

LIT 4930: Strange Weather

Professor Terry Harpold

Spring 2024, Section 1THA

Class meetings: Tu, per. 7, Th, pers. 7–8, Matherly 0113

office hours: Turlington 4105, Tu, 3–5 PM, and by appointment
email: tharpold@ufl.edu

home page for Terry Harpold: <https://people.clas.ufl.edu/tharpold/>

e-Learning (Canvas) site for LIT 4930 (*registered students only*): <https://elearning.ufl.edu/>

Imagining Climate Change: <https://imagining-climate.clas.ufl.edu/>

Course description



Aeschylus is fatally brained by a tortoise dropped by an eagle.
Maso Finiguerra, *A Florentine Picture-Chronicle* (c. 1460).

“We shall pick up an existence by its frogs” – Charles Fort, *Lo!* (1931)

This course is a survey of and a reflection on the modern literary imaginary of *strange weather*, by which I don’t mean merely “unseasonal” wind, rain, sleet, or snow. I mean the sorts of outlandishly unexpected and heretofore *never* seasonal phenomena that have manifested in one form or another in a long history of stories about the lower and upper atmospheres.

For example, the matter reported to have fallen from a region just beyond the Earth’s atmosphere that the American chronicler of occult phenomena and renegade philosopher of science Charles Hoy Fort (1874–1932)¹ christened the “Super-Sargasso-Sea.” This included a parade of “damned projectiles” such as fish (small and large, live, dead, fresh and rotting), frogs, insects, periwinkles, snakes,

gobbets of flesh, blood, mud, colored rains, edible solids, ice, punk, cannonballs,

¹ 2024, you’ll note, is the sesquicentennial of Charles Fort’s birth.

unworked and worked pieces of stone, etc. – there is a lot more of this kind of thing in centuries of credible reports of anomalous falls, torrents of weird stuff that shouldn't ever have been *up there* and shouldn't ever have fallen *down here*.

(A related history of damned projectiles. In the first century of the Common Era Pliny the Elder claimed that the Greek poet Aeschylus was killed by a tortoise falling on his head from an open sky.² It took nearly all of the 18th century and most of the 19th for European scientists to agree that rocks do sometimes fall from the heavens, even though the Greeks had documented the reality of meteorites as early as the fifth century BCE, and the Sumerians had done so two and half millennia earlier. Perhaps Aeschylus was watching out for the wrong sort of space junk?)

We will read from Fort's resolutely digressive and unsystematic writings on anomalous falls and strange weather, and from a related canon of short and long fiction recounting these phenomena – mostly early aeronautic fiction and science fiction from the latter half of the nineteenth century through to the first half of the twentieth century, when Fort's influence on Anglo-American sf was considerable – and from modern scientific literature that tries to make sense (i.e., explain in rational terms or explain away altogether) honest reports of odd detritus falling from over-crowded skies.

And then we'll turn to atmospheric anomalies and the emerging aerial imaginary of the late Anthropocene epoch when, as a common and unnervingly accurate cliché puts it, "abnormal [weather] is the new normal." We'll ask this question: what might we learn from fictions of the early technoscientific era, when human bodies first ventured into the skies, about the sources of our anxieties regarding unstable and unpredictable planetary weather, and from the abundant evidence of a deep human dread, as ancient as storytelling itself (e.g., *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the oral traditions of Aboriginal Australians), of an abject plenitude wandering above our heads?

Graded writing requirements include three short papers in response to assigned readings. Extra-credit service learning activities in the course include opportunities to take part in supervised volunteer tree plantings in and around the city of Gainesville.

² "[The eagle] has a clever device for breaking tortoise-shells that it has carried off, by dropping them from a height; this accident caused the death of the poet Aeschylus, who was trying to avoid a disaster of this nature that had been foretold by the fates, as the story goes, by trustfully relying on the open sky." Pliny, *Natural History*, Book 10, ch. 3 (Loeb Classical Library, 2nd edition, H. Rackham trans.)

Required texts to purchase

These texts are available at the UF Bookstore and from online vendors. I encourage you whenever possible to buy your texts from independent booksellers. If you choose to buy your texts online, I recommend sources such as [Abebooks.com](https://abebooks.com) and [Alibris.com](https://alibris.com) that serve independent booksellers.

