
Course description

_Flectere si nequeo superos, Aceronta movebo_ – Virgil, *The Aeneid*

We shall pick up an existence by its frogs – Charles Fort, *Lo!*

Angered by Aeneas’s impertinent foray into the underworld and by Jove’s disinterest in punishing him, the goddess Juno summons furies to wreak her revenge upon the errant Trojan: “If I can sway no heavenly hearts, I’ll rouse the world below.” Her threat has become a classic reminder of the unhappy consequences of crossing forbidding
boundaries. Sigmund Freud’s choice of Virgil’s line as the motto of his masterpiece *The Interpretation of Dreams* is an acknowledgment of the seductive force of the spatial taboo: the other scene, the space over there, irresistibly draws our eye and mind towards it; but our journey over the threshold is perilous.

Charles Fort, the twentieth century’s greatest chronicler of occult phenomena, suggests that the spirit of an age is best understood by looking to the rubbish that spills from its edges. To match the well-behaved domains of modern physics and geography, he wryly proposed a contrarian region he called the “Super-Sargasso Sea,” located somewhere above the Earth’s upper atmosphere. From there tumble falls of fish, frogs, periwinkles, insects, blood, colored dusts, ice, stones, bricks, and myriad edible stuffs – flotsam and jetsam well-documented in the popular and scientific record that appears to defy “reasonable” explanations. Within those superabundant terrains Fort also located the waystations of fairy lights and improbable airships, the shadowy towers of the Fata Morgana, and the battlefields of angelic armies.

To ask if Fort “really” meant to claim that the heavens are chock-full of angels, frogs, and other junk is to miss a broader significance of eyewitness testimony that the sky is falling. Looking up or down, to the center or the periphery, the other scene insists on being attended to. Reasonable imaginaries of space are bounded, are supported, by more fractious and unreasonable forms. These we commonly treat as fables, mirages, or the products of madness or artistic perverseness. The more interesting problem, as Freud and Fort understood, is not why eccentric spaces appear undisciplined, mischievous or nugatory; but how it is that “normal” spaces do not.

This course is an eclectic survey of spatial imaginaries in modern fiction. (Though our discussions will touch on the conceptual genealogy of “cyberspace,” we will not address that vexed spatial tradition directly.) Readings for the course will include novels, novellas and short stories by J.G. Ballard, Alfed Bester, Jorge Luis Borges, Shelley Jackson, Xavier de Maistre, Georges Perec, Edgar Allan Poe, Herbert Read, Marilynne Robinson, Jules Verne, and Elinor Wylie, and most of Peter Fitting’s edited collection, *Subterranean Worlds: A Critical Anthology.*

Course requirements include a take-home midterm, an annotated research bibliography, and a final paper.

**Required texts**

These texts are available for purchase at Goerings Book Store, 1717 NW 1st Avenue (voice: 377-3703). Note: several of these texts are available in other English translations or editions. Only the translations and editions listed below are acceptable for this course.


These texts are held on electronic reserve (ERes) at UF’s George A. Smathers Libraries <http://eres.uflib.ufl.edu> or are available online from other sources.


**Other resources**

As the semester progresses, I will post information about texts or resources discussed in class, but not among the assigned readings, to an “Other resources” web page, at <http://www.english.ufl.edu/~tharpold/courses/spring06/lit4930/resources.html>. You should review this page from time to time for suggestions regarding supplemental readings, pointers to online research materials, etc.

**Attendance, assignments, & grading**

**Attendance & lateness**

The texts we will read are complex, subtle, and challenging. You cannot reasonably expect to master them if you do not keep up with all required reading assignments and come to class prepared and on time. Moreover, our discussions in class will often include review of materials not among the assigned readings. For these reasons, your presence in class is essential and is required. *After two 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 for the course. 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 20 minutes late to class, this will be considered an absence.

If you have special classroom access, seating, or other needs because of disability, please do not hesitate to bring those to my attention, so that I may make appropriate accommodations for them.

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.

**The use of computers and other electronic devices in class**

Students may use laptop computers and other portable electronic devices in class for the purposes of taking notes during class discussion or for in-class presentations. WWW browsing, emailing, chatting, etc., unrelated to class activities is inappropriate and will not be tolerated. In the event of a violation of this policy, I reserve the right to prohibit the use of all electronic devices in class by individual students and/or the class as a whole. Cell phones, pagers, and other communication devices may not be used during class meetings, and must be turned off at the start of class.

