Gonzalez, Alcala Antonio, and Carl H. Sederholm, editors. *Lovecraft in the 21st Century:*

    Dead, But Still Dreaming. **Routledge, 2022.**

https://www.routledge.com/Lovecraft-in-the-21st-Century-Dead-But-Still-Dreaming/Gonzalez-Sederholm/p/book/9780367713041

    Lovecraft in the 21st Century: Dead, But Still Dreaming opens with the premise that Lovecraft is everywhere, inextricably bound up with popular culture. Indeed, the tendrils of Lovecraft's lore and themes spread through nearly every cultural touchstone, as the sheer breadth of subject matter covered in this work makes plain. This anthology conveys the scope of Lovecraft's influence and reach. He inspires *Magic: The Gathering* decks (Albary and Albary 103) and influences the depiction of Nightmare and Dream in *Bloodborne* (2015) (Murray 227); he becomes a fixation for Alan Moore (Lindsay 71) and influences Brazilian horror parody (Reis Filho and Schvarzman 50). He shows up in *The X-Files* (1993-2002) and he inflects *Stranger Things* (2016-present). If prevalence is relevance, and if relevance is importance, then the importance of a critical anthology on Lovecraft's enduring legacy is clear. And in an era where you can buy Cthulhu plush toys (Hudson 186) or consume a graphic novel which censors his cat's offensive name (Shapira 92), a critical treatment of his prejudices, politics, and philosophy is urgent needed too.

    In their introduction, co-editors Antonio Alcala Gonzalez and Carl H. Sederholm state that the anthology's purpose is "to assess Lovecraft's place in the present moment by gathering together several critical essays that can help us understand why he is so influential across such a wide variety of media" (1). I believe this anthology achieves that end. The editors begin by surveying four major recurring concerns that weave through the anthology's twenty-one chapters, which (in aggregate) cover a staggering amount of literary, artistic, and critical territory. First, the editors

mention Lovecraft's relevance to studies of the Anthropocene—our current geological age, which is marked by humanity's ability to radically and permanently alter ecology on a truly planetary scale. Next, the editors describe the simultaneous challenges posed by adapting Lovecraft to other media. They draw particular attention to the difficulty in representing Lovecraft's conceptual horrors visually, because "his work has very little direct dialogue and frequently includes descriptions not well suited for visual media. And yet, these apparent difficulties have not prevented a host of people from drawing on Lovecraftian themes, moods, and environments to evoke fear and uncertainty in their own work" (3). A third unifying theme for much of the anthology is Lovecraft's representation in, and influence upon, video games. The editors note that several of the challenges related to adaptation to any visual media show up in video games, but further that (because of the active nature of video gaming as media consumption) "Lovecraft's preference for lone protagonists with a final emphasis on the mental effects resulting from the encounter with weird horror" creates an ostensible barrier to building games around his mythos (4). But as the anthology demonstrates, many games in many formats and genres have done remarkably well. The final theme treated in the introduction is Lovecraft's permanence: "Lovecraft has become an idea, a memory, something that we permanently have but are not sure about" (4). This theme ties the entire anthology together—Lovecraft is everywhere, and Lovecraft is here to stay.

Chapters one through four focus predominantly on Lovecraft's adaptation to theater, television, and film. Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. provides a detailed account of Lovecraft adaptation to American theater (and invaluable insight into why Lovecraft would probably hate that). Elisabete Lopes unpacks the interplay between Lovecraft's cosmic horror and HBO's 2014 miniseries *True Detective*. Lúcio Reis Filho and Sheila Schvarzman discuss Lovecraft's intermittent contribution

to Brazilian cinema, and how current filmmakers have employed Lovecraft to critique racism, classism, and homophobia. John Glover rounds out this section by proposing a corrective re-evaluation of Lovecraft's curation of his image and persona throughout his own lifetime, and how he may have indeed anticipated and *intended* that his posthumous notoriety would be much more substantial than success in his lifetime. Glover's "corrective" to scholarly approaches to Lovecraft is crucial to the work of this anthology. Glover recommends that readers neither presume "the author is dead" nor dismiss the author due to his very real prejudices and biases; instead, Glover argues that to disarm Lovecraft and nullify the threat of a memetic proliferation of his animus is to clarify the role Lovecraft played in "actively shaping his own legacy" (57), especially with respect to cultivating a "Lovecraft Circle." This chapter serves to set stakes for the volume at large, including surveying not only the traditional tools but new approaches we might bring to bear on Lovecraft (and, indeed, any other area of literary analysis).

Glover's argument also segues into chapters five through seven. Herein, various authors discuss how Lovecraft's lore *and* his public persona have both been adapted and represented in more strictly visual media, including comics and trading card games. Stuart L. Lindsay investigates how comics have distributed not only Lovecraft's lore but Lovecraft himself. Tom Shapira continues this line of inquiry by recognizing the way in which comics have laundered Lovecraft's most disturbing and difficult character traits, astutely noting that Lovecraft himself might be horrified by this transformation into someone not-himself. Finally, Suzanne and Richard Albary discuss the fundamental challenges and constraints of representing Lovecraft's monsters in trading card games—as well as the transformation from "horrifying" to "disturbing" which attends giving Cthulhu playing card "stats" (even if they are overpowered).

