



William Blake, from *The Book of Urizen* (1795)

CORE 102: Strange Encounters

Fall 2024

Mon/Weds 2–3:50pm
WPH 103

Dr. Beatrice Sanford Russell
sanfordb@usc.edu

Office Hours: Mon 4–5pm, Fri 1–2pm
THH 404F

Course Description

A god goes to bed with a human; a group of shipwrecked mariners steal the indigenous magic of the native islanders; a close-knit family fights off their zombie doppelgangers. Through narratives like these, this class explores histories of strange encounters as reflected in literature, art, and film. We will not treat strangeness as a fixed category; part of the fun of the semester will lie in discovering how what counts as strange has meant different things in different times and places, and to different people. Sometimes the strange has been a site of worship or desire, other times of hostility or outright violence. We will be particularly interested in strange experiences that do not fall simply into one camp or another—experiences that vibrate between fascination and fear, and that disclose the historical complexity of our relationship to what is alien or unknown.

We will spend time in three domains. First, supernatural encounters. What was it like to wrestle with God, to be haunted by ghosts, to be persecuted by otherworldly creatures? How do threads of the supernatural stitch through the fabric of the ordinary? Second, colonial encounters. Why did cultural otherness become shot through with brutality? Indeed, how do histories of colonialism expose the very idea of “culture” as inextricable from practices of violence? Third and finally, self-encounter. How do ideas like Freud’s theory of the uncanny or Jung’s shadow redescribe the self as a site of mystery and peril? What are the stakes, and perhaps the limitations, of navigating what Adrienne Rich described as the “psychic geography” of our own interior life?

Learning Objectives

At the end of this course you will be able to:

- Read actively and critically by underlining key words and passages, noting moments of ambiguity, and writing comments and questions in the margins;
- Reflect on and creatively respond to your own experiences of the strange;
- Analyze moments of literary ambiguity or ambivalence to tease out contradiction and nuance;
- Create an original work that explores a puzzle or topic relating to strangeness;
- Comparatively explain how different works across media shape strange encounters through their use of language, imagery, or symbolism.

Assignments

You will keep a **reading journal** in which you record and respond to memorable passages from our course texts, as well as note down other encounters with strangeness from your own life. You will write **three short reaction pieces** in which you reflect on one thing you encountered on our field trips. The journal and reaction pieces will provide the basis for a **reflective essay** on what you have learned in this class and on your own developing attitudes towards what is strange.

You will write a **close analysis** of a particular moment that interests you in one of our texts, unpacking its ambivalence and/or use of ambiguity.

You will make a **creative work** in a format of your choice (written, visual, video, etc.) that explores a strange encounter, along with a **critical essay** that comparatively situates your work in relation to issues raised within our course texts.

Assignment	Points
Reaction Pieces (3 at 35 points each)	105
Analysis	120
Reading Journal	120
Participation	150
Reflective Essay	155
Creative Piece and Critical Essay	350

Final Grade: A 930–1000; A- 895–929; B+ 870–894; B 830–869; B- 795–829; C+ 770–794; C 730–769

Course Books

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (Cambridge, ed. A. R. Braunmuller)

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Cambridge, ed. David Lindley)

Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest* (Theatre Communications Group, trans. Richard Miller)

Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Graywolf)

Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (Graywolf)

Please get these exact editions, and purchase physical books—not ebooks. (Physical books are easier on the eyes and better for the brain; ask me if you would like to see the research.)

All other readings will be provided on Brightspace. Unless otherwise stated, you must print out course readings and annotate them by hand, bringing them with you to class.

Expectations

You will:

- **attend class regularly and on time.** Please clear legitimate absences—for illness, religious holidays, or emergencies—with me beforehand. After three unexcused absences, each further unexcused absence will cost ten points from your participation grade. Three instances of tardiness count as an unexcused absence.
- **closely read assigned texts**, printing out texts and making notes while you read, and come to class prepared for discussion.
- **work to produce creative and intelligent writing.** All work should be your own. You should not consult ChatGPT, Grammarly, or other AI resources.
- **turn your work in on time.** Assignments will be penalized by ten points for each day that they are late. Contact me ahead of time if you will need an extension.

