

<b>English 132: The Short Story and the Novel</b>	
<b>MWF 2:30-3:20 Woodburn 101</b>	
Instructor: Michael Green	
Email: mogreen@mix.wvu.edu	Office hours: by appointment, location decided by the student(s) and myself.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

(All texts NOT included in the list below will be made available as free PDFs and/or audio-books. I will also send out an email detailing those of the texts listed below that I have available as free PDFs and/or audio books as well).

Victor LaValle's *The Ballad of Black Tom*

Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*

Jeff Vandermeer's *Annihilation*

Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*

William Gibson's *Neuromancer*

Grant Morrison's *Arkham Asylum*

Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke*

-- *V for Vendetta*

If you choose to buy hardcopies of the required books for our class, it is okay if the editions you buy or own already are different than the editions offered through the bookstore. I clearly understand and support your desire to save money by buying cheaper editions online (hard copy or electronic), or simply not having to buy another copy of a book you already own simply because it happens to be a different edition than those offered at the bookstore. While it would be nice for all of us to be on the same page, with the exception, again, of Watts' novel, we can and will work with different paginations

**INTRODUCTION:**

Do you ever have that nagging feeling that forces from some vast unknown cosmos beyond time and space are closing in, ready to take you over, body and soul? Or have you ever been suspicious of the incantations and wriggling tentacles slithering under the door from the dorm room down the hall? Me neither. But you could be forgiven for entertaining such ideas, given how pervasive an

influence weird fiction has had on our culture in recent years. From the “Call of Cthulu” to *V for Vendetta*, this semester we will seek to better understand the ubiquitous presence of the “weird,” from its humble pulp magazine beginnings in the 1920s and 30s to its current push for world domination in the twenty-first century and beyond. We will examine its rise to mainstream acceptance through a number of short stories, novels, and graphic/comic narratives, spending time with the likes of H.P. Lovecraft, MR James, Shirley Jackson, Clive Barker, Grant Morrison, Victor LaValle, William Gibson & Jeff Vandermeer, among others.

We will also take a look at a number of films that not only embody many of the genre’s core characteristics but have given rise to its many variations and permutations, including Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*, Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*, The Wachowski’s *The Matrix* and Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell*.

### **Class Format:**

The class will be primarily discussion-based. Though it will be somewhat difficult to create an intimate round-table discussion for such a large class, we will nevertheless strive to include everyone in said general discussions by first and foremost including myself *amongst* the class as a contributing member. I eventually want to move from being the professor who leads the class discussions to being something more like a facilitator of said discussions as the semester progresses. In an effort to do so, we will begin early having each of you in groups of four or more kick start the discussions with thought-provoking questions about the text read that might lead to other interesting and provocative issues and arguments that need addressing. I will demonstrate how best to do this before handing it over to the class, so don’t worry—as long as your opening question is intriguing and thoughtful in some way, you can’t go wrong. Even though the class will be, as already stated, mostly focused on close readings of the texts assigned, I will still provide instruction on historical and theoretical contexts that speak to the themes of the class as our discussions deem necessary and/or helpful, which in turn will also help you think through the themes, topics and aspects you might want to discuss and/or write on yourself.

Given the weight it will play in your final overall grade, participation will be a fundamentally important part to doing well in the class. That said, I am more than willing to work with anyone that might be on the quieter side of things, or just simply has a hard time speaking in front of others. Regardless, I don’t want anyone to miss out on our class discussions, or suffer grade-wise, when there’s no real reason to. Which bring us to...

### **Grading:**

The following grade breakdown is meant to ease your concerns about grading and your final end-of-semester class assessments. While I do assign numeric-based letter grades for the following course requirements, I take into consideration above all else how much you have improved in these general categories as the semester progresses. In other words, your grade for, say, your third take-home exam, will be determined more on how much clearer, well-thought out and original test three’s arguments were than your previous two exams. Above all I look to be charitable and encouraging in the grades I give, hoping in the process to de-emphasize the focus on them as a

whole, replacing it with a greater concern for helping me and each of you to come to terms with how the novels, stories and films on the class syllabus address the themes of the class, themes determined in part by me but also by us as a class as we work our way through the semester. The class should be stimulating and, heaven forbid, fun. And I intend to keep it that way.

