, his colleague, and Legrasse are able to translate the most prominent chant the cult uses, "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wga'nagl fhtagn," to "in his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming" (210). This phrase has since become ubiquitous in popular culture and the Mythos.

The next breadcrumb on the trail is a 1925 *Sydney Bulletin* article detailing a derelict ship, the *Emma*, in the Pacific with only one survivor, Norwegian sailor Gustaf Johansen. Johansen recounted how the *Emma* encountered a heavily armed yacht, the *Alert*, manned by "a queer and evil-looking crew of Kanakas and half-castes" (Lovecraft 1928, 2018) who worship Cthulhu. They open fire without provocation; the *Emma*'s crew responds by murdering every last crewmember of the *Alert*, taking heavy casualties and damage to the *Emma* in the process. Johansen, first in command after the death of his captain, commandeers the *Alert* and sails to an island unknown to navigational charts to assess the damage and recover. The *Sydney Bulletin* article ends here, and Thurston decides to track down Johansen to uncover the rest of the tale: he longs to know how the rest of *Emma*'s crew died, and how this is connected to his own investigations into the Cthulhu cult.

In Oslo, Thurston finds out Johansen has died in a freak accident—he is actually assassinated by the cult—and recovers his diary from his widow. It details how the island turned

out to be the resurfaced sunken city of R'lyeh—which contains Cthulhu's "house"—abundant with bizarre geometry, "non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours" (Lovecraft 1928, 222). Johansen's crew inadvertently open Cthulhu's tomb, from which the entity appears, setting foot on Earth for the first time in "vigintillions of years" (224). It quickly proceeds to murder the crew. Only Johansen manages to flee the island to the *Alert* and starts its engines, although he finds out in dismay that "great Cthulhu slid greasily into the water and began to pursue with vast wave-raising strokes of cosmic potency" (224). Boldly, Johansen decides he must do *something* and turns the *Alert* around, ramming the bow into Cthulhu's head. "There was a bursting as of an exploding bladder, a slushy nastiness as of a cloven sunfish, a stench as of a thousand opened graves, and a sound that the chronicler would not put on paper" (224). Johansen, driven mad from the experience, drifts into open sea, but not before he sees Cthulhu slowly "*recombining* in its hateful original form" (224). Hence victory is only temporary: Cthulhu recombines, to ravage the Earth somewhere in the near future again; Johansen, although recovered from the drifting *Alert*, is brought before a court, returns to Oslo, and is promptly murdered by the cult; and Thurston "know[s] too much, and the cult still lives" (225). The tale ends here, although an astute reader will have noticed it opening with "Found Among the Papers of the Late Francis Wayland Thurston, of Boston" (201), illuminating Thurston's fate.

As I noted earlier, the description of the Cthulhu idol is pivotal to Harman's championing of Lovecraft as writing about "the essence of philosophy." He reads the passage as alluding to the gap between a real object, the Cthulhu idol, and its sensual qualities, its description. The hybrid octopus-dragon-human image is *not* the real object; it is "not unfaithful to the spirit of the thing," and hence fails to actually describe the real object. Thurston's reference to "*the general outline of the whole*" being the most frightening, not its monstrous hybrid form, is indicative of "the gap [Lovecraft] produces between an ungraspable thing and

Fig. 5. Artistic rendition of Cthulhu. Andrée Wallin, *Cthulhu Ascending*, 2021, Photoshop. https://andreewallin.com/Cthulhu-Collection.

the vaguely relevant descriptions [of it]" (Harman 2012, 24). Hence Lovecraft's description of the idol demonstrates the irreducibility of a real object to its sensual qualities: parts of the Cthulhu idol always withdraw from description, and paraphrase and literal statements are powerless in attempting to grasp reality, to describe the actual "spirit of the thing." Because of Harman's insistence on "*reality not* [being] *made of statements*" (14), he can rebut the likes of Edmund Wilson, who literalized Lovecraft's writing to such a degree it became ridiculous, and posit Lovecraft as writing about "the essence of philosophy." For Wilson—focusing on content rather than style—the Cthulhu idol *is* an amalgamation of "an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature," leaving out the "spirit of the thing" and its "general outline," the elements so important to Harman's gap between a real object and its sensual qualities.

This is an astute reading of an iconic passage. Although there are countless artistic depictions of Cthulhu, almost all of them terrifically menacing (fig. 5), none of them are able to capture "the spirit of the thing" or "the general outline," exactly *because* such things are not capturable. It has been claimed that *this* is the element in Lovecraft's work which has procured him lasting appeal (e.g. Leiber 1949; Joshi 1991; Harman 2012), and there is merit to such a claim. Yet this is a passage which contains no racist underpinnings. Conveniently focusing on such passages—as critics and reviewers of Harman's *Weird Realism* are wont to do (e.g. Hickman 2012; Stefans 2013; Boshears 2013)—appears to be too easy: it capitulates to the 'separate the man from his fiction' apologism (e.g. Joshi 2020). That is not to say that this passage, because of its lack of underlying racism, is not worthy of analysis; on the contrary, its popular iconic status and now visible aesthetic depth indisputably warrant scholarly attention. Yet I maintain *both* sorts of passages should be open for discussion, or literary analysis runs the risk of becoming "politically etiolated" (Miéville 2016, 240); which is what separating the man from the fiction accomplishes. Turning to an object-oriented analysis of a passage of *Cthulhu* that *does* contain racist underpinnings can prevent this and can simultaneously assess the worth of Harman's approach on political grounds.

