

# Course Descriptions

USC Dornsife  
*Department of English*



*for*

PhD Students

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Fall 2024



## ENGL 501

### History of Literary & Cultural Theory

**Dana Johnson & William Handley**

Th | 5:00-7:50 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.

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 *My Trade Is Mystery* by Carl Phillips.

## ENGL 595

### Literary Studies Across Cultures: *Writing as an Other*

**Viet Nguyen**

M | 5:00-7:50 p.m. | Section 32794D

What does it mean to be an other? How does the other experience their own self and subjectivity? What does it mean to write as an other? These are the core questions for this course, which foregrounds in particular the way that writers who are marked as other or who imagine themselves as other have dealt with issues of aesthetics, politics, economics, history, representation, publishing, and criticism. The writers who interest me are the ones who resist boundaries of all kinds—national, racial, gendered, generic, sexual, and disciplinary. Boundaries are a way of creating others and managing otherness by restricting creative, critical, and political inquiry. The writers we will read—novelists, poets, essayists, memoirists, critics, theorists—challenge multiple boundaries.

Some of the writers for the course express a desire to write creative criticism, whether they happen to foreground the critical and scholarly act or the creative act of writing fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or some hybrid. Likewise, this course emphasizes the writing of creative criticism. We will foreground the act of writing itself on the part of students, and I encourage students to think about their own styles, visions, and voices as they write their seminar projects.

I hope to cultivate the practice of writing criticism as a creative and idiosyncratic endeavor that should not be restricted by traditional academic conventions.



Photo Credit: Yannick Pulver

## ENGL 593

### Practicum in Teaching English & Narrative Studies

**Christopher Freeman**

W | 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.

The requirements are to read all material for each seminar meeting, to be verbally and critically participatory, and to present once, alone or in tandem with another student. The presentation will involve the presenter being in charge of the seminar for the first half. You are the professor, and the task will involve you figuring out your pedagogical and critical approach to the material and to the class. Summary of material should be very minimal. Focus on critique—the critique that is explicit or latent in the material; your critique of the critique; and your sense of the material’s larger significance, or lack thereof, to a critical and/or creative project of otherness as you see it. You can be as creative or not, discussion oriented or not, as you see fit for your own pedagogical style.

The other requirement is to write a work of approximately 20 pages by the end of the semester. Create your own genre or borrow an existing one. Define your voice, your style, your genealogy, etc. Think of yourself first and foremost as a writer. Everything else—being a critic, a scholar, a theorist, a “creative writer” of whatever genre—comes after defining yourself as a writer. For this course, you will be a writer engaged in criticism—however that expresses itself.

The course reading will be in three units:

1. Publishing and Otherness, where we look at otherness of various kinds, both as a thematic and lived experience that affects writers, editors, teachers, and readers, but also as an element of the capitalistic nature of publishing and its relationship to the MFA industry. Texts may include Eric Bennet’s *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing During the Cold War*; Percival Everett, *Erasure*, and Cord Jefferson, *American Fiction*; Maia Kobabe, *Gender Queer*.
2. Israel and Palestine, where we will look at war, colonization, and refugees. Readings may include

Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*; Amos Oz, *Fima and Israel, Palestine, and Peace*; Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*; Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*; Adania Shibli, *Minor Detail*; Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*; essays by Nadine Gordimer, Giorgio Agamben, and others.

3. Borders and Genres, where we will look at the figure of the refugee, immigrant, border crosser, and persecuted other to see how artists have sought to use their experiences to reshape the form in which they work.

Texts may include Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend But the Mountains*; Theresa Hak-kyung Cha, *Dictee*; Rithy Panh, *The Elimination* and *The Missing Picture*; Art Spiegelmann, *Maus*; Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*.

All readings subject to change.