Fort, Charles. *The Complete Books of Charles Fort*. Dover Publications, Inc., 1974. ISBN 9780486230948. 1152 pp. (print). *Also available in Apple Books and Kindle formats. N.B.: We will read two of the books included in this collection, comprising approx. 600 pages.*

Renard, Maurice. *The Blue Peril*. Translated by Brian Stableford, Black Coat Press, 2010. ISBN 9781935558170. 364 pp. (print). *Also available in Kindle format.*

Wells, H.G. *The War in the Air*. Introduction by Dave Duncan, Bison Books, 2002. 260 pp. (print) ISBN 9780803298316.

Other required and recommended texts

These texts are available at no cost via the course's electronic reserves (*Ares*, <https://ares.uflib.ufl.edu>). All are PDF files with searchable text layers or in comparable digital formats capable of being parsed by screen readers.

"A Philosophical Aviator." "Occult Revelations of a Flying Man." *The Occult Review* (UK) 26 (December 1917): 350–51.

Clarke, David. "The Scare in the Air: The British Airship Scare of 1909." *The Scareship Mystery: A Survey of Phantom Airship Scares, 1909–1918*, edited by Nigel Watson, Domra Publications, 2000, pp. 16–28, 153.

Collings, David A. "The God of the Whirlwind." *Stolen Future, Broken Present: The Human Significance of Climate Change*, Open Humanities Press, 2014, pp. 188–206.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. "The Horror of the Heights." Illus. Henry Reuter Dahl. *Everybody's Magazine* 29.5 (November 1913): 578–90.

———. "The Horror of the Heights." *The Strand Magazine*, vol. 46, no. 275, 1913, pp. 551–62.

- . "The Horror of the Heights." *The Lost World and Other Thrilling Tales*. Ed. Philip Gooden. London: Penguin Books, 2001. 321–6, 348–49.
- Gollin, Alfred M. "England Is No Longer An Island: The Phantom Airship Scare of 1909." *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1981, pp. 43–57.
- Gorman, Alice. "Junkyard Earth." *Dr. Space Junk vs. the Universe: Archaeology and the Future*, MIT Press, 2019, pp. 114–45, 279.
- Hampel, Eva. "Liminal Atmospheres: Ice and Chalk." *100 Atmospheres: Studies in Scale and Wonder*, edited by Material Ecologies Research Network, Open Humanities Press, 2019, pp. 95–116, 368–71.
- Haraway, Donna J. "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene." *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, 2016, pp. 30–57, 173–88.
- Kripal, Jeffrey J. "Scattering the Seeds of a Super-Story: Charles Fort and the Fantastic Narrative of Western Occulture." *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*, University of Chicago Press, 2010, pp. 92–141, 298–300.
- Lajuzan-Vigneau, Georges. "Letter – Occult Revelations of a Flying Man." *The Occult Review* (UK), vol. 27, 1918, pp. 231.
- Marsching, Jane D. "Orbs, Blobs, and Glows: Astronauts, UFOs, and Photography." *Art Journal*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2003, pp. 56–65.
- Page, Will A. "The Air Serpent." *Red Book Magazine* (April 1911): 1019–24.
- Raphael, John N. "Up Above: The Story of the Sky Folk." *Pearson's Magazine* (UK) 34 (December 1912): 709–60.
- Sleigh, Charlotte. "'An outcry of silences': Charles Hoy Fort and the Uncanny Voices of Science." *The Silences of Science: Gaps and Pauses in the Communication of Science*, edited by Felicity Mellor and Stephen Webster, Routledge, 2017, pp. 274–95.
- Spergel, David, et al. *Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena: Independent Study Team Report*. National Aeronautics and Space Administration, 2023.
- The Dreamer. "Armchair Reflections: Air Serpent Discovered." *Flight*, vol. 5, no. 48, 1913, pp. 1305.
- . "Armchair Reflections." *Flight*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1914, pp. 30.

The Hierophant's Apprentice. "FAFROTSKIES." *Fortean Times*, vol. 203, 2005, pp. 52–55.

Trainor, Joseph. "The New England Airship Invasion of 1909." *Fortean Studies*, vol. 1, 1994, pp. 59–70.

Whalen, Stephen and Bartholomew, Robert E. "The Great New England Airship Hoax of 1909." *The New England Quarterly*, vol. 75, no. 3, 2002, pp. 466–76.

Course Calendar

Course deadlines and events outside of normal class meeting times are indicated with an asterisk (*). Assigned readings should be completed by the start of the class meeting in which they are to be discussed. In the case of readings discussed over several class meetings you should have completed a corresponding portion of the reading for each of the meetings in which it is discussed (e.g., 2/3 of the text for the second of three meetings.)