According to Harman, another instantiation of Lovecraft producing a gap between a real object and its sensual qualities appears Johansen's diary. The passage describes the crew of the *Alert*: "the swarthy cult-fiends on the *Alert* . . . there was some peculiarly abominable quality about [them] which made their destruction seem almost a duty, and Johansen shows ingenuous wonder at the charge of ruthlessness brought against his party during the court inquiry [after being recovered]" (Lovecraft 1928, 2008). The "charge of ruthlessness brought against" Johansen and the crew of the *Emma* pertains to their response to the *Alert*'s attack: wholesale slaughter of the opposing crew. The real object here is the crew of the *Alert*, and it is in tension with its own sensual qualities: the appearance of said crew. A racially marked appearance that

is; remember they were earlier described as “Kanakas and half-castes” (2018). Harman claims that the crew’s “‘peculiarly abominable quality’ cannot take the form of a tangible adjective such as ‘red,’ or ‘evil’ or ‘greedy,’ but is a sort of malign general atmosphere lying beyond all speech, and accessible only through the sort of allusion that the narrator utilizes here” (2012, 75). Hence the argument is that the real object, the crew, cannot be described in speech by its sensual qualities, such as “‘red,’ or ‘evil,’ or ‘greedy’,” which necessitates Lovecraft to produce a gap and refer to the crew’s “peculiarly abominable quality” instead. This quality of the crew is abominable to such a degree that Johansen feels fully justified in his murderous response, leading to his “ingenuous wonder” later. It is in such an analysis that the cracks in Harman’s approach start to show: although a gap between a real object and its sensual qualities might be at play, it is not the *only* thing at play.

What is *also* at play according to Ezra Claverie, is “not . . . an objective property that they [the crew] possess, but . . . the subjective, affective response to their Otherness on the part of the European sailors (and the Bostonian WASP narrator)” (2015, 85). The “peculiarly abominable quality” of the *Alert*’s crew is the result of Thurston’s and the *Emma’s* crew’s—and by extension, Lovecraft’s, Harman’s, and Lovecraft’s supposed white racist reader’s—interpellation into a genre of being human in which “Kanakas and half-castes” are abominable. The crew’s “malign general atmosphere” is not “beyond all speech,” but is the result of being othered into *being* abominable; being a racialized marked Other is abominable *because* it means being a boundary marker of the human community.

This is the same mechanism operating behind Robert Olmstead experiencing a “wave of spontaneous aversion which could be neither checked nor explained” (Lovecraft 1936b, 512) when he meets an inhabitant of Innsmouth for the first time. Johansen not understanding the charge of ruthlessness brought against him in court operates on the same mechanism as *not* feeling sympathy for the Innsmouth hybrids who are sent to internment camps, as opposed to

Emrys. It works on the same mechanism which evokes horror at *Innsmouth*'s ending: a white racist finding out his bloodline is tainted by the blood of the Other. Harman, and by extension his ontology at large, fail to "take Lovecraft seriously when he writes of race" (Poole 2016, 227), because his radically separated, a-relational ontology fails to recognize the relational situatedness—the entangledness of myriad spatialities and temporalities—of Lovecraft the man, his work, and its reader.

In the spirit of staying with Harman's trouble, I have noted the perks of Harman's emphasis on style: his reading of, for example, the Cthulhu idol gives genuine insight in the aesthetic mechanisms at play in an iconic passage, which—considering Cthulhu's popularity, even showing up in Haraway's Chthulucene—evidently has spoken to the collective imagination. It could even be argued that Harman's rejection of content is a mode of staying with the trouble itself: by *not* making his reading of Lovecraft revolve around content—that is, racist content—he is able to focus on other elements of the text which would otherwise be snowed under. This allows him to highlight elements of the text which Haraway for example could never access, because of her dismissal of all of Lovecraft based on his racist content.

Yet I cannot ascribe to that position. Proclaiming "the inherent stupidity of all content" is diametrically opposed to affirmation's insistence on the world "as it is." Belittling content is not staying with the trouble; it is doing away with the trouble. As I already noted, it leads to a justification of racism based on its supposed artistic merits. But there are more flaws to Harman's object-oriented approach than that.

Situatedness and politics

OOO in general, and Harman's use of Lovecraft as its "poet-laureate" specifically, have garnered criticism from various strands of scholarship. The former has a larger body of work responding to it than the latter, perhaps stemming from the fact that—despite Harman's claims

to the contrary—Lovecraft is not universally regarded as writing about "the essence of philosophy." I will briefly summarize some of the bigger charges brought against OOO, before treating those most pertinent to staying with Lovecraft's trouble specifically. I will return to *Cthulhu* after with these criticisms in mind, to see whether they impair, or worse, invalidate, Harman's approach to Lovecraft, or not.

The main metaphysical argument levied against OOO is that its fundamental premise, the rejection of correlationism, is based on a "very particular reading of a very particular Kant." This reading "fantasizes a relation between being and knowing [i.e. correlationism]," yet "no serious critical thinker does that any more, or has for some time" (Braidotti and Vermeulen 2014). As such, "OOO is little more than a mass production of false philosophical problems dressing old concepts and conundrums up in flashy new clothing" (Massumi 2014, 114). This "mass production" includes: attacking a view which is not really a philosophical force in modern times, as noted by Braidotti; actually reiterating (parts of) Kant's thought instead of rejecting them (Galloway 2013; Cole 2015b); falsely proclaiming to be the first to reject correlationism (Wolfendale 2010; Braidotti and Vermeulen 2014; Åsberg et al. 2015); not being as anti-anthropocentric as it purports to be (Massumi 2014, 113-4; Cole 2015b); and regurgitating contemporary neoliberal technologies of late-stage capitalism, despite claiming to be politically neutral (Galloway 2012b; 2013).

