

*Spring 2022*

# **Graduate Course Descriptions**



**USC Dornsife**  
*Department of English*

## ENGL 508

### History, Theories & Practice of Cultural Studies: *Ghosts of the Future: Marx, Darwin, and Climate History*

Devin Griffiths

M | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32778

“The winds of the Anthropocene carry ghosts—the vestiges and signs of past ways of life still charged in the present. .... Our ghosts are the traces of more-than-human histories through which ecologies are made and unmade.” —Anna Tsing & Collaborators, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*

At a time of extraordinary churn in how we think the world and the social life within it, a range of writers and thinkers has turned their eye back to the past, not out of nostalgia, but to grapple what Christina Sharpe terms the “past that is not past”: the unfinished work of the past in structuring our present and future. This past includes both the legacies of capital’s regimes of domination and extraction, and planetary history, as embedded within the evolution of climates and ecosystems. It also includes the history of social and scientific attempts to grasp these histories and evaluate their implications. And finally, it includes the history of popular speculative genres, especially science fiction and utopia, that have tried to test the implications of the past for the future to come. All, in their way, study the past for ghosts of the future.

Graduate seminars work best as a collective project. For this reason, this course—which counts toward the Science, Technology, and Society certificate—will be a truly collaborative seminar. I will sketch the general arc of the course, based in my own interest in the dialogue between Marx and Darwin as founding theorists of social and ecological development, and as explored by post-Marxist philosophers and theorists of ecological relation. But the seminar will start with a conversation in which each participant identifies additional primary readings to include in the syllabus and a discussion of the design of course presentations, responses, and final projects that best suit the material. In this way, we will bring together a survey of post-Marxist and ecocritical thought with the

particular investments of seminar participants. Each member will also be responsible for leading course discussion one week by means of a provocation that seeks to both promote a dialogue between that week’s readings and discussion of the research strategies that could help us pursue the questions we raise.

Course readings will include primary works by Marx and Darwin, including selections of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, *Grundrisse*, *Capital*, *The Origin of Species*, and *The Descent of Man*, and a selection of commentaries and elaborations from Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams, Louis Althusser, Stuart Hall, Caroline Merchant, Gillian Beer, Sylvia Wynter, Cedric Robinson, Sara Ahmed, Frederic Jameson, John Bellamy Foster, Elizabeth Grosz, Jason Moore, Joan Martinez Allier, Donna Haraway, Andreas Malm, Anna Tsing, Richard Doyle, and others. We will also read some longer and more recent works of fiction, possibly to include works by Octavia Butler, Kim Stanley Robinson, Cixin Liu, Samuel Delaney, Amitav Ghosh, Louise Erdrich, and Waubgeshig Rice. For more info, contact Professor Devin Griffiths, [devin.griffiths@usc.edu](mailto:devin.griffiths@usc.edu).





## ENGL 580

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Literatures & Cultures: *U.S. Modernisms*

**John Carlos Rowe**

T | 5-7:20 p.m.: Zoom | Section 32788

This seminar will provide a broad view of the different U.S. cultural responses to the modernization process, which will be our working definition of cultural modernism. It is not necessarily an avant-garde cultural medium but can include modes of realism intended to challenge the “fantastic” qualities of modern life between roughly 1890 and 1960. In the first half of the seminar, we will consider several



From “The Epic of America” by José Clemente Orozco

versions of U.S. literary modernism: aesthetic or so-called “high” modernism (Ezra Pound [*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*], T.S. Eliot [*The Waste Land*], and Gertrude Stein [*Three Lives*]); the Harlem Renaissance (W. E. B. DuBois [*The Souls of Black Folk*]); Left culture of the CPUSA (Rukeyser [*The Book of the Dead*]) and Mexican Marxism (José Clemente Orozco’s frescoes [*The Epic of America*, a portion of which appears above]). In the second half of the seminar, we will

consider some “afterlives” of modernism (decidedly *not* postmodernism or post-humanism, but this can be debated!): the social criticism and cultural expression of the pan-Indian movement of the 1930s (*Black Elk Speaks*); resistance to the so-called “internment” of Japanese-Americans during World War II (Miné Okubo’s *Citizen 13660*), the Beats’ counter-culture (Ginsberg’s *Howl*, Diane di Prima, and a variety of lesser known Beats), and African American modernism after the Harlem Renaissance (James Baldwin, *Another Country*). We will try to assess the complementarity and conflict among these different backgrounds and versions of U.S. literary modernism as well as consider their respective influences on subsequent political and cultural movements. **Requirements:** lead the discussion of part of one seminar (probably with another member of the seminar); complete a seminar essay of approximately 25 pages or an equivalent project. The seminar will be taught online via Zoom.

