

*Fall 2023*

---

# Graduate Course Descriptions

---



# ENGL 501

## History of Literary & Cultural Theory

**William Handley and Dana Johnson**

T | 2:00-4:20 p.m. | Section 32773D

Required of all first-semester graduate students in both PhD programs offered through the Department of English, this co-taught seminar introduces students to each other and to graduate study by engaging with important works of literary and cultural criticism and theory and by exploring matters of professionalization.

# ENGL 520

## Renaissance English Literatures & Cultures: *On Words*

**Rebecca Lemon**

Th | 2:00-4:20 p.m. | Section 32780D

Polonius: "What do you read, my lord?"

Hamlet: "Words, words, words."

Hamlet's response to Polonius seems at once dismissive and exhausted. And his attitude to words is famously vexed: if words might move him to tears, he also condemns words as the province of the "whore," "drab," and "scullion." This course will, in contrast to Hamlet's prejudicial attack on valueless words, take words seriously, investigating their etymologies and their histories in order to illuminate the texts they live in. Drawing on Raymond Williams's approach to "keywords," this class begins by investigating the flourishing scholarship on words following what Jeffrey Masten has called a "renewed historical philology." In his appeal to attend to words and their histories, he writes, "We have not sufficiently attended to *etymology*— the history of words (the history *in* words)." Then, energized by readings and manifestos by Adorno, Williams, Masten, Roland Greene, and others, we will begin our primary investigations: studying keywords in early modern literature. We will concentrate each week on a play or poem(s) in tandem with a critical piece that illuminates keyword(s) in the text. In a week on Shakespeare's sonnets, we begin to think with Kim F. Hall about the racialized constructions of "fair." With *Richard III*, we will study the words "now," "determined," and (following Ramie Targoff's essay on the play), "amen." For *Macbeth*, our keyword study concentrates on "weyward," following Ayanna Thompson's "What Is a 'Weyward' Macbeth?," as well as on the racialized metaphors of the play (following Cord J. Whitaker's *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking* and Farah

Karim-Cooper's "Anti-racist Shakespeare"). Our study of *The Merchant of Venice* will concentrate on the words "quality," "shadowed," "bond," "conversion," and "blood" (reading the work of Patricia Akhimie on quality, Ian Smith on shadowed, Amanda Bailey on bonds, and Janet Adelman on blood). For *Twelfth Night* we will consider the word "baffle" (reading Adam Zucker on this term and phenomenon). For *The Tempest*, we will consider the word "pinch," building on Patricia Akhimie's reading of that word in the play. As the course unfolds, I am open to your reading interests as we decide what keywords we study in what texts.

### Requirements

- A short, written response (1 page) to one event.
- A short (1-2 page) analysis of a sonnet keyword for our second week of class.
- Presentation/leading class discussion on a keyword.
- An article-length final paper (20-25 pages).
  - An abstract and working bibliography due week 9.
  - Draft due week 12.
  - Final paper due week 15

### OR

- Two short papers (10-12 pages), due week 9 and week 15.



Hamlet portrayed by the actor, Edwin Booth, c. 1870

## ENGL 530

### Restoration & 18th Century British Literatures & Cultures: *The Dispossessed Eighteenth Century*

**Ashley Cohen**

W | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32781D

When we think about the eighteenth century, we tend to picture gentlemen and gentlemen's daughters—the kinds of characters who might attend a polite country assembly in one of Jane Austen's novels. When we tell a slightly different story about the eighteenth century—say, the rise of the middle class—this cast of characters expands slightly to include the London merchants and bourgeois professionals we find in the novels of Tobias Smollett and the coffee house prose of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Toss in the rakes,

In this class, our focus will be the remaining 99%: weavers and butchers, farmhands and swains, prostitutes and servants, highwaymen and housebreakers, chimney sweeps and child miners, the enslaved and the colonized. These are the protagonists of what some scholars have begun to call “the dispossessed eighteenth century.” They are the casualties of English capitalism's meteoric rise, the product of what is often called “development.” While it is true that processes of property accumulation, enclosure, imperialism, and industrialization resulted in the unprecedented enrichment of England's ruling classes, they also resulted in the pauperization and immiseration of the nation's—and empire's—laboring poor, its 99%.

We will take the eighteenth century as a case study in dispossession, reading foundational theorizing around the concept of primitive accumulation as well as cutting-edge new scholarship that puts dispossession front and center in eighteenth-century studies. The course will also serve as an intro-



squires, patricians, and peers that we find in Pope and Richardson and all of these characters taken together still only account for the wealthiest 1% of eighteenth-century Englishmen (not to mention Britons).

duction to eighteenth-century literature, so no prior coursework in the period is required. Readings will include: Gerrard Winstanley, John Locke, William Blake, Charles Brockden Brown, Karl Marx, Silvia Federici, Robert Nichols, Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, Mark Neocleous, and others.

## ENGL 593

### Practicum in Teaching English & Narrative Studies

#### Christopher Freeman

M | 5:00-6:20 p.m. | Section 32793D

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 reading 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 teach from your 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. Our main text will be *The Slow Professor* by Berg and Seeber (Kindle or paperback, easily accessible).