Children in a Syrian refugee camp. Photo Credit: Julie Ricard

## ENGL 620

### Literature & Interdisciplinary Studies: *Ecoaesthetics*

**Devin Griffiths**

Th | 2:00-4:50 p.m. | Section 32812D

\*\*\*This course counts toward the graduate certificate in Science and Technology Studies. Contact [stpl@usc.edu](mailto:stpl@usc.edu) for more information.\*\*\*

In classical and Enlightenment philosophy, humanity’s ability to make and appreciate art marked its distinction from non-human life. What if this were not true? How might art’s participation in natural systems recast the aesthetics of nature?

Our seminar will consider the intersection of aesthetic theory, ecocriticism, and ecological science from a series of perspectives. These will include a review of the history of traditional aesthetics, ranging from classical and Enlightenment aesthetic philosophy, to critiques of advanced work by Horkheimer and Adorno, Sylvia Wynter, and Kandice Chuh. But it will also consider the ecology of aesthetics in a series of readings developed from Charles Darwin, Elizabeth Grosz, Eduardo Kohn, Anna Tsing, and Robin Wall Kimmerer. We will lean also on ecofeminist theory, including work by Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, and recent work on the ecopoetics of African American and Pacific Islander poetry by Joshua Bennett, Craig Santos Perez, and others.

Refracted through these theoretical readings, we will examine a range of ecoaesthetic genres across various mediums, ranging from the work of early nature poets to landscape painters, mid-century nature writers, and “artist-activist” painters, filmmakers, and musicians celebrated by Rob Nixon, Stacey Alaimo, Jennifer Wenzel, and others. Seminar participants will also collaborate in identifying emergent ecoaesthetic genres and helping find the theorists best suited to thinking about them.



Art by Stephany Torres for Remezcla

## ENGL 650

Multicultural Literary Studies: *Latinx Literature & Cultural Production*

**Elda María Román**

W | 5:00-7:50 p.m. | Section 32815D

Latino/a/xs comprise a heterogeneous population with variations in national origin, time and circumstance of migration, citizenship status, race, class, and regional

location. With such differences, how do we periodize, analyze, and understand the literary and creative practices from these groups over time? To answer these questions, we will read primary and secondary works showcasing a range of narratives and theorizations. Designed to help students develop expertise in Latinx and ethnic literary studies broadly, we will discuss issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and transnationalism, among other topics.

## ENGL 693

Graduate Nonfiction Form & Theory

**Maggie Nelson**

T | 2:00-4:50 p.m. | Section 32823D

In this class we will be examining a wide range of nonfiction forms, from memoir to journalism to criticism to scholarship. Our focus will be on recent and contemporary examples; we will be discussing questions of style, structure, ethics, and audience. We will also host guests at work in the field over the course of our semester to discuss their experiences in

the worlds of thinking, researching, writing, and publishing. This is primarily a reading and discussion seminar, but we will also try our hand at several nonfiction experiments and take time to discuss them.

## ENGL 695

Graduate Fiction Form & Theory

**Percival Everett**

W | 2:00-4:50 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 697

### Graduate Fiction Writing Workshop

**Aimee Bender**

T | 5:00-7:50 p.m. | Section 32827D

The core of this class will be workshop with an eye on making space for work-in-progress of all kinds. I'm always interested in new shapes for workshop that benefit the writer, so there'll be discussion and experimentation along the way. There will be additional readings of short stories and chapters, as of yet unpicked but from writers such as Alice Munro, Yiyun Li, Yōko Ogawa, Helen Oyeyemi, and Denis Johnson.

## ENGL 698

### Graduate Poetry Form & Theory: *Lyric Hybrid: Poetry, Language, History, Visual Media, & Thought*

**Mark Irwin**

T | 11:00 a.m.-1:50 p.m. | Section 32828D

In this course we will direct our attention toward poets who incorporate different forms within their work while focusing on language, history, ecopoetics, and the effects of visual art and media in their work. This class will include a creative component, one that employs archival research with both history and visual imagery for a project of length. We will also consider how electronic media impacts writing and location: the notion of *poetry and place* in a placeless world of global technology. How does the writing of poetry, and its forms, now reflect this? How does the field of action within a poem become more permissibly divergent?