Tu, Jan 9 *Course introduction*

Horrors of the heights

Th, Jan 11 Conan Doyle, "The Horror of the Heights" (*Everybody's Magazine* + Penguin + *Strand* versions)
Page, "The Air Serpent"

Tu, Jan 16 *TH lecture: "Air Serpents, Air Spiders, and Other Blue Perils"*
"A Philosophical Aviator," "Occult Revelations of a Flying Man"
Lajuzan-Vigneau, "Letter – Occult Revelations of a Flying Man"
The Dreamer, "Armchair Reflections: Air Serpent Discovered"
The Dreamer, "Armchair Reflections"

Th, Jan 18 Renard, *The Blue Peril*

Tu, Jan 23 Renard, *The Blue Peril*

Th, Jan 25 Renard, *The Blue Peril*
Raphael, *Up Above*

Tu, Jan 30 Raphael, *Up Above*

“...by its frogs...”

Th, Feb 1 *TH Lecture: “Fort’s Falling Fictions”*
The Hierophant’s Apprentice, “FAFROTSKIES”
Fort, *The Book of the Damned*, chs 1–6

*** Fri, Feb 2 First response essay due by 5 PM**

Tu, Feb 6 Fort, *The Book of the Damned*, chs. 7–15

Th, Feb 8 Fort, *The Book of the Damned*, chs. 16–28

Tu, Feb 13 Fort, *Lo!*, chs. 1–10

Th, Feb 15 Fort, *Lo!*, chs. 11–19

Tu, Feb 20 Fort, *Lo!*, chs. 20–32

Th, Feb 22 Kripal, “Scattering the Seeds of a Super-Story”
Sleigh, “An outcry of silences”

Tu, Feb 27 Cutchin text *TBA*

*** Tu, Feb 27 The Charles Fort Sesquicentennial Symposium, with guest speakers
Jeffrey Kripal and Joshua Cutchin**

Th, Feb 29 *Open class discussion*

“What rain I don’t know”

Tu, Mar 5 Constable, “Eye into the Ethers”
Marsching, “Orbs, Blobs, and Glows”

Th, Mar 7 Gorman, “Junkyard Earth”
Additional assigned reading TBA

*** Fri, Mar 8 Second response essay due by 5 PM**

Tu–Th, Mar 12–14 *No class meetings (UF Spring Break)*

Come take a trip in my scareship

Tu, Mar 19 Clarke, “The Scare in the Air”
 Gollin, “England Is No Longer An Island”
 Trainor, “The New England Airship Invasion of 1909”

Th, Mar 21 Wells, *The War in the Air*

Tu, Mar 26 Wells, *The War in the Air*

Th, Mar 28 Wells, *The War in the Air*

Tu, April 2 Spergel, “Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena”

Tipping points of the new dominant

Th, April 4 *Assigned reading TBA*

Tu, April 9 Hampel, Eva. “Liminal Atmospheres: Ice and Chalk”

Th, April 11 Haraway, “Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene”

Tu, April 16 Collings, “The God of the Whirlwind”

Th, April 18 *Assigned reading TBA*

Tu, April 23 *Final class meeting*
Course debriefing

*** Tu, April 30 Third response essay due by 5 PM**

Evaluation of Performance, Attendance Requirements & Other Course Policies

Your final grade in this course will be determined by the average grade of three short essays in response to texts we have read and discussed in class. The essays are due about every five weeks.

Each essay must be between 1500 and 1800 words in length, not including a list of works cited, which *must* be included. Each essay must demonstrate a close critical reading of a passage or passages from an assigned text that you find of particular interest or significance in relation to themes and methods of the course. Your essays may be turned in at any time up to and including the deadlines stipulated in the syllabus, and you may write on any text you choose so long it was assigned for class discussion in the corresponding third of the semester. Early in the semester I will distribute guidelines for completing this assignment.

Extra-credit options. This course includes extra-credit options that may be used to raise your final grade. Extra credit may be earned for your participation in two types of events closely associated with themes and methods of the course: 1) the Trees! volunteer tree planting initiative; 2) guest lectures and symposia sponsored by Imagining Climate Change. Three to four events of each type are scheduled for this semester. You may earn extra credit for attending up to three of these events. Extra credit is earned simply for participating in a Trees! volunteer planting (your attendance will be automatically noted). To earn extra credit for attending an ICC event, you must submit a 300 word essay on the event, in the form of a summary of the guest speaker's presentation, or a summary of one or more of the guest speakers' presentations in the case of a multi-speaker event. This essay must be sent to me by email no later than three days following the last day of the ICC event. This essay option must meet minimal requirements for accuracy and completeness, which I will explain in class.