The claim to political neutrality stems from OOO's purported a-subjectiveness and a-relationality, which is mirrored in Harman's separation of style and content in the specific case of reading Lovecraft. It is also one of the most frequently criticized parts of Harman's thought, criticism that is especially pertinent to this project. It consists of two separate, but heavily entangled parts: first, the counter-claim that an a-subjective, a-relational ontology cannot exist, insisting on the situated relationality of being; and second, flowing from that, the insistence on the inseparability of ontology and politics.

The centrality of relationality to affirmation means that in an affirmative approach, ontology cannot exist radically separated from its context. This is argued from two different angles: the historical materialist angle; and the feminist, queer, and critical race theory angle. Both agitate against "speculative realist striv[ing] for an unmediated, wholly a-subjective real" (Åsberg et al. 2015, 151). The former maintains that OOO exhibits "an apparent tendency to treat social and economic discourses as mere side aspects of organic evolution" (Braidotti and Vermeulen 2014); and as such, Harman and others writing about OOO appear to forget "they write both for and as subjects of Late Capitalism – a fact which remains hidden from them – and a seemingly major aporia in their work" (Berry 2012). When applied to Harman's use of Lovecraft specifically, historical materialist criticism entails a "a refusal to allow the material conditions that informed Lovecraft's work to dissipate amid philosophical appropriations that ignore the author's own interests and dismaying beliefs" (Poole 2016, 221).

The feminist, queer, and critical race theory criticism of OOO follows a similar trajectory, insisting on the mattering of (embodied) context (e.g. Braidotti and Vermeulen 2014; Åsberg et al. 2015; Campbell et al. 2019). The argument goes that in a world of withdrawn, non-relational objects, materialist concerns such as race and gender, and social and economic factors, are swept away. Braidotti inextricably connects this to a loss of politics, too:

> The so-called speculative realists tend to be paradoxically dis-embedded and dis-embodied: they are really speaking from nowhere, though they try to hide it. They are unable to account for where they are speaking from. To me, however important it is that we concern ourselves with a-subjective or non-human matter, the politics of locations of the subject is something we cannot let go. (Braidotti and Vermeulen 2014)

The insistence on the situatedness of being means Harman cannot maintain his politically etiolated, radically separated, non-relational ontology: it, too, exists as part of a "complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical system" (Haraway 2016, 50).

OOO's non-committal stance towards politics—e.g., "as an ontological framework OOO prescribes no particular politics" (Bryant 2011)—has occasionally been broken in attempts to address the criticism outlined above. Both Graham (2014) and OOO philosopher Levi Bryant (2011; 2012) have at times attempted to formulate a politics based on OOO. Based on OOO's "refusing a partition between two distinct ontological categories, the subject and the object," Bryant has claimed that OOO "begins from the standpoint of *equality*," and "rejects *hierarchy*" (2011). Yet this stance has quickly been torn to shreds because a commitment to absolute object equality cannot discern the political good from the bad (Galloway 2012a). As such, "we do not find a substantive distinction made between, say, a hair dryer and a farmed mink in a cage. This focus on an ontology of objects takes neither the 'orientation' nor the human power-relational aspect in any process of knowledge production into account" (Åsberg et al. 2015, 148). Without situatedness—recognizing relationality, material and otherwise—Harman's ontology still fails to formulate a politics.

Nevertheless, despite his own protestations to the contrary, I maintain that Harman's project *is* (bio)political. I follow Jane Bennett (2007) in asserting that the contemporary shift to objects in scholarship is akin to a "gestalt shift" (107), because it forces us to rethink subjectivities, resignify matter, and potentially re-divide the political. Hence ontology, object-oriented or otherwise, is political: it is in its nature deeply concerned with (re)signifying what and who means what. Especially considering Lovecraft's racism counting as an object in Harman's ontology, it matters what objects mean and do; somewhat of a "gestalt shift" concerning Lovecraft's racism is exactly what this project attempts to undertake. Hence Harman's failing to formulate a politics does not mean that his project is not political in itself,

especially so when he brings Lovecraft onto the scene. In fact, Harman's seemingly innocuous ontological project has major political consequences. Advocating an aesthetic focus on style over content may appear to be separated from politics or ethics, but when said content is an object such as Lovecraft's legacy of racism, the separation of content and style *is a political move itself*. Furthermore, withdrawal, rather than relationality, is not simply an ontological event: it is also a passive and reactionary attitude. If one views the real as existing exclusively as objects that "both withdraw from any relations and simply perform the labor of being what they are" (Harman 2011, 116), then one blocks any possibility of concern, relationality, and/or transformation. One refuses to stay with the trouble.

Following the claim that OOO *is* political, the question arises *what* politics it advances. This can be answered by scrutinizing OOO's implied observer, the real object. By ascribing both real and sensual qualities to objects, Harman "migrates secondary qualities to the object . . . In other words, a philosophy of the object without the subject is achieved simply by decreeing everything considered subjective in correlationist thinking to be objective" (Massumi 2014, 113). As such, "the move to the object is . . . not a move away from but rather a renewed move towards the Subject (with a capital S)" (Åsberg et al. 2015, 164). And who or what is this universal Subject? An implied generic *human* subject: one who can perceive, albeit never exhaust, the sensual. And when the implied subject is human, Wynter's question arises again: who is human and who is not? Returning to *Cthulhu* can elucidate that question.