**Two take-home essay tests—(40% total of final course grade)**

You will provide thoughtful and persuasive essay answers (roughly two to three paragraphs each) to three out of four or more questions provided, which will allow you to play to your strengths. Each question will be based on themes, concepts and problems derived from our close-readings and class discussions. You can rest assured that each question will entail those questions, issues and problems discussed most frequently in class, so not to worry about obscure details and odd theories that you've barely heard of before. The point of said tests is to give you a chance to either show how well you've been paying attention and participating in class and/or to offer you the opportunity to take another swing at an issue you felt we could have spent more time on or considered from another angle we didn't cover in our class discussions. The questions will range in focus from single-text questions to comparative questions, covering a theme, concept and/or issue from the texts selected. There will be no attempt to "trick" anyone, mainly because I will not be looking for what one would necessarily call right or wrong answers. I will also not be looking for you to prove that you've finally figured out "what it's all about." I haven't. Hence, why I wanted to teach this class with these texts and films in the first place. Instead, I will be looking for, and grading you on, the thoughtfulness and clarity of your argument. Each test will be a take-home exam, which means you can consult your books (though no need to directly quote from the texts, unless you feel it would help sure-up your answer), and whatever else you feel would be most helpful to your argument (consider the supplemental materials I've provided for you on eCampus). We will discuss in greater depth what I am looking for and how to prepare for the exams as each approaches. For now, don't worry about them—we'll have plenty of opportunities to use a variety of in-class discussions formats and opening-discussion questions, among other things, to practice how best to take them. I will not, by the way, be grading your responses for grammatical correctness and/or organizational issues unless they turn out to be so pervasive as to obscure the meaning of what you meant to say. Look at the tests as three separate opportunities to practice expressing yourself and your ideas as clearly and logically as possible in writing.

**The tests will be graded in the following way:**

Excellent (A), Good (B), Average (C) and Unacceptable (F). The latter will be given to tests turned in more than a day late. Tests turned in a day late will be reduced a half-letter grade, i.e., an A will fall to an A- and a B will be reduced to a B-, depending on what you would have received if you had turned the test in on time. While we will go over how I determine the grades for your tests at greater length in class, suffice it to say that an **Excellent performance (A)** shows you did the reading, and paid attention to our class discussions and debates with a close eye to one or more of the texts' most relevant issues, clearly organizing your response on whatever position and/or argument you felt most relevant to the prompt, in a thoughtful, challenging and reasonably sophisticated and original manner. A **Good**

**performance (B)** shows that you clearly did the reading and did it well, but your tests observations, argument(s) and/or question(s) were somewhat vague in what they were trying to say, oftentimes lacking textual and/or clear logical support for your claims or questions and, in that, lacking the sophistication and/or originality of an A-level test. Nevertheless, a Good test shows significant promise. An **Average performance (C)** is given for a test that in some way is off-subject, lacking clear relevance to the prompt given and/or one that generally suffers from a certain degree of disorganization (i.e., I can't always make heads or tails of what you're saying and/or what it has to do with the prompt, even if I am able to find something to work with after struggling through your response). Average tests do, however, always have something to work with and, as such, are not meant to disparage or discourage; instead, a C performance simply lets you know, along with my marginal criticisms, questions and observations, that your critical thinking needs some work, but it is in no way impossible and/or arduously difficult to significantly improve as the semester goes along.

As mentioned previously, I will not be looking for right or wrong answers: most of the prompts won't readily lend themselves to such definitive responses to begin with. They are instead intended to generate insightful and stimulating responses to your close-readings and class participation, and by doing so, give us more to work with in class. That said, if you truly feel that you have an answer and/or have solved a problem we've been struggling with in class, by all means go for it! You won't be penalized for doing so. I want you to take risks, go out on a limb within reason; I can't encourage you in this and at the same time deduct points for a worthy and interesting attempt. You also might find that your responses sometime consist in more than anything else, questions. The same can be said about our class discussions, given that most of the texts we will be reading and watching generate to this day ongoing critical-interpretive debates with no signs of any definitive resolutions on their respective horizons (in spite of the best efforts of readers and critics who are convinced otherwise about the superiority of their abilities). This is not only alright, but in many cases desired. Don't be afraid to say you don't understand something; just make sure that you *clearly* and *thoughtfully* spell out what it is you don't understand and how it relates to what you do or think you do understand.

