

Fall 2022

Graduate Course Descriptions



USC Dornsife
Department of English

ENGL 501

History of Literary and Cultural Theory

Margaret Russett and David St. John

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

Despite the title, this class is less a survey of theory than an opportunity to reflect on the practices and motivations of literary study. It also happens to be the only class required of all entering Ph.D. students in the English Department, so its highest goal is to get all members of the class into conversation. Co-taught by a poet and a scholar, it is intended to provoke dialogue and cultivate familiarity: dialogue with various intellectual traditions and between “creative” and “critical” modes of engagement as well as familiarity with the fundamental questions that shape contemporary thinking about literature and culture. At the same time, we will attempt to “defamiliarize” some of our rote ways of reading, writing, thinking, and being. The course texts, many of which straddle or indeed blur the line between critical and creative writing, were chosen to make us think hard and creatively about humanistic inquiry—in particular, to explore the dimensions of the *habitus* where we literary folks dwell, whether we identify primarily as makers or as analysts. Discussions will focus on critical reflection rather than application. Written assignments, however, will stress the practices associated with being *professional*—not merely “theoretical”—intellectuals. We hope



Samuel Taylor Coleridge

to foster confidence in engaging with the challenges of diverse intellectual traditions and in contributing to the larger conversations that brought us together in the first place.

Course texts will be drawn from an eclectic list that includes some ancients (Aristotle, Coleridge, Shklovsky) and some moderns, including Maggie Nelson and Claudia Rankine; a number of works from both camps fall under the broad rubric of “autotheory.” Requirements will include weekly Blackboard posts on the assigned readings; a short descriptive essay on a critical or literary journal, due at midterm; a conference-style presentation near the end of the semester; and a final paper of 10-12 pages that engages directly with at least one of the major texts on our syllabus.

ENGL 504

Theories of Race, Class and Gender

Melissa Daniels-Rauterkus

M | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32776

As static and essentialist notions of identity have been supplanted by more dynamic and fluid accounts, the task of defining Blackness has never been more complicated or contested. Scholars working at the forefront of African American literary studies agree that old approaches to subjectivity and periodization can no longer offer a coherent framework for assessing contemporary Black life or literature. But there really is no scholarly consensus on what it means to be Black in America today or just what to call this current outpouring of African American literary production.

Viewing Black life as a generative site of inquiry, this seminar explores how recent African American writings conceptualize Black identity in the 21st century. Acknowledging that there is no singular, universal Black experience, this course surveys a wide range of writings in an effort to take stock of the sheer diversity of Black life in modern America. Adopting an intersectional approach, this course examines Blackness through the interlocking and overlapping lenses of race, class, and gender. Understanding these categories as mutually constitutive forces, this seminar stresses the cumulative significance of these social constructs in the making of Black subjects, aesthetics, and critical theories.



The objective of this course is to familiarize students with both established and emergent theories of race, class, and gender; provide an in-depth treatment of key works of 21st-century African American literature; and determine what, if any, relationship this current production has to previous periods of African American literature and culture, like the New Black Aesthetic, the Black Arts Movement, the Harlem Renaissance, the Nadir, and the antebellum period.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:

Fiction/Creative Non-Fiction:

1. selections from Randall Kenan's, *Walking on Water* (1999)
2. Marci Blackman, *Po Man's Child* (1999)

3. Andrea Lee, *Interesting Women* (2002)
4. ZZ Packer, *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere* (2003)
5. Michael Thomas, *Man Gone Down* (2006)
6. Chimamanda Adichie, *Americanah* (2013)
7. Dana Johnson, *In the Not Quite Dark* (2016)
8. Danzy Senna, *New People* (2017)
9. Tayari Jones, *An American Marriage* (2018)
10. Michelle Obama, *Becoming* (2018)
11. Kiese Laymon, *Heavy* (2018)
12. Nafissa Thompson-Spires, *Heads of the Colored People* (2018)
- Raven Leilani, *Luster* (2020)

Scholarly Criticism:

1. Dwight McBride, “Can the Queen Speak? Racial Essentialism, Sexuality, and the Problem of Authority” and Rinaldo Walcott, “Outside in Black Studies: Reading from a Queer Place in the Diaspora”
2. Carmen Phelps, “Variations on the Theme: Black Family, Nationhood, Lesbianism, and Sodomasochistic Desire in Marci Blackman’s *Po Man’s Child*” and Marlon M. Bailey and L.H. Stallings, “Sexuality” from *Keywords for African American Studies*
3. Mark Anthony Neal, *Soul Babies: Black Popular Culture and the Post-Soul Aesthetic*; Jennifer D. Williams, “An Interesting Woman: A Conversation with Andrea Lee”; and Quito Swan, “Transnationalism” from *Keywords for African American Studies*
4. Martha Southgate, “Someday We’ll All Be Free: Considering Post-Oppression Fiction” and Derek Adams, “The Pass of Least Resistance: Sexual Orientation and Race in ZZ Packer’s *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*”
5. Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature?*
6. Yogita Goyal, “We Need New Diasporas” and Shana L. Redmond, “Diaspora” from *Keywords for African American Studies*
7. Introduction, chapter one, and chapter two from Kevin Quashie’s, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* and Cassi Pittman Claytor, *Black Privilege: Modern Middle-Class Blacks with Credentials and Cash to Spend*
8. Michele Elam, *The Souls of Mixed Folk: Race, Politics, and Aesthetics in the New Millennium*
9. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*
10. Koritha Mitchell, *From Slave Cabins to the White House: Homemade Citizenship in African American Culture*
11. Introduction and chapter one from Aida Levy-Hussen’s, *How to Read African*

