

# **ENC 1145: Writing About Weird Fiction**

**Section:** 3309

**Time:** MWF Period 8 (3:00-3:50 pm)

**Room:** Turlington 2349

**Instructor:** Spencer Chalifour

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**Office:** Turlington 4315

**Office Hours:** W Period 7 and by appointment

## **Course Description:**

In his essay “Supernatural Horror in Fiction,” H.P. Lovecraft defines the weird tale as having to incorporate “a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.”

This course will focus on “weird fiction,” a genre originating in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and containing elements of horror, fantasy, science fiction, and the macabre. In our examination of weird authors spanning its history, we will attempt to discover what differentiates weird fiction from similar genres and will use several theoretical and historical lenses to examine questions regarding what constitutes “The Weird.” What was the cultural and historical context for the inception of weird fiction? Why did British weird authors receive greater literary recognition than their American counterparts? Why since the 1980s are we experiencing a resurgence of weird fiction through the New Weird movement, and how do these authors continue the themes of their predecessors into the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Readings for this class will span from early authors who had a strong influence over later weird writers (like E.T.A. Hoffman and Robert Chambers) to the weird writers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (like Lovecraft, Robert Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, Lord Dunsany, and Algernon Blackwood) to New Weird authors (including China Miéville, Thomas Ligotti, and Laird Barron). We will also examine theorists and historians who have analyzed the genre, such as S.T. Joshi and Jeff and Ann VanderMeer (whose anthology *The Weird* will be a primary text for the class) and how the weird has manifested in other pop cultural texts, such as the HBO TV series *True Detective*.

## **Course Objectives:**

In this course, you will

- Compose critical papers in response to the readings and in-class discussions
- Formulate arguments regarding weird fiction and support them with evidence from the texts and outside research

- Define what is meant by the term “the Weird” and place your definition within the broader critical discourse on the genre
- Interpret the ideological, historical, and theoretical influences that are at play in the different variations of weird fiction encountered during the semester

## Required Texts

*The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, Jeff and Ann VanderMeer, eds. Tor, 2011. ISBN 9780765333605

*Neonomicon*, Alan Moore (w) and Jacen Burrows (a). Avatar Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1592911301 (TW: gore and sexual violence)

To be purchased for streaming or on Blu-ray/DVD:

Episodes 1 and 2 of *True Detective*. Nic Pizzolatto, writer; Cary Fukunaga, director.

The following texts can be purchased in any edition and are also available for free online:

*The King in Yellow*, Robert Chambers.

*The House on the Borderland*, William Hope Hodgson.

*At the Mountains of Madness*, H. P. Lovecraft.

Other readings will be made available online via Canvas

## Assignments

Close Reading: For this assignment, you will choose one of the short stories you will have read and select a passage (ideally an approximately 300-word long section, so basically a paragraph-sized length) and construct an original thesis-driven argument regarding the importance of this passage to the larger work and how this passage reflects the characteristics of weird fiction we have discussed so far. This is *not* a research paper, so your argument should be based only on your own analysis of the text. (900–1200 words, 125 points)

Synthesis Essay: For this assignment, you will choose one of the short stories encountered so far to write about (alternatively, you can choose a chapter from one of the novels). You will also choose one of the critical texts we will have read up until this point. Your argument for this paper will concern how the text you choose reinforces the definitions of the weird discussed in the critical text and/or how your text pushes against the critical text’s definitions. (1200–1500 words, 175 points)

Final Project Proposal: You will present a detailed proposal of your final research paper, including which text(s) you want to analyze, what additional research you would have to

complete, and what your research question(s) is/are. Also include a list of at least five secondary sources you will use in your paper and be sure to discuss in your proposal how you will use these sources (you can only use at most two sources from class, the rest must be from outside of class). (500–600 words, 100 points)

Pop Culture Presentation: For this assignment, you will choose one pop culture “artifact” (this might be a TV episode, comic book, merchandise, fan art, video game, podcast) that references weird fiction (you may find your own artifact or you can choose one from a list I will provide). You will then create a short presentation on how it encapsulates or contradicts the aspects or the “weird” we have discussed in class. (30 points)