I will:

- **prepare for class time** while remaining flexible to respond to your interests, questions, and concerns.
- **approach each day with enthusiasm** and an openness to learning alongside you.
- **communicate clearly and in a timely manner** about assignments, deadlines, and grading criteria.
- **be available** over email and during office hours to discuss issues relating to the course, and to serve as a resource for your reading, thinking, and writing.
- **read your work carefully, provide thoughtful feedback, and evaluate it fairly** according to clear standards.

Note on AI

This course is designed to help you grow as a reader, a thinker, and a writer. This growth requires direct contact with language, even if that contact involves making mistakes or hitting creative dead-ends. AI cannot do your learning for you!

Any use of AI to help you write will be considered a violation of the academic honor code and may result in failure for an assignment or in the class. This includes the use of Grammarly to suggest alternative words or sentence constructions. There are many AI apps out there; please ask if you have any questions about what constitutes an improper use of AI.

Schedule of Readings

	Readings	Tasks
	Unit 1: Supernatural Encounters	
Week 1 Aug 26	Genesis 32: 22–31 Exodus 33: 7–23	
Aug 28	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> Bk 1:416–779 Apuleius, <i>The Golden Ass</i> , “Eros and Psyche”	
Week 2 Sept 2	LABOR DAY – NO CLASS	
Sept 4	William Shakespeare, <i>Macbeth</i> , Acts 1–2	
Week 3 Sept 9	<i>Macbeth</i> , Acts 3–4	
Sept 11	<i>Macbeth</i> , Act 5	
Week 4 Sept 16	Akira Kurosawa, <i>Throne of Blood</i>	
Sept 18	Samuel Taylor Coleridge, <i>Christabel</i>	
Week 5 Sept 23	Revelation 6:1–8:1 Ingmar Bergman, <i>The Seventh Seal</i>	Turn in analysis
Sept 25	*Field Trip to The Getty Center to see “Lumen: The Art and Science of Light”*	
	Unit 2: Colonial Encounters	
Week 6 Sept 30	Review	Turn in reaction #1
Oct 2	William Shakespeare, <i>The Tempest</i> , Acts 1–2	
Week 7 Oct 7	<i>The Tempest</i> , Acts 3–4	
Oct 9	<i>The Tempest</i> , Act 5	
Week 8 Oct 14	Aimé Césaire, <i>A Tempest</i>	

Oct 16	Tsitsi Dangarembga, <i>Nervous Conditions</i>	
Week 9 Oct 21	<i>Nervous Conditions</i>	
Oct 23	<i>Nervous Conditions</i>	
Week 10 Oct 28	Review	
Oct 30	*Field Trip to Autry Museum of the American West to see “Future Imaginaries: Indigenous Art, Fashion, Technology”*	
	Unit 3: Self Encounters	
Week 11 Nov 4	Thomas De Quincey, “The Apparition of the Brocken” Maya Deren, <i>Meshes of the Afternoon</i> Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny”	Turn in reaction #2
Nov 6	William Blake, <i>The Book of Urizen</i>	
Week 12 Nov 11	VETERANS’ DAY – NO CLASS	
Nov 13	William Blake, <i>The Book of Los</i>	Turn in journal and reflective essay
Week 13 Nov 18	Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, <i>Everything Everywhere All at Once</i>	
Nov 20	*Field Trip to The Broad to see Yayoi Kusama’s Infinity Mirror Room*	
Week 14 Nov 25	Claudia Rankine, <i>Don’t Let Me Be Lonely</i>	Turn in reaction #3
Nov 27	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – NO CLASS	
Week 15 Dec 2	<i>Don’t Let Me Be Lonely</i>	
Dec 4	Jordan Peele, <i>Us</i>	
Week 16		Turn in creative piece and critical essay

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.