Calling Cthulhu II: the reiteration of Man

I have already discussed the bankruptcy of Harman's claim that "racism can only make a philosopher worse . . . but in certain rare cases, reactionary views might improve the power of an imaginative writer" (2012, 59), separate from the passage in *Cthulhu* he is referring to. It pertains to the "outré mental illnesses and outbreaks of group folly or mania" (Lovecraft 1928,

204) occurring early in *Cthulhu*: the Haitian voodoo orgies, the bothersome Philippine tribes, the ominous mutterings in African outposts, and the hysterical Levantines in New York (207-8). Harman notes how "one can easily imagine a bitter critique of this passage by the late Edward Said," but "in a certain sense Said's critique would miss the point": the passage is meant to evoke fright and is not meant to be discussed in relation to its racist utterings (2012, 60). That is, the 'point' for Harman is style and aesthetics, not content; the point is not about the bare fact of a blatantly racist passage.

Nevertheless, I maintain that it is *not* style that makes this passage carry the horror Lovecraft meant to evoke, but instead depends on interpellation into white, racist subjectivity. Following Braidotti's argument, the passage does not *mean* anything if we follow Harman's "dis-embedded and dis-embodied" analysis. "Hysterical Levantines" could be funny, not horrendous. "Ominous mutterings" are hardly terror inducing. Certain Philippine tribes being "bothersome" does not carry any useful information, let alone a feeling of fright. It is only when the reader is able to find him/herself in a white, racist worlding that this passage evokes dread. These passages are only frightening when interpellated into a certain genre of being human: one which is white and needs the non-white Other to constitute its own humanity. Then, and only then, it makes sense if Philippine tribes are bothersome, for example: they are troubling, stirring up, disturbing their status as boundary markers of the human; threatening the exclusive claim to humanity of Man. It matters which stories make worlds: only interpellation into the story of Man and Anthropos makes a world in which this passage is frightening.

Harman's invention of an a-subjective reading makes a world in which racism can be justified because it allegedly increases aesthetic power. I have already demonstrated the bankruptcy of that approach based on its ethical failure, but it now becomes clear it does not hold up logically either. "Said's critique would miss the point," Harman claims, because the point is that "Lovecraft's reference to a mob of hysterical Levantines is genuinely frightening,

presumably even for readers from present-day Lebanon and Syria" (2012, 60-1). Why exactly would hysterical Levantines be genuinely frightening to fellow Levantines, hysterical or not? Harman's mention of an imagined "bitter critique" by Said is facetious. Refusing to engage with Said's thought beyond this comment betrays Harman's vulnerability to a critique along Orientalist lines; in fact, Said's critique is right *on* the point. It is not a coincidence that "Cthulhu's worshippers are almost entirely brown people. Or 'mongrels' or 'degenerates' or 'mixed-bloods'" (Pillsworth and Emrys 2014c).

"Hysterical" is a typical Orientalist typification of the (Middle) East; combining two of Orientalist discourse's favorite othering labels: the irrational and the feminine, violently combined in a childlike rage. As such, Lovecraft's hysterical Levantines are implicitly contrasted with Man: "the Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (Said [1978] 1995, 40). This "slid[ing] together" (Cohen 1996b, 11) of differential markers we also saw in Lisa Foo and Aphra Marsh, who combined the racialized and feminine; Lovecraft's Levantines combine the irrational, feminine, and childlike. Suffice it to say that "hysterical" is anything *but* an innocent adjective; and that it is fairly safe to say that the only way in which "hysterical Levantines [are] genuinely frightening, presumably even for readers from present-day Lebanon and Syria" is because these present-day Levantine readers would be cognizant of the Orientalist rhetoric present in Lovecraft's choice of words. Hysterical Levantines are only *truly* frightening for Man, and only *because* they are Levantines. Or, as Emrys summarizes it, "yeah, when white people get the call it's mostly scary for them. When brown people get the call, it's scary for the white people" (Pillsworth and Emrys 2014c).

For Harman, the 'point' is aesthetic, not political. Yet that can only be the case if the reader agrees with Lovecraft's worlding, in which "the infinite superiority of the Teutonic Aryan over all others" (Lovecraft 1964, 17) is self-evident. A worlding in which Levantines are

frightening because they are *not* "Teutonic Aryan." And they are all the more frightening when they are hysterical, living up to the Orientalist image Western bourgeois Man projects on them in a biopolitical othering to demarcate and constitute its own genre of being human as being the only possible narration of the human. This also elucidates the implied Subject of OOO: "the European," who, unlike its Middle Eastern other, "is rational, virtuous, mature, [and] 'normal'." In Harman's reading of Lovecraft, it becomes clear that OOO "strongly retains . . . the 'invidious economic analogies' of individualism, discrete-ness, human timescales and a flattened concept of stability" (Campbell et al. 2019, 133). If agreeing with such a worlding is not a political act, nothing is.