**Assignments & grading**

Your final grade will be determined by the average of three written assignments:

- Take-home midterm: 35%
- Annotated research bibliography: 15%
- Final paper (9–12 pages): 50%

Grades are calculated on a numerical scale, as below:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<td>A</td>
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A grade of 59 or below is a failing grade. 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 turn in an assignment late without penalty only if you have a written medical excuse for the day of the class meeting 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.

Format, topics, & due dates of writing assignments

The take-home midterm and the final paper must be submitted on paper, have been composed with a computer or word processor, and must follow guidelines on format and citation methods that I will distribute in class. You must submit two copies of every print assignment. I will keep one copy, and return the other to you, marked with my comments and corrections.

The take-home midterm is open-book and will require that you respond to two short essay questions. It will be distributed at the end of class on February 22, and will be due at the beginning of class on March 1.

You may not collaborate with any other person when working on this exam. Because it is intended to be a time-limited review of your understanding of course readings and discussions, the penalty for an exam returned after the deadline is severe: for each day that your completed exam is late, ten points will be deducted from the grade for that exam. I will not accept any exam that is turned in later than three days after its due date, in which case a grade of 0 will be given for the exam.

The annotated research bibliography is an exercise in collaborative research on subjects related to the concerns of the course. To complete this assignment, you must identify a short list of print and electronic scholarly sources related to texts and/or themes of the course, relevant to the projected topic of a research paper. You will be required to document these sources carefully, and to write a short abstract of each with sufficient detail and discernment that others might find these abstracts useful for their research. You will transmit electronic copies of your bibliography to me (in a format and a method that I will specify) for review and grading. This assignment is due April 5.

I will collate the bibliographies produced by students in the class and redistribute them to the class in the form of a single document that may serve as a valuable resource in your research for the final paper.

The final paper (10–12 pages) may be on any subject relevant to texts and concerns of the course, but must reflect the research project implicit in your annotated research bibliography. It is due by 5 PM, May 3, one week after the final class meeting.
Penalties for research bibliographies or final papers turned in after their respective deadlines are significant: for each day that one of these assignments is late, five points will be deducted from the grade for that assignment. A weekend counts as 1 day in this scheme.

There are no other graded assignments in this course. I do not give “make-up” or “extra-credit” assignments. There is no final exam in this course.

**Policy on academic honesty**

The University community’s policies and methods regarding academic honesty are clearly spelled out in the Academic Honesty Guidelines. The Guidelines are printed in full in the current Undergraduate Catalog, and are available online from the Office of Student Judicial Affairs home page of the Dean of Students Office WWW site, at <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/>.

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.
Course calendar

Species of spaces

Jan 11
Course introduction
Borges, “Of Exactitude in Science” (*Photocopied handout*)

Jan 18
Borges, “The Aleph”
Diolé, “Tamrit”

Jan 25
Perec, *Species of Spaces*

The goblin chamber

Feb 1
Ballard, “The Enormous Space”
Jackson, “Cancer”
Maistre, *A Journey Around My Room*

Feb 8
Robinson, *Housekeeping*

Feb 15
Ballard, *Concrete Island*

Feb 22
Wylie, *The Venetian Glass Nephew*
Take-home midterm distributed

The sky is falling

Mar 1
Doyle, “The Horror of the Heights”
Fort, *The Book of the Damned*, chs. 7–8
Gudger, “Rains of Fishes”
The Hierophant’s Apprentice, “FAFROTSKIES”
Take-home midterm due
We live inside

Mar 8  Fitting, *Subterranean Worlds* (all but chs. 11 & 12)

Mar 15  **No class meeting (Spring Break)**

Mar 22  Verne, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*

Mar 29  Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

Apr 5  Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*

Annotated research bibliography due

Apr 12  Read, *The Green Child*

William of Newburgh, “Concerning the Green Children”

Tiger, tiger

Apr 19  Bester, *The Stars My Destination*

Apr 26  *No assigned reading – course review*

**Final class meeting**

May 3  **Research paper due (5 PM)**