American Literature: Post Civil-Rights Fiction and the Task of Interpretation and Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, “Black Grotesquerie”

12. Introduction and chapter one from Margo Natalie Crawford’s, *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First-Century Aesthetics* and Alexander G. Weheliye, “Post-Integration Blues: Black Geeks and Afro-Diasporic Humanism”

13. Introduction to Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman’s *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race*; Introduction and chapter one from Ariane Cruz’s, *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography*

ENGL 520

Renaissance English Literatures and Cultures:

Worlds of Change: Ovid Across the Media in Early Modern England

Heather James

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

How can poetry—fiction, broadly speaking—participate in the histories of change in aesthetics, political philosophy, social relations, physics, sexualities, emotions, and rhetorical modes associated with early modern England as it engages the religiously divided continent and the emerging geopolitical world, including the New World, Africa, and Asia? One lens on the diversity of thought, culture, and race in the early modern world comes from a potentially surprising source: Ovid, the counter-classical poet of ancient Rome at the beginning of its imperial sway. For some early modern commentators, Ovid seemed to sum up the whole domain of culture and knowledge, especially as it was transformed into a world of questioning.



Ovid

This class focuses on the links of poesy (poetry, fiction, and drama) to keywords in art and political thought: audacity and invention, aka the willingness to discover

and reinvent what has come before the widely divergent periods and artistic waves that see themselves as in some ways “modern.” An additional lens is that of exile: Ovid was exiled by the first Roman emperor, and his reception in later fields directly engages the political injustice as well as the continuing pressure of censorship.

This class is equally suited to graduates directly working in early modern studies and later fields. The focus of the course is on literature as it connects with political philosophy, science (natural philosophy in particular), the arts, and (to some extent) music. The first ¾ of the class focuses on early modern poetry and its relations to other arts. The final ¼ of the course hones in on projects that relate to our prior work but do so in any field. This part of the semester will take shape around 20-minute paper panels or 15-minute pre-recorded powerpoint presentations. In previous classes, students have presented on modernism, the American West, British women writers, the 18th-C, and more, along with early modern England.

Readings include Ovid, Spenser, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Milton, Wharton (and other women writers), along with early modern commentators and modern critics of literature and art history.

ENGL 580

19th Century American Literatures and Cultures:

“Indians”: Indigeneity and North American Nationalism

John Carlos Rowe

W | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32789

The seminar will offer a survey of U.S. literary nationalism and Native American cultural representation. Although the focus will be on U.S. nationalism, we will consider Canadian and Mexican representations of indigenous peoples. We will also study the extent to which native people in the Americas repudiate national institutions and rhetoric. The seminar will serve three purposes: a survey of nineteenth-century U.S. literature, Native American cultural expression in the same period, and recent theories of Indigenous Studies. Although the emphasis of the seminar will be on literature, we will also view at least one film and consider monuments and performances, such as dance and warfare.



Lakota Indian Beaded Vest

Readings/ screenings: Colin Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*; Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian*; Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *Indian Given*; Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly* (1799); William Apess, “A Eulogy on King Philip” (1836); James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826); Black Hawk, *The Life of Black Hawk* (1833); Anonymous, *Xicoténcatl* (1826); John Rollin Ridge (Yellow Bird), *Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854); Judith Freeman, *Red Water: A Novel* (2003) and historical materials about the Mountain Meadows’ Massacre of 1857; Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and “Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians” (1969); Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, *Life among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (1883); Edward S. Curtis, *In the Land of the Head-Hunters* (1915) and documentary film of the same title (1911; 66 minutes).

Requirements: lead a seminar discussion; proposal for seminar essay; seminar essay (20-25 pages).

ENGL 593

Practicum in Teaching English and Narrative Studies

Christopher Freeman

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

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.

ENGL 650

Multicultural Literary Studies:
Latinx Literature and Cultural Production

Elda María Román

F | 2:00-4:20 p.m. | Section 32815

This course offers an in-depth engagement with foundational and contemporary texts in Latinx literary and cultural studies. We will begin with 1960s Movement poetry and political platforms and end with recently published novels, supplementing texts with relevant secondary sources. 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 and Theory

Maggie Nelson

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

This seminar will examine a wide range of nonfiction forms, from memoir to journalism to criticism to experimental scholarship. We will read and discuss the texts; grapple with questions of style, structure, ethics, and audience; host a few guests; and try our hand at experiments in nonfiction writing.



ENGL 695

Graduate Fiction Form and Theory

Percival Everett

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

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

Robin Coste Lewis

M | 2:00-4:20 p.m. | Section 32826

Intensive practicum in advanced-level poetry writing, intended to develop high-level creative compositional ability.



ENGL 697

Graduate Fiction Writing Workshop

Dana Johnson

Tu | 4:30-6:50 p.m. | Section 32827

The basic idea behind this fiction workshop (and most others) is that graduate students learn best about literary fiction by writing, by reading published examples of literary fiction, by reading the creative work of peer writers and constructively discussing it in class, by listening to others constructively discuss their work, by talking about their work in conference with the instructor, and by rewriting and revising. The aim of the course is to help you write quality literary fiction by providing you with a supportive and, at the same time, critical environment and by helping you to develop a sound technical sense of your own work as well as the work of others. In addition to submitting stories or chapters from novellas or novels (approximately 40-60 pages by the end of the semester), you will read and critique the course texts as well as critique and discuss one another's creative work.