Harman comes within inches of understanding this central flaw in his reading—and by extension, his ontology—yet ultimately retreats into his apolitical, a-relational world. When Legrasse and his fellow police officers encounter the Louisiana cult, it is described as "a dark cult totally unknown to them, and infinitely more diabolic than even the blackest of African voodoo circles" (Lovecraft 1928, 208). Harman astutely notes how "most of us do not live in fear of African voodoo circles, or think of them in anything more than anthropological terms" (Harman 2012, 62), yet he fails to see the irony of this statement. His point is that the horror of this passage is evoked by "subtly convinc[ing] us *not only* that the cult must really be bad if it is worse than African voodoo, but *also* that African voodoo must be really bad if it is being used as the springboard to describe something else as even worse" (63). However, he disregards that the "really be bad" and "really bad" parts of his argument stem from a value judgement stemming from *some* knowledge—which, as Harman correctly notes, is most likely not accurate, but rather interpellated—of what African voodoo circles and dark (not an innocent nominator in itself) cults are. That is, in OOO terms, such objects are not fully withdrawn, but gain meaning from a rich history and context, *situated* in geographical, racial, and cultural preconceptions; preconceptions associated with a white, racist worlding seeking to marginalize

others in a biopolitical project to maintain their dominance and power. Harman's reading of Lovecraft entails a reiteration of Man because it fails to acknowledge the fundamental othering on which it operates, and refuses to interrogate its own worlding.

Ezra Claverie correctly asks how "Harman does not answer the crucial, but implicit question: for whom does racism 'improve the power of an imaginative writer?'" (2015, 263). As I have argued, it improves the power for those who share Lovecraft's—and perhaps Harman's?—worlding: one in which there is a definite Other operating on the first axis of the monster; one which attempts to appropriate; one in which the shoggoths remain "the true horror," and, as Claverie formulates it, the worlding of the "author's fictional Self against the fictional Other" (263). The genre of the human in such a worlding is that of Man2, *homo oeconomicus*: Harman's own situatedness, his writing "both for and as subjects of Late Capitalism" reiterates Anthropos and Capital. The "equality" envisioned by Harman and Bryant in an object-oriented approach means equality only for those counted as human; the rest is marginalized and locked in a binary relation as boundary marker. An object-oriented approach to Lovecraft's racism reiterates Lovecraft's own biopolitical project.

An object-oriented approach vis-à-vis an affirmative approach

Positing Lovecraft's racism as a real object, "inexhaustible by any total sum of interpretations and irreducible to any effects it might have in the world," may sound appealing to any project attempting to formulate an affirmative approach to that object. There are strong similarities between insisting on the reality of Lovecraft's racism and a belief in the world "as it is"; but there is a strong disagreement on what that means for the potential for transformation—which makes all the difference—with radically different consequences as a result.

OOO's ultimate insistence on the withdrawnness of objects, of their non-relation, means that they remain unresponse-able: "multidirectional relationships in which always more than

one responsive entity is in the process of becoming" cannot be fostered in a reality in which real objects only ever encounter their sensual counterparts at best. If in OOO "the real object is never encountered" (Campbell et al. 2019, 124), it *does not matter* whether he classifies Lovecraft's racism as real object or not, because it remains outside of the possibilities of agentic influence regardless. Although Harman's ontology may seem a flat ontology that gives agency back to the nonhuman, in fact, he removes it from all—human and nonhuman—to create a passive, free-floating, non-relational universe, in which the only possible attitude is one of passivity, not of affirmation.

Perhaps it is no wonder that such an ontology leads to Harman's approach to Lovecraft's racism: when there is no agentic possibility of multidirectional relationality, any possibility of transformation is blocked. Harman *is* concerned about things: "we now find that *there is* a strong dose of reality in all content, and it comes from the observing agent (always a real object, whether human or otherwise) which truly invests its energy at any given moment in being involved with certain things rather than others" (2012, 257-8), but this concern remains unidirectional, flowing from the real object to whatever it encounters, but *never back*; multidirectional relationality is never at play. The ultimate withdrawnness of that which he is concerned about and the withdrawnness of himself means he cannot relate to it. Hence all that remains is free-floating concern, unable to do anything but restate the existence of the objects it encounters—real or sensual or anything else—because its agentic possibilities in relation to others are not accessible. Harman, the real object, encounters Lovecraft's racism, the real object, and concludes "it is undeniably effective in purely literary [terms]" because it cannot relate to it. It sees no possibility of multidirectional becoming, of response-ability; hence resignification and/or transformation are not possible. There is only a reiteration of the object encountered, repeating its violence in the process.

I have shown how an affirmative approach to the "real object," or, perhaps, "brute and often brutal fact" of Lovecraft's racism *can* resignify it by staying with its trouble. The relationality, the entanglement of those in play, enables a productive—if risky—way forward, as opposed to Harman's reactionary repetition in a universe in which all relationality is blocked. Because of Harman's pre-eminence in philosophical discussions of Lovecraft, we must interrogate his approach if we wish to affirm and then resignify and transform Lovecraft's racism, rather than repeat it. Having already looked at Harman's approach to *The Call of Cthulhu*, I want to turn to Harman's treatment of the tales I have discussed in comparison with their post-Lovecraftian rewritings: *Mountains* and *Innsmouth.*

Harman views *At the Mountains of Madness* as hugely successful but having one single flaw: "it would easily rank as my favourite . . . if not that the entire second half of the story seems like a very bad idea" (2012, 148). The half he refers to is the part in which Dyer and Danforth explore the Old One city, in which they first realize that the Old Ones "were men!" (Lovecraft 1936a, 495), and encounter the shoggoth afterwards. Harman believes this half to be "bland, distracting, and unfortunate" (2012, 149), because it "undermine[s] Lovecraft's primary gift, which is to poise his creatures forever on the very brink of knowability" (148). Because of this opinion, in the whole chapter Harman devotes to *Mountains* (148-172), he does not discuss the likening of Old Ones to humans, and he fails to mention the shoggoths at all.

