

ENGL 595, Literary Studies Across Cultures
Viet Thanh Nguyen

Monday 2-4:20

KAP 460 (not the assigned classroom, THH 219)

Office hours: Monday after seminar, in person; Tuesday 2:30-3:30PM in person in my office (see THH404D for my office number); and by appointment

Course theme: “Writing as an Other”

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.

Most 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.

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 work will proceed in stages as indicated in the syllabus.

If we need to meet online for seminar, this is the Zoom [link](#).

Meeting ID 976 0334 2114

Passcode 534497

Syllabus subject to change—some texts might be added or deleted as needed.

*items below marked with an asterisk still need to be copied and made available

Reading List

- Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*
- Eric Bennet, *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing During the Cold War*
- Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend But the Mountains*
- Octavia Butler, *Kindred*
- Theresa Hak-kyung Cha, *Dictee*
- Don Mee Choi, *DMZ Colony*
- Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*
- -----, *Monolingualism of the Other*
- Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*
- Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist*
- John Keene, *Counternarratives*
- Maia Kobabe, *Gender Queer*
- Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*
- Rithy Panh, *The Elimination*
- Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*
- Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*
- Art Spiegelmann, *Maus*

American Literary History (ALH), selections from special issue on publishing

PMLA, selections from issue on monolingualism

Other essays, available online and/or for download from [Dropbox](#)

Week 1	January 9	Introduction
Week 2	January 16	Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, no class
Week 3	January 23	“Creative Writing” Between Imperialism and Otherness

Part I: U.S. “Creative Writing” as an Industry

Eric Bennet, *Workshops of Empire* (whole or excerpts)

Lee Konstantinou and Dan Sinykin, "Literature and Publishing, 1945-2020" (*ALH*)

Laura B. McGrath, "Literary Agency" (*ALH*)

Part II: Perspectives of Otherness

[Alicia Elliott](#), "On Seeing and Being Seen: The Difference Between Writing With Empathy and Writing With Love"

[Reginald Shepherd](#), "Why I Write"

[Salman Rushdie](#), "Is Nothing Sacred?"

[Sarah Schulman](#), Publishing Triangle Award Speech

[Ijeoma Oluo](#), "Sometimes Writing is Just a Job"

[Terese Marie Mailhot](#), "Surviving Racism"

[Alexander Chee](#), "On Becoming an American Writer"

[Eudora Welty](#), "Must the Novelist Crusade?"

[George Orwell](#), "Why I Write"

Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own"

Due by Friday: a tentative abstract of a paragraph or two with an idea for your work

Week 4	January 30	War Machines and Distant Others Don Mee Choi, <i>DMZ Colony</i> Susan Sontag, <i>Regarding the Pain of Others</i> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam" Rey Chow, "The Jargon of Liberal Democracy" (<i>PMLA</i>)
Week 5	February 6	Exiles and Refugees Behrouz Boochani, <i>No Friend But the Mountains</i> Giorgio Agamben, "We Refugees" Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees" Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile"
Week 6	February 13	Palestine, Occupation, and Necropolitics Emile Habiby, <i>The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist</i> Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics" Edward Said, <i>After the Last Sky</i> (excerpt)*
Week 7	February 20	Presidents' Day, no class
Week 8	February 27	Genocide and the Inhuman, or the Other of Forgiveness Rithy Panh, <i>The Elimination</i> ---, <i>The Missing Picture</i> (watch at home) Jacques Derrida, <i>On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness</i> (excerpt)*

Due by Friday: a detailed outline of two to three pages outlining your work, explaining so far as you can imagine what the voice, style, form, content, critique, and intervention of the work will be

- Week 9 March 6 Fear of the Other(s)
 Art Spiegelmann, *Maus*
 Maia Kobabe, *Gender Queer*
- March 12-19 Spring Break
- Week 10 March 20 The Language(s) of Others
 Theresa Hak-kyung Cha, *Dictée*
 Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings* (excerpt)*
[Ken Chen, "The Stakes of Dictée"](#)
 Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other* (for this week and next)
- Week 11 March 27 Oneself as Another, or the Writer as the Other
 Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*
 Hélène Cixous, "Coming to Writing"*
 ----, "The Laugh of the Medusa"
 Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Commitment from the Mirror Writing Box"
 Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*
- Week 12 April 3 (De)colonization, I: Borderlands and Queerness
 Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera*
 Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America"
 Jose Munoz, introduction to *Cruising Utopia**
 Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, "Commodifying Mexico: On *American Dirt* and the Cultural Politics of a Manufactured Bestseller"
- Due by Friday: five pages of the work**
- Week 13 April 10 (De)colonization, II: Counternarrative and Counteremory
 John Keene, *Counternarratives*
 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (excerpt) *
 Ismail Muhammad, ["Can Black Literature Escape the Representation Trap?"](#)
 Kinohi Nishikawa, "Driven by the Market: African American Literature after Urban Fiction"
- Week 14 April 17 Blackness and the Imagination, Part I
 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (chapters 1-6, open access version available in the Dropbox link)

Week 15 April 24 Blackness and the Imagination, Part II
Sharpe, Moten, and Harney (continued)
Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

Due by April 31: approximately twenty pages of the work