## ENGL 592

### Contemporary British & American Literatures & Cultures

**Geoff Dyer**

T | 3:30-5:50 p.m. | Section 32792

We will be reading some of the best, most enjoyable, and formally innovative writing of the last sixty years (a capacious definition of contemporary!), paying particular attention to borders and roots. Specifically: to the way the borders between fiction and nonfiction have become porous; to the influence of American on British writing (itself an expanded entity given the importance of “commonwealth” writers) and vice-versa; and to the origins of the “contemporary,” to the antecedents lying behind some of these books. (As an embodiment of these concerns, consider Shirley Hazzard’s great *The Transit of Venus*, first published in 1980, reissued in 2021 as a Penguin Classic.)

## ENGL 593

Practicum in Teaching English & Narrative Studies

**Chris Freeman**

T | 5:00-6:20 p.m. | Section 32973

English 593 is a course designed to help advanced PhD candidates with their teaching and with their shift from graduate school to first job. We will do some readings and discussions around those issues, but we will spend more time talking about your teaching and your work as a scholar. You'll observe members of the English department, watching them from the point of view as a TEACHER rather than as a student. The course will be a workshop on the profession; we will have guest speakers who will also share their wisdom. The class will meet seven or eight times during the semester. You'll keep a journal based on your teaching, our sessions, your reading, etc. There is one main text, *The Academic Self*, by Donald E. Hall.

## ENGL 620

Literature & Interdisciplinary Studies

**David St. John**

T | 2:00-4:20 p.m. | Section 32812

This course will be team-taught by David St. John and Professor Frank Ticheli of the Thornton School of Music. The course provides a series of structured collaborations between composers and poets. Activities include fundamentals of poetry, comparative analysis of poem/song settings, and creative projects. There is also a class of remarkable graduate singers from Thornton attached to our course to allow for the workshopping of all student projects. We hope that this course can foster long-term collaborative relationships between composers and writers. The course is designed for graduate students in Music Composition and English/Creative Writing (Poetry). However, other graduate students may enroll with the permission of the instructor. Be warned: this is all about collaboration in the arts. If you think of yourself only as a lone wolf artist, this course may not be for you.



"Los Angeles" by Tala Madani

## ENGL 630

Studies in Gender

**Maggie Nelson**

W | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32813

This class will focus on recent works of literary autobiography, autofiction, fiction, and art that link up with current areas of discussion re: gender. Rather than offer a theoretical or scholarly guide, this class will focus on the question of how one might make interesting, risk-taking art in and around gender. We will discuss the readings, host guests, behold some art, and undertake our own critical and creative experiments. Starting off with Hilton Als's provocative 1996 book *The Women*, we will launch into a semester-long conversation about, among other things: the relationship between desire and identification; the complexities and thrills of cross-identifications; the promises and pitfalls of identity; changing mores/changing times; webs of race, sexuality, class, and gender; and the different possibilities offered by different genres and media. Objects of inquiry may include work by Lou Sullivan, Mattilda B. Sycamore, Kalup Linzy, Kiese Laymon, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Richard Pryor, Grace Lavery, Tala Madani, and more. Required work will include an oral presentation, a final paper, and smaller writing assignments along the way.

## ENGL 660

Studies in Genre:

*Race and the Novel*

**Elda María Román**

Th | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32816

The aim of this seminar is to give you an in-depth understanding of how the novel as a genre has been theorized and how ethnic writers have developed the novel form. Most foundational scholarship on the novel has been written about texts produced by white European and U.S. writers. In this course, we will examine novels by Native, Black, Asian American, and Latinx authors alongside readings in narrative theory to ask what the theory productively illuminates about the text as well as what it cannot account for. Topics include: the origins of the novel; theorizations of structure, time and space, perspective, voice, novelistic subjectivity; as well as innovations in the Bildungsroman, metafiction, speculative fiction, and hybrid forms.

