ENG 192: Why Is This So Weird? Critical Approaches to "Weird" TV, Movies, and Literature

Course Description:

You’re watching or reading something and slowly your skin starts to crawl—you don’t know exactly how to put it into words, but something about it just feels… weird. This class will explore how specific notions of weirdness have been defined and discussed in film, TV, literature, and other popular media, with the goal of better understanding what it is we’re really reacting to when we deem something "weird." From the unsettling neo-noir of David Lynch and the uncanny domestic spaces of Blake Butler, to Surrealist works by Luis Buñuel and Leonora Carrington, and even to viral videos and web series (such as Poppy’s YouTube presence)—we’ll interrogate and question our understanding of and reactions to things we find "weird," as well as the expectations and cultural narratives that are often engaged by such "weird" media and texts.

In addition to examining specific artistic theories and concepts that often intersect with or encompass media we find strange (including Surrealism, the Lynchian, and the uncanny, among others), students will work toward their own definition of weirdness, with special consideration to the artistic, cultural, and political utility of "weird" narratives. Questions we’ll return to throughout the semester include: How does weirdness relate to specific narrative and genre conventions? How does that which we find weird help shed light on assumptions of normativity and certain mainstream myths and values? What kinds of cultural fears and anxieties might be illustrated through a critical examination of weird media?