Columbia University School of the Arts

Intro Creative Writing
Fall 2015

Coursebook

Free non-credit creative writing workshops and seminars taught by MFA Writing Program students

Fiction * Poetry * Nonfiction * Cross-genre

Updated: October 4th, 2015
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**General Information**

**Classes**
The Intro Creative Writing Program is pleased to offer 13 classes this fall, along with a three-hour writing retreat.

Classes will begin on October 16th and run through November 6th.

**Registration Periods**
The priority deadline to register for fall Intro classes is Thursday, October 15th at 5:00pm

**How to register**
Submit your course preferences online by visiting


**Late registration**
If you are interested in signing up for a class, but have missed the priority deadline, send an email directly to writingcats@gmail.com

**Questions**
If you have questions about a specific class, you may email the instructor directly. Any and all other questions may be directed to the Intro program coordinator at writingcats@gmail.com
Course list
Fall 2015

Cross genre

The art of science writing
Instructor: Beth Livermore
Mondays 7:00pm-8:30pm

Beg, borrow or steal: the art of imitation
Instructor: Colin Sullivan
TBD

The manifesto: inspiration and craft
Instructor: Simona Blat
Saturdays 3:00-4:30pm Dodge 403

Fiction

Where are you from? Where are you going? A look at regional voices in fiction
Instructor: Erinn Kindig
Saturdays 3:00-4:30pm Dodge 407

Daily life in fiction
Instructor: Francesca Giacco
Saturdays 1:00-2:30pm Dodge 409

One class to rule them all: A discussion of fantasy literature
Instructor: Allison Giannotti
Fridays 9:00-10:30am Dodge 409

Nonfiction

The personal connection: writing for yourself
Instructor: Jaclyn Petrow
Fridays 9:00-10:30am

Writing about music: The Pleasure and Practicality of Criticism
Instructor: Samuel Sodomsky
Saturdays 11:00am-12:30pm
Poetry

Poetry and sports: rhythms of play, writing, and life
Instructor: Dolapo Demuren

Let's get physical: The Making of concrete poems
Instructor: Nicholas Goodley
Saturdays 1:00-2:00pm Dodge 407

Selfie in a convex mirror: poetry workshop concerning the First Person "I"
Instructor: Christopher Blackman
Saturdays 3:00-4:00PM

Poetry in polaroids: An intro to image driven poetics
Instructor: Matt Huey
TBD

Conversing with "you" in Poetry: Addressing Second Person Point of View
Instructor: Isabella DeSendi
Saturdays 11:00am-12:30pm

Writing retreats

Acting for writers
Instructor: Carla Stockton
November 6th, 2015
**Course Descriptions**

**The Art of Science Writing (CG)**  
**Mondays 7-8:30pm**  
**Beth Livermore**

Art and science share a mission: to explore and reveal the world. Merging these two pursuits to produce illuminative works has attracted great thinkers of all kinds throughout time. To get a grip on the possibilities we will survey the masters. This may include Lucretius, Darwin, Thomas, Nabokov, Proust, Ackerman, Dillard, McPhee and the late, great Oliver Sacks, among others. We will also create short works of our own dwelling on inspirational prompts and superlative bits of text. We will pause along the way to discuss literary techniques that can be used to translate science into art, such as description, voice, and point of view. And, we will learn how to enrich creative writing with scientific research and deep contemplation. So, whether you are a scientist who is interested in writing or a writer interested in science, you will leave this seminar able to cross boundaries, borrow material and build a better, more beautiful bicycle.