For each extra-credit event, you will earn 1 point applied after the calculation of your final grade. You may earn this credit for *up to three* extra-credit events. Thus, a student with a final average of 87 (an A-) who took part in two tree plantings and attended one ICC event (for which she wrote a report) would have her reported final grade raised to 90 (an A). Note, however, an important restriction on the extra credit that you may earn. If you seek credit for participating in more than one event, they must include events of both kinds. You can earn extra credit for one planting plus one ICC event, but not for only two plantings or only two ICC events. If you seek extra credit for three events, at least one of them must be of a different type than the others.

Trees! (extra-credit option). A growing body of scientific evidence shows that encouraging the regeneration of natural forests and planting new trees on treeless lands are among the most economical and effective climate change mitigation solutions available to us.³ You may receive extra course credit by taking part in a local effort to increase our forest canopy.

Since early 2019, UF's Imagining Climate Change initiative has worked closely with the Alachua County Department of Land Conservation and Management (opens in new tab) to coordinate volunteer tree plantings in and around the city of Gainesville. The plantings emphasize high-value tree species appropriate for site conditions on County owned right-of-ways, developed County properties, and properties directly influencing the public sphere. Of priority are trees that provide shade for bicycling and human pedestrians, provide erosion control, extend forest canopy, and support wildlife biodiversity and carbon sequestration. The most recent census (2021) showed that 98% of trees planted in this initiative remain in excellent health.

Tree plantings are fun, low-effort undertakings to beautify our community and to help foster a sustainable local ecosystem for decades to come.⁴ Pretty much, you help to dig a hole a few feet deep, drop in a juvenile tree, refill, brace, bank the tree with mulch, water, and repeat. No prior tree planting experience is necessary. Needed tools, reflective safety vests, and vegan snacks are provided. A filled personal water bottle is strongly recommended, as access to potable water on site may be limited. You should wear lightweight but sturdy outdoor clothing and closed-toed shoes. Gloves suitable for garden work, a hat, protective eyewear (eyeglasses or sunglasses), sunscreen, and insect repellent are recommended. Typically, a planting takes 3–4 hours, usually beginning around 9 AM. You must complete a volunteer release form, provided on site, before the planting begins. See <http://imagining-climate.clas.ufl.edu/trees> for planting dates and locations and for a photographic gallery of previous plantings. *The Alachua County Department of Land Conservation and Management is unaffiliated with the University of Florida.*

Imagining Climate Change events (extra-credit option). Several UF events this semester sponsored by the Imagining Climate Change initiative (<https://imagining->

³ Bastin, Jean-François, *et al.*, "The Global Tree Restoration Potential." *Science* 365, 76–79 (2019) <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/365/6448/76>; Lewis, S.L., "Regenerate Natural Forests to Store Carbon," *Nature* 568: 25-28 (2019) <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01026-8>.

⁴ Andreu, M.G. *et al.*, Urban Forest Ecological Analysis. Report to the City of Gainesville, March 2017. City of Gainesville, Florida, 2017 <http://sfrc.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/GNV-ECO-Report-2016.pdf>. Gainesville has been an Arbor Day Foundation "Tree City USA" since 1983. it was named a "Tree City of the World" by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 2020.

climate.clas.ufl.edu) are of direct relevance to this course. I encourage you to review the ICC schedule of events and plan on attending as many events as possible.

Grading scheme and graded assignments. The evaluation method in this course is consistent with UF's policies on grading (<http://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>).

Grades are calculated on a numeric scale, as below:

A	90–100	A–	87–89		
B+	84–86	B	80–83	B–	77–79
C+	74–76	C	70–73	C–	67–69
D+	64–66	D	60–63	D–	57–59

A grade of 56 or below is a failing grade (E). A minimum final grade of C is required for General Education Credit.

If you do not complete an assignment, you will receive a grade of 0. If you feel that you've been unfairly graded on an assignment, you may make a case in writing for a better grade. I will consider no grade changes without this written rationale.

You may make up a missed assignment only if you have a written medical excuse from a doctor, a signed letter from a judge or law enforcement officer (if you are called for jury duty or to testify in court, for example), or if a death or serious illness or injury occurs in your family. You should contact me as soon as possible when you anticipate a delay in submission of graded work.