As we have seen, these two elements are exactly those that enable Elizabeth Bear to create a narrative in which relationality takes center stage. By extending "the profound bonds that human beings share with [the Old Ones]" (Joshi 1991, 155) to the shoggoths, too, Bear is able to create a relational dimension to the creatures which is absent from Harman's reality, which posits them as withdrawn objects "forever on the very brink of knowability." By then affirming the existence of Lovecraft's shoggoths as a slave race, Bear is able to entangle "myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters [and] meanings" (Haraway 2016,

1), enabling staying with the trouble and, through that, transformation over repetition. Harman's omission of the shoggoths is particularly peculiar considering the latter's central role in *Mountains* and the consequent Mythos at large. Although Harman wishes to focus on the creatures that are "on the very brink of knowability," the fact that the shoggoths are thinly disguised stand-ins for the very human Other—those made slaves in the Transatlantic slave trade, as well as Jewish people, as I argued in chapter 1—makes relegating them to the brink of knowability a reiteration of the biopolitical policing of who is and who is not human. As opposed to an object-oriented approach, an affirmative approach moves the shoggoths and all they stand for from being matters of fact—or, perhaps, real objects—to being matters of concern. The shoggoth is not always on the brink of knowability; Harman *refuses* to know the shoggoth. In this way, he repeats the violence of the past by sheer unwillingness to affirm, whereas Bear effectuates risky but transformative staying with the trouble.

Weird Realism also has a chapter entirely dedicated to *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (Harman 2012, 173-193); and similarly to what we saw happening with *Mountains*, Harman's non-relational attitude leaves him stranded in a lamentable repetition of Lovecraft's racism: the biopolitical attempt to other the racialized Deep One hybrids into an invented boundary marker for Man. Ruthanna Emrys' initial response to *Innsmouth* was one of "sympathy with the interned frog-monsters"; a fundamentally relational response. On the contrary, Harman, unable to relate to the monstrosities, instead wonders why "the arrestees were imprisoned rather than shot, since we later learn . . . that the creatures are immortal unless they die by violence" (2012, 175).

Starting from such a disposition, opposite to one of concern and relationality, forces Harman down a road of repetition. His insistence on the separability of style and content—and consequently, of ontology and politics—enables him to willfully ignore the narrative core of *Innsmouth*: the dangers of miscegenation. As such, he "uncouples Being from politics to

withdraw from the project of political critique altogether" (Galloway 2013, 358); although that does not mean his treatment of *Innsmouth* has no political repercussions. On the contrary, Harman repeats Lovecraft's biopolitics by reiterating *Innsmouth*'s racist foundations. He does not interrogate the tale's racist underpinnings, which leads him to repeat Olmstead's musings on biological degeneration (Harman 2012, 173, 182-3); treats the Innsmouth look on purely aesthetic terms (182-3); skirts within inches of repeating Lovecraft's casual remarks regarding the relation between skull structure and degeneration (186); and discusses Lovecraft's various animal metaphors describing Innsmouth's inhabitants—e.g. their speech as "hoarse barkings and loose-syllabled croakings" (Lovecraft 1936b, 537), or "the dog-like sub-humanness of their crouching gait" (545)—as productionist gems, failing to mention the biopolitical tropes they represent (Harman 2012, 189-92).[31] Hence he repeats Lovecraft's violence, keeping the Deep One hybrids locked in racialized othering; or perhaps even exceeds that violence, as evidenced by his suggestion to shoot the captured Deep One hybrids rather than intern them.

The bankruptcy of Harman's justification approach to Lovecraft's racism and the repetition of his violence through his ontology combine into a rather disastrous take on the work of a deeply racist author. An affirmative approach offers liberatory potential, an object oriented one is a dead end. Although Harman's himself claims of Lovecraft's productionist qualities do have merit, I maintain that by leaving out Lovecraft's legacy of racism—or at least, by not "tak[ing] Lovecraft seriously when he writes of race"—Harman's project becomes uncritical at best, and a reiteration of Lovecraft's biopolitical project at worst. Contrary to Harman's claims, the way ahead is affirmative, not object-oriented.

[31] The animal has long been, and continues to be, one of the great boundary markers of (a certain genre of) humanity. The negation of animality as constitutive of the human has historically been "fundamentally biopolitical in its effects" (Seshadri 2012, 26), because it confers those qualities to marginalized people, too. Lovecraft's Deep One hybrids exist in this tradition.

CONCLUSION

James Kneale has claimed that "once Lovecraft's racism is discovered, it is difficult not to read him *solely* in terms of these fears and hatreds. His pathology represents a critical singularity, from which interpretations struggle to escape" (2006, 116-7). This claim points in the right direction, yet also illustrates some of the sore points in contemporary Lovecraft scholarship which I have addressed. First, it is not a matter of discovery; Lovecraft's racism is conspicuous enough to be noticed immediately. A narrative of "discovering" works hand in hand with narratives enticing apologism or dismissal. Second, Kneale demonstrates scholarship's inability to grapple with Lovecraft's racism: a critical language of "difficulty" and interpretations "escaping" is opposite to staying with the trouble; the gesture of affirming *what there is* first. Third, a critical singularity is absolutely necessary in the face of Lovecraft's ever-increasing ubiquity, but it is not one from which interpretations struggle to escape. On the contrary, interpretations should move *closer* to the facts—Lovecraft's legacy of racism—and not further away. Interpretations should include Lovecraft's racism, but struggling to escape from it is not the required critical attitude. Instead, the critical singularity necessary is the one I have presented: an alternative approach to Lovecraft's trouble, an affirmative approach, a staying with his trouble.

