

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
SUMMER 2011 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

ENGL 502: CONTEMPORARY LITERARY AND CULTURAL THEORY

**Bruce R. Smith, Tuesdays and Thursdays, May 19 to June 14, 4:30 to 6:50 pm
Course Number 050-32771D**

“He sent thither his Theōry, or solemn legation for sacrifice, decked in the richest garments” (George Grote, *A History of Greece*, 1853). A deft hand with the sacrificial knife is not required for this course; only two feet and a peripatetic itch. *Theors* in ancient Greek were people sent out from the city to perform religious rites. Fundamental to the idea of theory (from the Greek *θεᾶσθαι*, to look on, to view, to contemplate) is stepping back and taking the long view. What do we see when we walk away from modes of reading and interpretation that are already familiar to us? Inevitably the view from the outside changes the view from the inside, from the position of one’s habitation as a reader. After a brief tour among the theoretical encampments that have had endured the longest (rhetoric, philology, phenomenology, structuralism, poststructuralism), we shall spend most of our time together exploring four newer vantage points: ecology, cognitive theory, historical phenomenology, and presentism. For each of these four methodologies we shall read and discuss theoretical writings as well as trying our hands at specific applications, using as reference points three imaginative texts about islands: Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Blake’s *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, and Gary Pak’s *A Ricepaper Airplane*. You will be asked to write up a summary of one of the theoretical readings and to pose discussion questions about one of the three imaginative texts. Toward the middle of the session you will have the chance to put together a critical manifesto that announces your own goals for the seminar and details the particular critical strategy (or strategies) that you will use to pursue those goals. The second half of the seminar will be devoted to presentations of each participant’s work using texts of his or her own choosing. A final paper, due one week after the presentation, will incorporate class discussion provoked by the presentation. You are encouraged to read *The Tempest*, *Jerusalem*, and *A Ricepaper Airplane* before the session begins.

Recommended texts: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Peter Hulme and William Sherman (Norton); William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (Kessinger); Gary Pak, *A Ricepaper Airplane* (U Hawaii); Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, eds., *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (Wiley Blackwell).