Final Paper: The culminating project of this course will be an original research paper related to one or more themes from the class. For this project, your goal will be to create an original and complex contribution to the pre-existing conversation concerning weird fiction we will have investigated throughout the semester. You must choose a primary text for your analysis, but this does not necessarily have to be one of the texts from the class, and it also does not necessarily have to be a short story or novel (feel free to discuss a movie, comic book, TV show, video game, etc.). (1800–2100 words, 300 points)

#### Discussion Posts - Long

In addition to formal writing assignments, students will also be responsible for responding to weekly discussion posts on the Canvas site. In your posts, you will provide insight into one of the week’s readings by discussing the common themes, ideas, or approaches to weird fiction seen in the readings. You will only write one long post in a week. Be sure to use at least one quote from the text in your discussion. You will write a total of four long responses. If you are responding to Monday’s reading, it must be posted by 4 pm on the preceding Sunday (so your peers have time to respond). If you are responding to Wednesday’s reading, it must be posted by 4 pm the preceding Tuesday. And, if you are responding to Friday’s reading it must be posted by 4 pm of the preceding Thursday. (350 words each, 30 points each)

#### Discussion Posts – Short

On the weeks when you are not writing a longer response, you should respond to the close reading of your peers. This must be posted before class time on the day the reading will be discussed. You will write a total of four short responses. (150 words each, 20 points each)

Participation: This grade constitutes participation in in-class discussion, workshops, quizzes, in-class work, etc. (70 points)

## Grading Scale

|    |      |        |          |    |      |       |         |
|----|------|--------|----------|----|------|-------|---------|
| A  | 4.0  | 93-100 | 930-1000 | C  | 2.0  | 73-76 | 730-769 |
| A- | 3.67 | 90-92  | 900-929  | C- | 1.67 | 70-72 | 700-729 |
| B+ | 3.33 | 87-89  | 870-899  | D+ | 1.33 | 67-69 | 670-699 |
| B  | 3.0  | 83-86  | 830-869  | D  | 1.0  | 63-66 | 630-669 |
| B- | 2.67 | 80-82  | 800-829  | D- | 0.67 | 60-62 | 600-629 |
| C+ | 2.33 | 77-79  | 770-799  | E  | 0.00 | 0-59  | 0-599   |

A = An “A” student consistently shows outstanding scholarship and initiative exceeding the assignments (using creativity, outside research, etc.), makes contributions to discussions, and is punctual and regular in attendance.

B = A “B” student demonstrates excellent scholarship and shows some initiative in assignments, is effective in regular participation and completes all work by the assigned date, and work submitted shows that instructions have been followed completely.

C = A “C” student has a cooperative attitude toward class work and demonstrates an adequate grasp of the subject matter, all assigned work is completed in a satisfactory manner, instructions are generally followed well, and assignments generally turned in on time.

D = A “D” student provides an often unsatisfactory effort toward class work, assignments are barely met and turned in late, instructions are poorly followed, and there is little or no constructive participation in group or class discussions.

## Assessment Rubric

Each paper will have its own individual rubric, but here is a sample of the common writing qualities I will be looking for across all your work:

Content: Papers exhibit evidence of ideas that respond to the topic with complexity, critically evaluating and synthesizing sources, and provide an adequate discussion with basic understanding of sources.

Organization: Documents and paragraphs exhibit identifiable structure for topics, including a clear thesis statement and topic sentences.

Argument and Support: Documents use persuasive and confident presentation of ideas, strongly supported with evidence. At the weak end of the satisfactory range, documents may provide only generalized discussion of ideas or may provide adequate discussion but rely on weak support for arguments.

Style: Documents use a writing style with word choice appropriate to the context, genre, and discipline. Sentences should display complexity and logical structure.