### **Creative Mini-Project (40% of final grade) –**

For the final creative mini-project, you can write a short story, part of a script or screenplay, produce a painting, sculpture or graphic design, or, if you are so inclined, a short graphic story/comic. You can storyboard a film script or write the scenario for a video game or even write with your small groups a script to be acted out if you so wish. Whatever you choose to do, you will need to reflect in some way, shape or form one or more of the concepts from our class discussions and integrate them into and express them through your narrative. You could even extend a narrative thread or create a spin-off narrative from a favorite novel, TV series or movie. For example, you could write your own backstory or alternate ending or even comedic spoof of a character, narrative theme or plot point from, say, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*, *Cabin in the Woods*, *The Shining*, *Spirited Away*, *Dune* (the novel or one of the film adaptations), *The Watchmen* (comic or film adaptation), another H.P. Lovecraft short story or a Lovecraft-inspired story from the burgeoning field currently identified as the "new weird," (Laird Barron, Caitlin Kiernan, John Langan, Junji Ito's manga *Uzumaki* or

Alan Moore's *Providence* comic series), an episode of "The Twilight Zone," "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" or Japanese anime series, like "Death Note," "Attack on Titan," or "Mushi shi." Whichever you choose, I require that your final project be about 3-4 pages in length, though longer projects are welcome as well. First and foremost, this exercise is supposed to be fun and interesting, both for you and for me. As with the tests, I'm not going to penalize you for spelling or grammatical issues unless, of course, they become a front-and-center problem. I want you to primarily be focused on coming up with interesting and original ideas and take a stab at making them your own, creatively speaking. As long as I see that a sincere effort has been made to think through and bring to fruition your mini-creative project, I am more than happy to reward said effort with an excellent mark.

### **Participation— (30% total)**

**Participation in class discussions, debates, group work, etc.**—Even though it is a large class, it will be, per the syllabus, a discussion-based class just the same. As such, I will be keeping track, loosely speaking, of how helpful your contributions to the class discussions have been with an eye towards grading you in terms of how much you improve said contributions as the semester continues. I will not and cannot, due to the number of people in the class, keep exacting records of every time you speak up, hence why I will instead focus more on the bigger picture regarding the quality of your contributions rather than the quantity. Obviously, someone who doesn't speak much at all in turn doesn't contribute much to the class discussion. But not to fear (a statement you won't be hearing me say all that much this semester, given the nature of the texts we will be reading and watching): there will be plenty of small-to-medium group-work opportunities for you to earn your participation grade as well. I also count any substantive contact/communication with me outside of class towards your participation grade, but it should be noted that said contact/communication will not provide total cover as far as your final participation grade is concerned for someone who remains entirely quiet both in group and whole-class discussions.

If you have serious issues with public speaking and the like, I will do my utmost to help you develop a way to enter in to said discussions and improve your participation grade as we go along. Which brings us to...

### **Attendance:**

Given the importance of participation, naturally your attendance will be very important to your success in the class. You're allowed three unexcused absences; after the third unexcused absence your final grade will drop an entire letter-grade. Missing 7 or more classes constitutes grounds for failure. If you need to miss class, talk to me about it early. If you must be absent, it is your responsibility to check with a classmate to find out what you missed. In addition to regular class attendance, you will be responsible for all assigned reading material. Much of class time will consist of discussions of material read; student input is necessary. Attendance is a part of your participation grade.

### **Late Work:**

Without a previously-arranged agreement with me (the excuse's validity is to be determined by me and me alone), each late assignment will be deducted a half-letter grade; as of the second day, late

work will receive a failing grade. If an unexpected emergency or something of the sort arises, speak to me and I'll do my best to work something out between us. That said, it must be understood that, barring the most extreme circumstances—death in the family, significant injury or sickness, etc.—exceptions to the above late-work policy will be rare. In other words, outside of the above-mentioned extenuating circumstances, don't always assume my leniency in these matters.

### **Academic Integrity**

West Virginia University expects that every member of its academic community shares the historic and traditional commitment to honesty, integrity, and the search for truth. Academic dishonesty includes plagiarism, cheating and dishonest practices; and forgery, misrepresentation, or fraud. WVU's Academic Integrity Statement is at <<http://www.arc.wvu.edu/admissions/integrity.html>>.

### **WVU Social Justice Statement**

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and nondiscrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangement with Disability Services.

### **Tentative reading, screening, exam, and creative project schedule**

**\*\*Tests: Your completed exams will be due at the beginning of the class meeting on the date indicated within the following exam schedule.**

**\*\*All films will be made available on our class's WVU library**

**e-streaming page, linked on ecampus in the left-hand menu. You will simply click on the ecampus link and, once on the Library's e-reserve sign-in page, enter your MIX login info and, from there, click on our class, E132, and select the film assigned for that day.**

1/7—Introduction to the class: its format, policies, required texts, reading and exam schedule;

&

Discuss Teaming Brains webpage introduction to HP Lovecraft, Part 1 only

1/9—HP Lovecraft’s “The Call of Cthulu” ( free PDF or audiobook version,  
both available on ecampus),

&

Neil DeGrasse Tyson’s YouTube video “We Might Be Living in Higher Dimensions”  
(linked on ecampus under Secondary contextual and theoretical materials)

1/11— HP Lovecraft’s “The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” (either free PDF  
and/or audiobook version, available on ecampus.