Post-Lovecraftian fiction can inform scholarship in how to formulate such an approach. Briefly summarizing: Elizabeth Bear has demonstrated by way of her shoggoths and Professor Harding how to say 'No' to Lovecraft's racism in a way which is concerned about what it says no to, and stays related to that no. Ruthanna Emrys and her monsters showed how to respond to a certain cultural moment in a way that can effectuate transformation, to avoid repetition of past violence. I have argued *with* Haraway to formulate an approach informed by (science-)fiction, written from the belly of the monster, which stays with the trouble. I have argued

against Graham Harman, who showed how *not* to approach Lovecraft's racism, neither ontologically nor politically.

The three most commonly seen contemporary approaches to Lovecraft's racism are critically and ethically bankrupt. Dismissal, apologism, and justification, represented by Donna Haraway, S. T. Joshi, and Harman, respectively, carry multiple flaws which make them unfit and unable to grapple with Lovecraft's racism; a necessity considering Lovecraft's enormous popular and scholarly influence. Yet unlike Joshi, Haraway and Harman are not writing in Lovecraft studies; they draft Lovecraft "into various philosophical and ideological struggles" (Poole 2016, 216) that appear to be disconnected from Lovecraft at first sight. We have seen Lovecraft star in struggles as diverse as—and yet not limited to—object-oriented ontology, white nationalist meme culture, and Harawayan critique of the Anthropocene. What does it mean that a legacy of racism has apparent merit in the contemporary cultural moment—the 'Age of Lovecraft'—as evidenced by his unlikely stardom in a plethora of seemingly unrelated phenomena? Although I have answered the question "how to approach Lovecraft?", the questions unanswered remain "why Lovecraft?" and "why now?".

Sederholm and Weinstock answer that Lovecraft "addresses questions, anxieties, and desires that have become increasingly insistent since the close of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first" (2016, 3). Although I believe they are asking the right question, their answer seems too general to be satisfactory. *What* are these questions, anxieties, and desires? "What does it mean that out of prejudice, fear, and a hatred of otherness was born a literary tradition that has particular merit in the contemporary moment?" (Sperling 2017a).

Perhaps, like Sederholm and Weinstock suggest (2016, 4-8), there *is* a common posthumanist thread in Haraway's Chthulucene, Harman's OOO, and Joshi's cosmic indifferentism. Perhaps Lovecraft's writings are congruent with posthumanist thought. Perhaps Harman's reading of the Cthulhu idol *does* provide an enticing answer to the question of

Lovecraft's rise to stardom. Yet, such explanations do not take Lovecraft seriously when he talks about race, and such explanations refuse to affirm the racist underpinnings of his work. Furthermore, such explanations deliberately place themselves in a tradition of posthumanist and speculative realism thought which has long sidestepped "the analytical challenges posed by the categories of race, colonialism, and slavery" (Jackson 2013, 671). Our contemporary moment has little need for such an explanation: like Harman's attempted separation of ontology and politics, an approach which sidesteps the question of race runs the risk of reiterating the current dominant biopolitical genre of being human, because it refuses to stay with the trouble.

The "why now?" question can conjecturally be answered by interrogating that genre of being human: Man, who is radically separated—withdrawn, perhaps—from others, yet dependent on Others to be able to (self-)narrate who or what he is. This is this genre of being human Haraway agitates against: Man, Anthropos, "in its many flavors in science, politics, and philosophy has finally become unavailable to think with, truly no longer thinkable, technically or in any other way" (2016, 5). That is, Man, with its focus on Anthropos and on Capital, and its continuous reification of "Western bourgeois tenets" (Wynter 2015, 9), has led us to the precarious, violent world we live in today, "*this* mess [in which we] all [are] together" (Braidotti 2013, 141). A reiteration of Man would continue this mess, if not aggravate it. An affirmation of Man could stay with its trouble and work towards liberatory transformation: a different genre of being human, "outside of the prick tale of Humans in History," a "different future for humanness."

In the introduction to this project, I have stated that I hold two elements of Lovecraft's legacy responsible for his contemporary ubiquity: the racism underlying his work, and the collaborative nature of the Mythos. These two combine to make Lovecraft a prime battlefield for fighting out questions on who is human and who is not. Lovecraft, as quintessential Man, deeply concerned with keeping "the Anglo-Saxon race and psychology . . . dominant in

America" (Lovecraft 1968, 308) and the decline of Western civilization (Joshi 1990), is also the one presiding over the Mythos. In this shared universe, everyone—including Harman; but also Haraway, and Lovecraft's monsters, such as women, people of color, and Jewish people—can stake their claim at humanity. This is my tentative answer to the "why Lovecraft" question: Haraway, Harman, *and* post-Lovecraftian authors attempt to stake a claim in our contemporary cultural moment which is particularly sensitive to Wynter's notion of the genre of being human: our humanity is being revalued, interrogated, and resignified in a time of unprecedented oppression, violence, and economic and ecological collapse. Lovecraft provides the vehicle with which to do that, be it a reiteration of Man, like white nationalists or—in a different way from the previous group, yet nonetheless disastrously aligned with them—Harman. Or be it a more inclusive picture of being human, either inclusive of marginalized groups like Bear and Emrys' projects, or a vision also including the nonhuman as kin, like Haraway's. Or both, or a combination thereof. All of these projects capitalize on the Mythos'—and by extension, Lovecraft as a signifier of this phenomenon—collaborative nature and racist underpinnings.