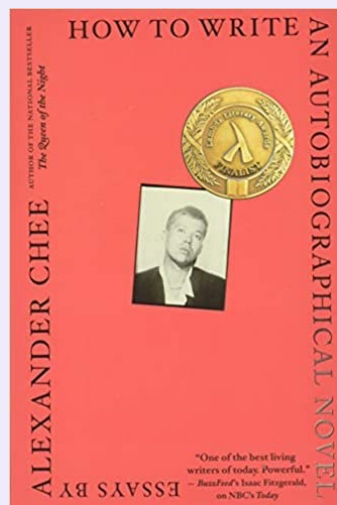
## ENGL 693

Graduate Nonfiction Form & Theory

**Danzy Senna**

M | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32823

This class will examine the murky relationship between autobiography and fiction. Writers in both genres are welcome to participate in sharing work that teeters uneasily on the line between the truth and fiction. We will explore questions of veracity, persona, inclusion and omission. What facts do we choose to include in a story about ourselves; what part of the story do we choose to leave out? How is a character who resembles us still not exactly us? How is the self we construct in writing always, as Alexander Chee puts it, a golem of



our self, “more or less careless than you, more or less selfish, more or less remorseful...More or less you, but not you.” Students will share their own writing in a workshop setting and also read selected fiction and non-fiction that walk this line, including works by Chee, Rachel Cusk, Brandon Taylor, Amy Hempel and Tao Lin.

## ENGL 695

Graduate Fiction Form & Theory

**Aimee Bender**

T | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32825

This course will be part workshop, part reading and discussion. Students will be encouraged to bring two pieces of writing at a time into workshop as a way to expand our notion of what is “workshoppable,” and we’ll look at form/shape/movement and detail in pieces by Danielle Evans, Alice Munro, Ted Chiang, Joy Williams, possibly Sigrid Nunez, a little Beckett and more.

## ENGL 698

Graduate Poetry Form & Theory

**David St. John**

Th | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32828

This course will focus on workshop discussions of your full manuscript—or chapbook collection—of poetry. We will also discuss a few recent collections of poetry, including books by Nicole Sealey (*Ordinary Beast*); Brandon Som (*The Tribute Horse*); Safiya Sinclair (*Cannibal*); and Linda Gregerson (*Canopy*). As always, aesthetic assumptions will be confiscated upon entry.



## **ENGL 700x**

Theories and Practices of Professional Development I

**Joseph Boone**

TBA | TBA | Section 32830

This two-unit class is designed for graduate students in the literature and creative writing tracks of the English PhD program who have completed coursework and are preparing to take their qualifying exam. The majority of our meetings are focused on familiarizing ourselves with and executing the different components of the dissertation prospectus. Your prospectus will undergo successive levels of writing and workshoping throughout our group meetings. I've found that participants inevitably benefit from the input of their peers as we talk about your aims, your audience, your methodology, and the structure of your project; indeed, many of the students taking the workshop tend to win various dissertation fellowships. Hence, time permitting, we will practice fellowship grant writing—condensing the “meat” of the prospectus down to three pages. We will hold roughly seven group meetings during the semester at a time mutually agreed upon by those who register for the class.



## **ENGL 701X**

Theories and Practices of Professional Development II

**Devin Griffiths**

TBA | TBA | Section 32831

Where do you want to go, and how are you supposed to get there?

This two-credit seminar is a practical workshop for the genres, codes, and strategies that will help advance your career as a researcher and writer after finishing your PhD.

Topics: application materials including the job letter and CV, genres of the interview and presentation and how to prepare for them, sample teaching documents, writing samples, letters of support, job market analysis, the difference between liberal arts and R1 institutions, the difference between postdoc and job applications, strategies for looking for alternative and non-academic jobs and networking, and above all: how to cope with the stress of the market and to support each other.

The seminar will meet on a biweekly basis and, in addition, will be expected to participate in periodic mock interviews and job talks. The placement director will also meet with each of you individually to review materials and discuss your strategy on the market.