Discussions around the braided narrative and elegy will include works by Jorie Graham, Natalie Diaz, Arthur Sze, Paisley Rekdal, Roger Reeves, Forrest Gander, Bei Dao, Robin Coste Lewis, Annelyse Gelman, Brenda Hillman, Laura Kasischke, Angie Estes, Jake Skeets, and others. During this class we will also visit some visual artists' installations in hope that this will inspire your own work.

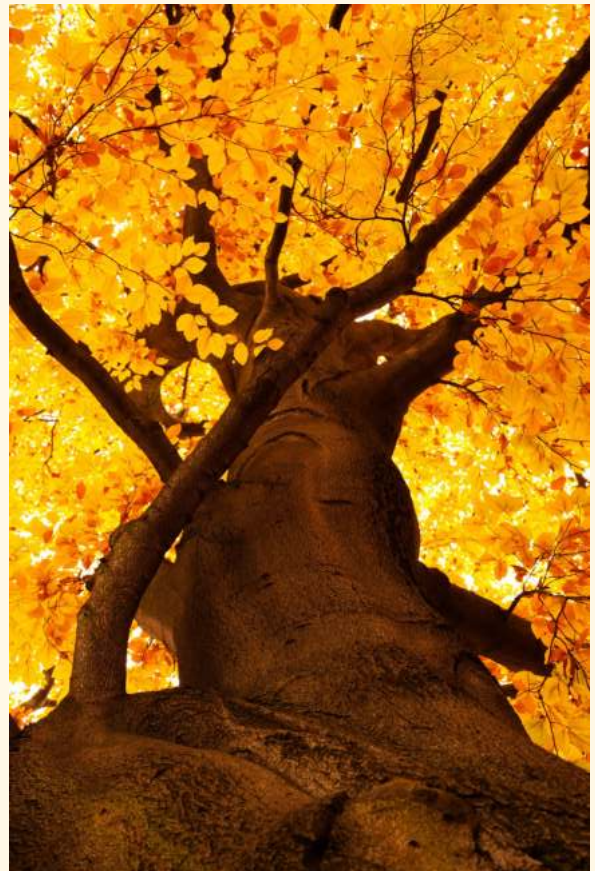
## ENGL 700

### Theories & Practices of Professional Development I

**Ashley Cohen**

Th | 5:00-6:20 p.m. | Section 32830D

This two-unit course will help you find, finesse, and design a promising dissertation project. By the end of the semester, you should be able to write a successful prospectus. Even more importantly, you will understand what goes into the making of a successful dissertation project.



# ENGL 701

Theories & Practices of Professional Development II

**Elda María Román**

F | 3:00-4:20 p.m. | Section 32831D

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

This 2-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 Ph.D.

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, and above all: how to cope with the stress of the market and to support each other.





## **\*\*ENGL 563/THTR 501 (*Crosslisted*)**

Poetry and Prose into Drama

**Heather James**

M | 2:00-4:50 p.m. | Section 63219D

Plays for the stage shall be written using public-domain poetry and prose as inspiration and source material, complemented with exploring poetry, prose, and varied dramas as context for the student writer. Students should be well-versed in literature and have written in one or more genres.

\*\*This course is crosslisted with English but is housed in Theatre.

For D-clearance, contact Admissions & Student Services in the School of Dramatic Arts: 213/740-1286; email [sdainfo@usc.edu](mailto:sdainfo@usc.edu).



## **\*\*ENGL 678/CTCS 678 (*Crosslisted*)**

Seminar in Film Theory and Medium Specificity

**Thomas Pringle**

Th | 2:00-5:50 p.m. | Section 18191D

Explores the way film has been theorized in relationship to traditional media that preceded it and electronic media that followed.

\*\*This course is crosslisted with English but is housed in Cinema and Media Studies.

For D-clearance, contact Cinema: email [mediastudies@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:mediastudies@cinema.usc.edu).



### **English D-Clearance Requests**

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