## ENGL 640

### Individual Writers: *Herman Melville's Moby-Dick: Monsters, the White Void, and the Quest for Representation*

#### Enrique Martínez Celaya

T | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32814D

This course offers an in-depth study of Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick* and its relationship to art and philosophy. We will explore symbols and themes that touch on the limits of human knowledge and experience and raise questions about the nature of representation, the human condition, the instability of language, and the concept of a unified, objective truth. In addition to its literary complexities, the novel presents significant chal-

lenges for artists, and many artists have struggled to capture its elusive and enigmatic spirit, often turning to the use of



the abject to represent the unknown, the incomprehensible, and the unrepresentable. Through class discussions, presentations by students and invited speakers, written assignments, and creative projects, we will explore Melville's life and work and the historical and literary context of *Moby-Dick*. We will also consider the relationship between the novel and the art it has influenced. In addition to *Moby-Dick* and other works by Herman Melville, we will read Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and J.M. Coetzee's *Slow Man*. In addition to literature, we will read and write about art, so this course is an excellent opportunity for those excited by the intersection of literature, philosophy, and art, and it will be of interest to students in literary theory, creative writing, cultural studies, comparative literature, art history, and studio art.

## ENGL 660

### Studies in Genre: *Race and the Novel*

#### Elda María Román

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

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 694

Graduate Nonfiction Writing  
Workshop

**Maggie Nelson**

M | 2:00-4:20 p.m. | Section 32824D

This course is a workshop in which students will have the opportunity to garner feedback about original works of nonfiction written in response to class prompts. We will do some reading, concentrating mostly on recent and contemporary works of nonfiction. We will also host a couple of guests. Along the way, we will touch on questions of memory, narration, ethics, form, style, research, and genre. Please come ready to write new work, respond to the work of your peers, and engage deeply with the work of published writers.



## ENGL 695

Graduate Fiction Form & Theory

**Percival Everett**

W | 2:00-4:20 p.m. | Section 32825D

We will examine notions of form in fiction. What are the necessary and sufficient conditions that must be satisfied before we call a work of prose a work of fiction? Are there any? Is there such a thing as conventional fiction? Is experimental fiction possible and what does that mean? We will take stories apart and rebuild them, retelling them by doing “violence” to the stories’ constituent elements.

## ENGL 696

Graduate Poetry Writing Workshop: *Séance Poetics—Manuscripts in Process*

**Susan McCabe**

Th | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32826D

“I feel the lure of the invisible”—H.D.  
*Helen in Egypt*

T.S. Eliot attributed to Dante, “a psychological trick of which we have forgotten, but as good as any of our own. We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten seeing visions.”

“As a bowl starts out being a bowl, the not-bowlness / drains out of it. Later, // form is not something we remember doing, like being born.”—Brenda Hillman, *Loose Sugar*

H.D. writes in her classical *Notes on Thought & Vision*: “Two or three people, . . . with the

right sort of receiving brains, could turn the whole tide of human thought, could direct lightning flashes of electric power to slash across . . . the world of dead, murky thought.”



The aim of this workshop, our “receiving station,” to continue H.D.’s notion of a group of sympathetic artists, is to either conceive your first collection of poems (in whatever stage) or, if you already have a first book, to begin the second project. I cast the workshop as a creative forum geared to connect with “envisioning” in your poetic process, to allow for writing to your roots, to the dead, to dreams, to the unknown, inanimate, unhuman. In short, we will practice being mediums for our poems with the idea of *gnosis* as “an intuitive process of knowing oneself,” as Elaine Pagels writes. But we will also reach out from our interiority to our particularly wrought epoch of “unprecedented” historical and cultural conditions. This calls for contemplation, meditation, and group stimulus. We will inevitably read writers who address our ecological, gender-stressed era and the struggle for racial and class equality to discover new humanist gambits.

Ghosts, invocations to the dead, conversations with the invisible, all sound morbid and self-involved, but every time we start a poem we let go a bit of our ego and address an absence through the very act of writing. The workshop will help re-animate fragmentary drafts, but you are free to contribute new poems through a “mediumistic” practice, or re-worked ones, while responding to the writing of your peers. In other words, I hope the seminar will stimulate poems for our time that are waiting for revision or to emerge and to offer a safe accepting environment for this writing. I offer prompts, but they are not mandatory; deviation is acceptable. There will probably be several “visionary” and eco-activist texts on offer to discuss and guide you.

## ENGL 698

Graduate Poetry Form & Theory:  
*Words/Pictures*

**Robin Coste Lewis**

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

Of Mallarmé, Valéry once said that “He has undertaken finally to raise a printed page to the power of the midnight sky.” Regardless of Valéry’s tendency to hyperbole, his statement expresses the historical desire to transform the simple and accessible page into a vehicle of aesthetic transport. This craft course, then, will encourage each student to survey the methods with which artists of all kinds, but especially poets, have engaged the book’s objectness as a space for simultaneous engagement with visual and textual material. In addition to creating their own work, students will read/view travel narratives, art books, poetry collections, treated novels, little magazines, erasures, printed material and card games not only for their historical contribution, but for aesthetic inspiration. Our primary emphasis will be to examine work that uses text and image to question, play, or outright refuse to engage—intentionally or accidentally—issues of authorship, illustration, collaboration, representation, anonymity, hybridity, seriality, narrative, the archive, and the individual.



## ENGL Course D-Clearance Requests

- Contact Janalynn Bliss ([jbliss@usc.edu](mailto:jbliss@usc.edu)) to request D-clearance for workshop and form and theory courses.
- Contact Jeanne Weiss ([jeanne@usc.edu](mailto:jeanne@usc.edu)) to request D-clearance for other graduate courses in English.