Innsmouth is also available as an excellent full-on BBC  
audio-performance, with music and sound effects, also linked on ecampus)

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an excerpt from Mark Fisher’s *The Weird and the Eerie* on Lovecraft’s  
hypernaturalism and the weird “Outside,” to be emailed to the class but also linked on  
ecampus under Secondary contextual and theoretical materials.

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1/14— Victor Lavalle’s *The Ballad of Black Tom*, chapters 1-5

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My handout on the uncanny, to be emailed to the class but also linked on ecampus under  
Secondary contextual and theoretical materials.

1/16—Victor Lavalle’s *The Ballad of Black Tom*, chapters 6-14

1/18—Victor Lavalle’s *The Ballad of Black Tom*, chapters 14-End

1/21—Martin Luther King, Jr Day Recess—University Closed

1/23—Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, chapters 1-2 (available in hard-copy,

PDF & audiobook format, the latter two linked on ecampus)

1/25— Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, chapter 3-4

1/28— Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, chapters 5-6

1/30—Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, chapters 7-8

2/1— Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*, chapter 9

2/4—Clive Barker’s “The Hellbound Heart”. (available as both PDF and

audiobook format on ecampus.

It should be noted that the audiobook version linked on ecampus is read by none other than Clive Barker himself, complete with music and ambient sound effects)

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MR James’ “Oh Whistle My Lad and I Will Come”

2/6— HP Lovecraft’s “The Color Out of Space” (available in PDF and audiobook format on ecampus)

2/8—Jeff Vandermeer’s *Annihilation*, chapter 1 (available in either hard copy or PDF formatting, the latter linked on ecampus)

2/11—Jeff Vandermeer’s *Annihilation*, chapter 2-3

2/13—Jeff Vandermeer’s *Annihilation*, chapters 4

2/15—Jeff Vandermeer’s *Annihilation*, chapter 5

**\*\*Take-home exam #1 sent via email today, to be turned in at the beginning of class on 9/28 as a typed hardcopy**

2/18— Arthur C Clarke’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Foreword & chapters 1-8 (available in hard-copy,



PDF and audiobook formats, the latter two linked on ecampus)

2/20— Arthur C Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, chapters 9-14

2/22— Arthur C Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, chapters 15-20

**\*\*Take-home exam #1 due today at the beginning of class as a typed hardcopy**

2/25—Arthur C Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, chapters 21-25

2/27—Arthur C Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, chapters 26-32

3/1—Arthur C Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, chapters 33-40

3/4— Arthur C Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, chapters 41-47/End

3/6—Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (film linked on ecampus)

3/8— The Wachowski's *The Matrix* (film linked on ecampus)

3/9—3/17—Spring Recess

3/18— William Gibson's *Neuromancer* chapters 1-2 (available in hard-copy and audiobook format,  
the latter available on ecampus)

3/20—William Gibson's *Neuromancer* chapters 3-5

3/22—William Gibson's *Neuromancer* chapters 6-9

3/25—William Gibson's *Neuromancer* chapters 10-13

3/27—William Gibson's *Neuromancer* chapters 14-16

3/29—William Gibson's *Neuromancer* chapters 17-20

4/1—William Gibson's *Neuromancer* chapters 21-24 & Coda

4/3—Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (film linked on ecampus)

**\*\*Take-home exam #2 sent via email today, to be turned in at the beginning of class on 9/28  
as a typed hardcopy**

4/5—Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* (available in hardcopy and online graphic format)

&

Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*

4/8— Grant Morrison's *Arkham Asylum* (available in hardcopy and online graphic format)

4/10— Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*, Book 1, chapters 1-5 (available in hardcopy and online graphic format)

**\*\*Take-home exam #2 due today at the beginning of class as a typed hardcopy**

4/12— Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*, Book 1, chapters 6-11

4/15—Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*, Book 2, Prelude & chapters 1-10

4/17— Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*, Book 2, chapters 11-14

4/19—Spring Holiday, University Closed

4/22—Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta*, Book 3, chapters 1-End

4/24—The Wachowski's *V for Vendetta*

&

Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*

4/26—Last day of class—TBA--**Final creative project due today, either online or in-person, depending on the nature of the project.**