Mechanics: Papers will feature correct or error-free presentation of ideas. At the weak end of the satisfactory range, papers may contain a few spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors that remain unobtrusive and do not obscure the paper’s argument or points.

**Tentative Course Schedule (please note readings are due on the day they are listed, and schedule is subject to change)**

**Note: All short stories are from *The Weird*, unless noted otherwise**

Week 1, August 22-26

- M: Introduction and Course Overview
- W: Defining the “Weird” || “Foreweird” by Michael Moorcock and “Introduction” by Ann and Jeff VanderMeer from *The Weird*
- F: Where does the weird come from? || “The Sandman” by ETA Hoffmann and “The Uncanny” by Sigmund Freud (both available on Canvas)

Week 2, August 29-September 2

- M: The early weird in America || “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe and “An Inhabitant of Carcosa” by Ambrose Bierce (both available on Canvas)
- W: *The King in Yellow* by Robert Chambers – “The Repairer of Reputations” and “The Mask”
- F: *The King in Yellow* continued – “In the Court of the Dragon” and “The Yellow Sign”

Week 3, September 5-9

- M: No Class – Labor Day
- W: *King in Yellow*, continued
- F: The genesis of the weird || “Supernatural Horror in Literature” sections I-V by H. P. Lovecraft (available on Canvas)

Week 4, September 12-16

- M: The early weird in Britain || “The Willows” by Algernon Blackwood
- W: Early British weird continued || “Casting the Runes” by M. R. James and “Now Nuth Would Have Practiced His Art Upon the Gnoles” by Lord Dunsany
- F: Discuss how we define the weird || How to craft a thesis statement

Week 5, September 19-23

- M: Cosmic horror || *The House on the Borderland* by William Hope Hodgson, chapters I - XIII
- W: *The House on the Borderland* continued, chapters XIV-XXVII
- F: **Due: Close Reading**

Week 6, September 26-30

- M: “Supernatural Horror in Literature” sections VI-X (on Canvas)

- W: How do we define cosmic horror?
- F: Classic pulp-era weird fiction || “Genius Loci” by Clark Ashton Smith, “Pigeons from Hell” by Robert E Howard (available on Canvas)

#### Week 7, October 3-7

- M: “The Dunwich Horror” by H. P. Lovecraft
- W: *At the Mountains of Madness* by H. P. Lovecraft, chapters I-VIII
- F: No Class - Homecoming

#### Week 8, October 10-14

- M: *At the Mountains of Madness*, continued chapters IX-XII
- W: Discuss Lovecraft || China Miéville’s Introduction from the Modern Library Classics edition of *At the Mountains of Madness* (available on Canvas)
- F: Continue discussion of Lovecraft’s influence and *Weird Tales* || S. T. Joshi’s Introduction from *The Weird Tale* (available on Canvas)

#### Week 9, October 17-21

- M: Post-pulp weird fiction || “The Crowd” by Ray Bradbury
- W: The weird in 50s America || “The Summer People” by Shirley Jackson
- F: **Due: Synthesis Essay**; continue discussion of weird after Lovecraft

#### Week 10, October 24-28

- M: The weird and *Twilight Zone* || “The Howling Man” by Charles Beaumont
- W: “Don’t Look Now” by Daphne Du Maurier
- F: New weird voices || “My Mother” by Jamaica Kincaid

#### Week 11, October 31-November 4

- M: New Weird || “Bloodchild” by Octavia Butler, Jeff VanderMeer’s introduction to *New Weird* (available on Canvas)
- W: New Weird continued
- F: What is “New Weird”? || S.T. Joshi’s Introduction from *The Modern Weird Tale* and “Tracking Phantoms” by Darja Malcolm-Clarke (both available on Canvas)

#### Week 12, November 7-11

- M: “Details” by China Miéville
- W: **Due: Final Paper Proposal**; What sets apart “modern weird”?
- F: Pessimism and the weird || “The Town Manager” by Thomas Ligotti