Chapters eight through twelve comprise the most expansive thematic section, which crucially serves as a hub wherein the concerns represented in the rest of the anthology may intersect and interact. The expanse and scope of this section make it the most difficult summarize, but it principally attends to the ways in which Lovecraft's themes resonate with our contemporary sociopolitical and ecological anxieties. Here contributors unpack why Lovecraft remains so popular with contemporary consumers—he pens a near-perfect allegory for nuclear contamination (Fetters 123), Cthulhu serves as a powerful metaphor for capitalism's ability to both alienate the laborer from the value of their labor and simultaneously compel them to keep going (Doncel 140), his ecophobic anti-pastorals exemplify Nature's ability to frustrate our schemes of control and domination (Blanc 169), and his Deep Ones function as powerful analogs to "hyperobjects" that undermine anthropocentric presumptions (Alcala Gonzalez 181). These chapters employ both established and emergent critical approaches, including Marxist critique, ecocriticism, posthumanism, and corporeal feminism. Despite the breadth of analytical approaches, the scholarship here seeks to illuminate how Lovecraft's cosmic indifference can help us consider humanity's relationship with the material world. I was particularly impressed with Doncel's work because it brings T. S. Kuhn's theory of "paradigm shift," Mark Fisher's framing of weird fiction as crisis narrative, and Timothy Morton's concept of "hyperobjects" to bear on the Cthulhu Mythos, and further turns to articulate how the (an)nihilistic tendency of capitalism to erase and foreclose all other possibilities is a material process of alienation modeled on (and perpetuated by) the estrangement of the laborer from the value she produces.

Contrasting with the theoretical emphasis above, chapters thirteen and fourteen articulate the many challenges that Lovecraft's sexual and racial prejudices pose to contemporary consumers, creators, and critics. These two chapters discuss the strategies that historically minoritized and

marginalized authors have employed to complicate Lovecraft's themes to both contribute to the Cthulhu Mythos (Hudson 199) and to finding redemptive readings within it (Barbour 210).

As an avid gamer, chapters fifteen through seventeen piqued my curiosity as they explore the difficulties inherent to adapting Lovecraftian lore to video games. Each chapter examines how game designers use virtual "space" to provide players with an uncanny experience. Corstorphine and Crofts explore how developers use space to invoke a sense of the "weird" and undermine the player's sense of control (223), while Murray focuses on how the impossible topographies themselves often represent shattered psyches (227). As a complement to the tension above, Simmons explains how developers have successfully subverted an entire genre of gaming (the walking simulator). While walking simulators typically provide players with a sense of mastery by mapping and navigating a physical environment, walking simulators that tap into Lovecraftian lore instead constantly unnerve and disorient the player (250).

Chapters eighteen and nineteen examine the queering of Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos by using its metaphors, monsters, and motifs to express intimacy and affection that defy normative binaries, rupture closed-minded structures of thought, and overtly challenge the systemic mechanisms of oppression and policing that imperil so many people today. Taken together with chapters thirteen and fourteen, this section explores why and how historically marginalized and minoritized communities—who often do not appear (or, worse, only appear in dehumanizing caricatures) within Lovecraft's fiction—have found a visual and metaphorical vocabulary for solace, refuge, and self-expression within the corpus. Non-Euclidean geometries, for instance, may only seem "wrong" and feel "oppressive" to a white heteronormative patriarch demanding a Euclidean worldview (Marshall 262). And while Lovecraft's cosmic horror might have fundamentally been "a literature of hatred for life" (Houellebecq, quoted in Johnson 279), a series

of m/m slash fiction can leverage that same "weirdness" to create "a structure of inclusivity in which the values of love, affirmation, and community transcend the real horrors of alienation, melancholy, and shame" (Johnson 279).

Finally, chapters twenty and twenty-one turn to the eschatological and epistemic crises that Lovecraft's writing employs as a trope, and how Lovecraft provides a vocabulary for expressing both end-of-the-world anxieties and demarcating thought constrained by—and possible ways of thinking beyond—the cognitive horizons that our current paradigms impose. A hauntological reading of Lovecraft reveals that his mythos might help us at least articulate "the knowledge of the possibility of our annihilation" (Cerliano 293) and equip us to experience the "unintelligible but real" (Harman quoted in Sederholm 304); perhaps we might even begin to glimpse and articulate "something new, something real and purposeful, but also something outside of human understanding" (Sederholm 204).

Lovecraft in the 21st Century clearly meets its stated goals. Like Lovecraft's cosmic monsters and unthinkable time scales, this anthology's work is so complex and interrelated that it defies brevity. Because of Lovecraft's resonance and relevance, and considering the breadth and variety of work undertaken herein, this anthology will be important for a wide cross-section of scholars. Beyond the audiences suggested above, scholars working within posthumanism/transhumanism, ecocriticism, and post-Marxism will find several chapters that reward their attention. Even further afield, though, this anthology offers a contribution that caught me entirely unaware: it is, I believe, a missive of hope in an epoch of disaster.

Throughout my reading of the individual chapters, I was deeply impressed by the promise that these critics—and the communities and creators on whose behalf they speak—find inside of the eerie and weird lore of Lovecraft. Lovecraft's Real broke minds and shattered psyches; and his

racialism, cultural imperialism, and homophobia cannot be ignored. But this anthology suggests that maybe the minds that broke and the psyches that shattered were beholden to the wrong Real. Maybe we can enjoy the Real, if we can shrive ourselves of the narratives of control and domination to which Lovecraft was so profoundly beholden. Perhaps that weird Real is not so terrible and abhorrent; maybe it is a true communion, and maybe that is why it horrifies so many.

Brian D. Breed is a Lecturer of Writing Studies at the University of Miami, where he teaches First-Year Writing, Writing in the Sciences, and Advanced Writing in the Sciences. His dissertation, *Legal Fictions: The Trope of Criminality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, argues that, through criminalized characters, narrators can compel readers to entertain radical ideas they would otherwise ignore. His current areas of research interest are genre analysis, rhetoric in the sciences, and science fiction studies.