That is not to say that his thought and work are *not* congruent with posthumanist thought, or any of the other explanations put forward for explaining our current 'Age of Lovecraft,' such as Harman postulating Lovecraft writing about "the essence of philosophy." On the contrary, I would posit that is the *combination* of these themes that explains Lovecraft's meteoric rise to popular and scholarly stardom: the more entangled themes and layers an author and his work have, the rifer for analysis and argument his legacy becomes. The richer the battlefield, the more combatants will show up. Yet, I do maintain that it is always Lovecraft's legacy of racism *in combination with*, and never the parts alone. An exclusive focus on the separate parts leads to approaches such as dismissal, apologism, and justification; and I have shown what that means for scholarship at large. Contrary to Kneale's "critical singularity," that does not mean that a scholarly investigation of, say, Lovecraft's life (e.g. De Camp 1975; Joshi

2001; Faig 2011), or philosophy (e.g. Joshi 1991; Harman 2012; MacCormack 2016), or more peculiar explorations of say, Lovecraft's use of sound (Elferen 2016) or relation to animal studies (Mayer 2016) should not be undertaken; but rather that they should always take Lovecraft's racism into account, preferably by taking an affirmative approach. Hence Lovecraft's life and work are "site[s] of disputes about history, politics, and affect" (Claverie 2013, 81), yet these disputes are always fought under the looming shadow of Lovecraft's legacy of racism. Refusing to affirm that is a dead end, as the approaches of dismissal, apologism, and justification show.

This project is part of these disputes. I have aimed throughout to stay with the trouble of Haraway's mistake of dismissing Lovecraft *tout court* while actually cherry-picking parts of his legacy for their aesthetic-political power; Joshi's liberal use of apologisms and the man of his time defense; and Harman's repetition of Lovecraft's biopolitical violence by way of his dis-embodied and dis-embedded politically etiolated ontology. Yet these approaches can and will raise very valid criticism, and detractors will disagree with an affirmative approach to Lovecraft's racism. Affirmation was never without risk. In the spirit of response-ability, I will briefly evaluate potential criticism.

I hope to already have addressed the two main, most obvious points of criticism that can be levied at this project: Kneale's worries of a critical singularity of racism-focused Lovecraft scholarship, and the concomitant ever-nebulous charge of political correctness, whatever that may exactly mean. I retort with the first consequence of the three observations I started this project with: because of Lovecraft's now-ubiquitous scholarly and popular status, scholarship will *have* to find a way to grapple with his troubled side, be it 'politically correct' or not. Joshi's rant against the "political correctness" (2015a) of the WFA controversy, and consequent call to separate Lovecraft's racism from his literary achievements (e.g. Joshi 2015a; 2015c; 2016; 2020) entail a move similar to Harman's separation of ontology and politics, and has similar

ill-fated consequences for Lovecraft scholarship. Claims of political correctness' polarizing nature stem from a misunderstanding of the project; it is, at its core, a Latourian moving *closer* to the facts, to matters of concern: "the critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather" (Latour 2004, 246). It is in this spirit that my alternative approach to Lovecraft's legacy of racism exists: affirmation means concern and relationality, not separation and polarization.

However, my reliance on affirmative practices, Harawayan thought, and monster theory, makes my proposed alternative approach vulnerable to criticism levied at those strands of scholarship. Although I have attempted to steer clear of Haraway's ostensible "self-indulgence, stylistic obscurantism, 'postmodern' triviality, [and] etymological shamanism" (Lewis 2017), standard criticisms of her thought such as these can also be ricocheted to my alternative approach to Lovecraft's legacy of racism. Affirmation's open-ended nature and willingness to take risks concerning its outcome are indeed drawbacks to consider; but they are, as I have argued, better than its alternatives. The *potential* for liberatory transformation outweighs not upsetting the status quo, as evidenced by Harman's withdrawn—that is, passive and reactionary—implicit reiteration of Man. On a larger scale, this project's reliance on *bricolage* can be criticized: although I hope to have shown that the whole is critically stronger than its separate constituents; the discrepancies between the individual disciplines it pulls from could lead to critical miscommunication.

I have already noted the importance of the specificity of this project's subject matter. The Mythos is a crucial element of the alternative approach I have formulated. Therefore, although it may seem logical and straightforward to apply my approach to other non-innocent legacies—the likes of Allen or Heidegger—this can nor should be done without careful consideration of the differences between such legacies. Again, the collaborative nature and

racism underlying the Mythos are tantamount to this project, and as such, my approach should not be haphazardly applied to a figure whose non-innocent legacy does not contain these two elements. More suited would be for example Robert E. Howard's—who also wrote in the Cthulhu Mythos—'Hyperborean Age,' the setting of the Conan the Barbarian stories. Like the Mythos, the Hyperborean Age is collaborative in nature, and, albeit not as obviously as Lovecraft, predicated on racist stereotyping (Finn 2006, 80-5; Romeo 2009). This does not mean that more adventurous applications of my affirmative approach should not be undertaken; only that critical care and rigor are a necessity in such cases.

As affirmation as a practice grows; Haraway's thought is increasingly analyzed, adapted, and criticized; and Lovecraft's renaissance continues, so too do the significance and relevance of this project change. The influence of Lovecraft on scholarship at large, and Lovecraft studies specifically, is not showing any signs of diminishment. Six years after the WFA controversy, the field has changed: Lovecraft studies has become more cognizant of Lovecraft's racism, and post-Lovecraftian fiction has established itself, achieving both critical and commercial success. It is beneficial for all involved if this trend continues, and this project hopes to contribute to that: staying with Lovecraft's trouble appears to be an excellent way to go ahead with Lovecraft, scholarly and popularly, warts and all.

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