### Week 13, November 14-18

- M: Later New Weird || “The Forest” by Laird Barron and “Saving the Gleeful Horse” by K. J. Bishop
- W: Later New Weird, continued
- F: The weird in other media || *Neonomicon* by Alan Moore and Jacen Burrows

### Week 14, November 21-25

- M: *Rick and Morty* screening || Weird satire
- W: Thanksgiving Break
- F: Thanksgiving Break

### Week 15, November 28-December 2

- M: Weird television || Episode 1 of *True Detective*
- W: Episode 2 of *True Detective*
- F: Conferencing

### Week 16, December 5-7

- M: Conferencing
- W: **Due: Final Paper**; Course evaluations

## **Attendance**

Attendance is required. If a student misses more than **three** periods unexcused during a fall or spring semester, he or she will lose a letter grade from their class average for each unexcused absence after the initial three. Missing class on a double period counts as **two** absences. The **only** exemptions from this policy are those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays. Absences related to university-sponsored events must be discussed with the instructor prior to the date that will be missed.

**If you are absent for any reason: You are required to submit by the next class period a 250-word response discussing the missed day’s reading. Failure to do so will result in a 5 point deduction from your overall participation grade. If you have to leave class early, it will result in a half absence, barring extenuating circumstances.**

Please Note: If students are absent, it is their responsibility to make themselves aware of all due dates. If absent due to a scheduled event, students are still responsible for turning assignments in on time.

Tardiness: If students enter class after roll has been called, they are late, which disrupts the entire class. Two instances of tardiness count as one absence.

## **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the Student Honor Code. The Honor Code prohibits plagiarism and defines it as follows:

Plagiarism. A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:

1. Quoting oral or written materials including but not limited to those found on the internet, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.
2. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.

(University of Florida, Student Honor Code, 8 July 2011)

University of Florida students are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the entire Student Honor Code.

Important Tip: You should never copy and paste something from the Internet without providing the exact location from which it came.

## **Final Grade Appeals**

For 1000- and 2000-level classes, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Department of English Program Assistant.

## **Statement of Composition (C) and Humanities (H) Credit**

This course can satisfy the General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/1314/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx>

## **Statement of Writing Requirement**

This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/writing-requirement.aspx>

## **Classroom Behavior**

Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate

respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal, and accordingly absence, from the class.

### **In-Class Work**

Papers and drafts are due at the beginning of class or on-line at the assigned deadline. Late papers will not be accepted. Failure of technology is not an excuse.

Participation is a crucial part of success in this class. Students will be expected to work in small groups and participate in group discussions, writing workshops, peer reviews, and other in-class activities. Be prepared for unannounced quizzes or activities on the readings or classroom discussion. Students must be present for all in-class activities to receive credit for them. In-class work cannot be made up. Writing workshops require that students provide constructive feedback about their peers' writing.

In general, students are expected to contribute constructively to each class session.

### **Paper Maintenance Responsibilities**

Students are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a resubmission of papers or a review of graded papers, it is the student's responsibility to have and to make available this material.

### **Mode of Submission**

All papers will be submitted as MS Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf) documents to E-learning/Sakai and as hard copies. Final drafts should be polished and presented in a professional manner. All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced with 1-inch margins and pages numbered. **Be sure to staple papers before submitting hard copies.** Unstapled papers will **not be accepted**.

### **Technology**

- **Laptops/Tablets:** You are welcome to bring laptops to class to take notes; however, if your device prevents you from paying attention in class, you will be asked to put it away and will lose laptop privileges for the rest of the semester
- **Cell Phones/MP3 player/Portable Electronic Devices, etc.:** Please keep your device put away and on silent at all times.

### **Writing Center**

The University Writing Center is located in Tigert 302 and is available to all UF students.

### **Students with Disabilities**

The University of Florida complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students requesting accommodation should contact the Students with Disabilities Office, Peabody 202. That office will provide documentation to the student whom must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

### **Sexual Harassment Policy**

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>

### **Course Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at

<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.