Voices in Visionary Poetics
Professor John Phillip Santos

There is poetry in the everyday, poetry in the stories of history, poetry of philosophy. This seminar will study the other long tradition of poetic expression that has emerged from visionary experience, interactions between the human and the divine, the human and the supernatural, the human and super-human, from earliest texts to the contemporary. What shapes a poetics informed by visions and wonders? What roles have such poetics played in envisioning important social change? How might we set out to practice a visionary poetics? Beginning with an examination of biblical and other ancient sources, works of such authors as Hildegard of Bingen, Dante, Edmund Spenser, Sir Thomas Browne, Thomas Traherne, Christopher Smart, William Blake, Charles Olson, Laura (Riding) Jackson, and James Merrill will be examined. Some of these are long and challenging important texts. This course will combine scholarly study and creative writing.

Every student will prepare an informal weekly one-page response to assigned readings. Each week, two students will be designated discussion leaders. There will be a mid-term project (8-10 pages) and a final project (20 pages), and each student will be responsible for maintaining a complete portfolio of their semester writings, which will be submitted along with the final project at the term’s end. ¼ of the grade will be for class participation, ¼ for the weekly writings, ¼ for the mid-term project, and ¼ for the final project.

As much of the course’s work will take place through in-class group reading, critique, dialogue and discussion, punctual attendance is compulsory, and any more than one absence requires pre-approval. The quality of your engaged, non-virtual presence is invaluable; hence texting and other forms of real-time wi-fi social media are only permitted (for consequential exchanges) immediately before and after class---otherwise strictly prohibited.

Required Texts:
- Book of Revelations
- Edmund Spenser, Faerie Queene
- Dante, La Vita Nuova
- Christopher Smart, Jubilate Agno
- William Styron, Darkness Visible
- William Blake, Collected Writings, ed. By David Erdman
- William Wordsworth, The Prelude (1805 version)
- Laura (Riding) Jackson, The Telling
- Robert Graves, The White Goddess
- David Jones, The Anathemáta
- John Matthias, Trigons
- James Merrill, The Changing Light at Sandover
- John Phillip Santos, The Farthest Home is in an Empire of Fire

Other readings and media will be available on library hold or via Blackboard and the Web.
9/4
**What is Visionary Poetics?**

Sir Thomas Browne, “Hydriotaphia”
Thomas Traherne, *Century of Meditation* (excerpt provided in class)

9/11
**Invocations of Visionary Hermeneutics**

*Book of Revelations*
Christopher Columbus, Prophecies (Selections provided)
Dante, *La Vita Nuova*
George Steiner, “On Difficulty”

9/18
**Imagining a Visionary Epic**

Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Bk. I
William Butler Yeats’s “Spenser” essay

9/25
**Imagining a Visionary Epic**

Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Bk. V, “Proem” & Bk. VI
Fim: *Koyanissqatsi*, by Godfrey Reggio

10/2
**Visionary Experience & Madness**

Christopher Smart, *Jubilate Agno*
William Styron, *Darkness Visible*

10/9
**Visions of the Other**

*Florentine Codex*, Bk. 6
Nezahualcoyotl, (selected poems)
Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, “Dream I”

10/16
**Creating a Visionary Cosmos**

William Blake, “Marriage of Heaven and Hell” & “The Book of Urizen”
10/23
Creating a Visionary Cosmos
William Blake, “Jerusalem”

10/30
Visionary Autobiography
William Wordsworth, “The Prelude”
Charles Olson, The Maximus Poems (Selections)

11/6
The Utopian Visionary
Laura (Riding) Jackson, The Telling & audiotape of speech (provided)
Robert Graves, The White Goddess

11/13
The Dystopian Visionary
David Jones, The Anathémata
John Matthias, Trigons

11/20
The Automatic Visionary
William Butler Yeats, A Vision (Selections)
James Merrill, The Changing Light at Sandover

11/27
Visionary Practices in Deep Time
Terrence McKenna, Archaic Revival
J.P. Santos, The Farthest Home is in an Empire of Fire

Presentation of Term Projects I

12/4
Presentation of Term Projects II