Attendance & lateness. The text, and concepts we will review are complex and challenging. You cannot reasonably expect to master them if you do not keep up with required reading assignments and come to class prepared and on time. Class discussions will often include review of materials not among the assigned texts. For these reasons, your presence in class is essential and is required. **After four absences, I reserve the right to lower your final course grade by five points for each additional class that you miss.** I treat excused and unexcused absences alike in this regard. It is your responsibility to keep track of your absences and to make sure that you complete all required work. If you must miss class, make sure that you turn in any assignments due for that day, and that you are ready if another assignment is due on the day you return to class. In the event of a prolonged illness or other emergency you should notify me as soon as possible so that we may make provisions to insure that you do not fall behind.

Lateness is disruptive to others in the classroom, and is strongly discouraged. If you are more than 15 minutes late to class, this will be considered an absence.

If you have special requirements because of disability, do not hesitate to bring those to my attention so that I may make appropriate accommodations. Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the UF Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>) by providing appropriate documentation.

If you are unable to attend any part of a class meeting or work on a course assignment because these coincide with the timing of religious observances, you must notify me of this conflict well in advance, so that we may make appropriate adjustments to relevant assignment deadlines.

Use of computers and other electronic devices in class. The use of personal computers and other electronic devices in class is acceptable for purposes related to class discussion and collaboration. Casual WWW browsing, emailing, chatting, texting, etc., unrelated to class activities will not be tolerated. Apart from those times when I have approved their use in advance, cell phones, pagers, and similar communication devices may not be used during class meetings, and must be set to silent ring at the start of class.

Recordings of class meetings. University of Florida policy requires me to add the following statement to my syllabus:

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part,

any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

See this page for the University's guidelines on recording class lectures:

<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/code-change-faq/> .

Course evaluation. Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Title IX and gender equity. Title IX is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity in federally funded education programs or activities. Title IX addresses sexual harassment, sexual violence, or any gender-based discrimination that may deny a person access to educational benefits and opportunities. Under Title IX, schools must ensure that all students and employees have equal access to education and educational facilities, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The UF Office for Accessibility and Gender Equity (<https://titleix.ufl.edu>) provides support to anyone affected by sexual or gender-based misconduct, harassment, or discrimination. As the instructor of this course I am considered an Official with Authority who is required to report violations of UF's gender equity policy.

Policy on academic honesty. The University community's policies and methods regarding academic honesty, your obligations to me and mine to you with regard to academic honesty, are clearly spelled out in the UF Student Honor Code, which is available online at <http://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/students/student-conduct-code/>.

Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated in this course. Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to:

- Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or oral information in the preparation of graded assignments submitted for this course.

- Substitution of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another individual or individuals.
- False claims of performance or work submitted by a student for requirements of this course.

I am obliged to act on any suspected act of academic misconduct. This may include a reduced or failing grade for the course as a whole or other disciplinary proceedings, as per the recommendation of the Dean of Students. If you have any concern that you may not have made appropriate use of the work of others in your research or writing for this course, please confer with me before you submit the assignment. You should retain all graded materials that you receive from me until you receive your final course grade.

Emergency services. U Matter, We Care serves as the umbrella program for UF's caring culture and provides students in distress with support and coordination of a wide variety of appropriate resources. Contact umatter@ufl.edu seven days a week for assistance if you are in distress. Call 352-392-1575 for a crisis counselor overnight and during weekends. Note also these support services:

- The University Counseling Center – 301 Peabody Hall, 352-392-1575; <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu>
- Student Health Care Center – 352-392-1171
- Career Resource Center, Reitz Union – 352-392-1601
- Center for Sexual Assault/Abuse Recovery and Education (CARE), Student Health Care Center – 352-392-1161
- University Police Department – 352-392-1111 (non-emergency); *call 9-1-1 for emergencies*

Policy on environmentally unsustainable activity in the classroom. When possible I will distribute all course materials via paper-sparing digital media. I encourage you to purchase e-book editions of assigned texts when they are available, or used copies of print texts, and to return those to circulation if you choose not to keep them at the end of the course. (Donating your unwanted books to the Alachua County Friends of the Library annual book sale (<http://folacld.org>) is a good way to get them into other readers' hands and to help raise a bit of cash for our county's excellent but criminally underfunded public libraries.) If you do elect to keep your books, share them with others after the course is over. And a final appeal to your common sense: bring food and/or beverages to the classroom only in reusable containers. Please, no food or beverages in single-use containers and no single-use, unrecyclable cutlery or straws.