

Introduction to Science Fiction

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

November 29, 2023. VanderMeer (2).

review: words

ordinary function	weird function
referring	underspecifying
informing	misleading
promising	foretelling (creepily)
ordering	compelling (hypnotically)
communicating	contaminating (with spores)
being used	being alive
distinguishing	confounding (humans and non-)

response papers

The journals and other materials formed a moldering pile about twelve feet high and sixteen feet wide that in places near the bottom had clearly turned to compost, the paper rotting away. Beetles and silverfish tended to those archives, and tiny black cockroaches with always moving antennae. (111)

- ▶ What kind of writing is the “insane midden”? How could it be connected to the book itself?

old weird

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—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.

H.P. Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," *The Recluse I* (1927): 24, [Princeton University Library](#).

new weird

New Weird is a type of urban, secondary-world fiction that subverts the romanticized ideas about place found in traditional fantasy, largely by choosing realistic, complex real-world models as the jumping off point for creation of settings that may combine elements of both science fiction and fantasy. New Weird has a visceral, in-the-moment quality that often uses elements of surreal or transgressive horror for its tone, style, and effects—in combination with the stimulus of influence from New Wave writers or their proxies (including also such forebears as Mervyn Peake and the French/English Decadents). New Weird fictions are acutely aware of the modern world, even if in disguise, but not always overtly political. As part of this awareness of the modern world, New Weird relies for its visionary power on a “surrender to the weird” that isn’t, for example, hermetically sealed in a haunted house on the moors or in a cave in Antarctica. The “surrender” (or “belief”) of the writer can take many forms, some of them even involving the use of postmodern techniques that do not undermine the surface reality of the text.

sources of inspiration

- ▶ Watch the promotional trailer, “Life in the Broken Places with Jeff VanderMeer,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5stee_pAAU.
- ▶ What does this tell you about VanderMeer’s response to climate change?

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- ▶ [graffiti at St. Mark’s: “Ghost Bird Was Here”] (2:42)
- ▶ “conveying my books...a real experience of nature” (3:11)
- ▶ “I don’t think that this place here is not political” (3:29)

real nature?

But in front of me was the trail, strewn at times with oddly tortured-looking pieces of heavy white driftwood flung far inland from past hurricanes. Tiny red grasshoppers inhabited the long grass in legions, with only a few frogs present to feast on them, and flattened grass tunnels marked where the huge reptiles had, after bathing in the sun, slid back into the water. Above, raptors searched the ground below for prey, circling as if in geometric patterns so controlled was their flight. (90)

this is fine

The government's version of events emphasized a localized environmental catastrophe stemming from experimental military research. This story lead into the public sphere over a period of several months so that, like the proverbial frog in a hot pot, people found the news entering their consciousness gradually as part of the general daily noise of media oversaturation about ongoing ecological devastation. (94)

But in what had been kitchens or living rooms or bedrooms, I also saw a few peculiar eruptions of moss or lichen, rising four, five, feet tall, misshapen, the vegetative matter forming an approximation of limbs and heads and torsos. (96)

next

- ▶ finish the novel
- ▶ papers due Monday 10 p.m.!