**Beg, Borrow, or Steal (CG)**  
**TBD**  
**Colin Sullivan**

It all starts with a sentence but how to find that sentence? How to derive material from our lives in New York City? How to find our own unique voice in an ocean of clattering VOICE? This class will exploit imitation of great lines, great poems, great texts as well as scenes appropriated from life to generate work from the sentence-level forward. We will write in class and outside class. We will use recommended lines and texts as well as material you bring to class, all with the aim of crafting voice. We will lift texts from the public space — eavesdrop on conservations, steal lines from subway ads — as a way of launching ourselves into an entirely new weirdness. Think of Bob Dylan as Woody Guthrie addict/fan/imitator having moved to New York copying and copying only to one day emerge from that cocoon with his own real thing. He had help, in other words: It was not a gift from the universe. Talent is not the issue. Among the movements considered are language poetry and Burroughs’ cut-ups as we find our own process in the process, in an attempt to move from admiration to true creation. The only requirement is a willingness to write nakedly with an open mind to produce a single text at the end of the seminar, whether it's a poem, an essay, a post card or a short story (or all four). The instructor will participate. Think of it as a writing lab, not a class. Think of it as mad science, not literature. Think of it as fun. The voice is in there; we can feel it bubbling even before we know who it is. Let's unlock it by any means available.

**The Manifesto: Inspiration and Craft (CG)**  
**Saturdays 3-4:30pm**  
**Simona Blat**

1. As readers, writers, and idea-makers—as humans—we are in constant composition of our own manifestos, whether we realize it or not, by simply being alive. A manifesto is a declaration, a communication made to the world. It can be a plea, a prayer, a reply, a bildungsroman, or an ars poetica, and it can exist in any form.
2. This will be a part seminar, part practicum course.
3. We will read, exam, and discuss several manifestos of varying kind—political, artistic, old, and new—as well other texts, which act like manifestos (short stories, speeches, songs, poems, etc.) Some examples might include The Dada Manifesto, SCUM Manifesto, The Romantic Manifesto, Braschi’s Empire of Dreams, BLAST The Vorticist Manifesto, Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream,” etc.

4. It is important to note that this course will not aim to teach the historical movements of each manifesto, rather:

5. How can the stylistic, linguistic, and organizational tactics used in these texts, be useful tools for our own writing? What are their strengths and failures?

6. We will read as writers.

7. Each week, students will receive a writing prompt apropos a manifesto. For the final week, it will be optional (though encouraged) to submit a finished piece, in any genre, as your own manifesto, however you interpret it.

8. I assure you: there is no beginning, and we are not afraid.

**Where are you from? Where are you going? A look at regional voices in fiction (F)**

Saturdays 3-4:30PM

This class is a hybrid of craft and voice. Over the course of 4 weeks, we will explore what makes regional fiction “work”. What are the observations that make a piece stand out as being of a place? How is place important – or is it? How do writers develop their authoritarian voice as being a representative of a specific place? We will read short stories by “regionally-voiced” writers (Larry Brown, Sherman Alexie, Philip Roth, Jess Walter, Bonnie Jo Campbell, and others) to try to discover what makes their stories successful. In-class story prompts will be the foundation where we will dissect each other’s work for what feels true, what is engaging, and what happens to a narrative when place becomes a character. At the end of the course, you will be expected to have taken one of your in-class writings and turned it into something more. It could be a long descriptive scene or a short story of no more than 10 pages.

**Daily Life in Fiction (F)**

Saturdays 1-2:30PM

FRANCESCA GIACCO

On the surface of an Alice Munro story, not much seems to happen. By the end, her characters have experienced vast transformations, found and lost love, and come to terms with overwhelming loss. In chronicling seemingly mundane lives, she is able to capture no less than what it is to be human. Writing fiction allows us to use our own experience to find the extraordinary in the everyday. As a group, we will explore how writers like Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Marilynne Robinson, Lydia Davis, James Salter, and, of course, Alice Munro transform quotidian details into evocative fiction. Class time will be devoted to writing exercises and discussion of (brief) reading assignments. The last class will consist of an optional workshop, in which we’ll closely examine our own stories.

**One class to rule them all: A discussion of fantasy literature (F)**

Fridays 9:00-10:30am

ALLISON GIANNOTTI

Every year millions of people are plunged into alternate worlds, where time is relative and the seemingly impossible is preferable. Turning pages under dim lights in the early hours of the
morning, readers are unable to forgo the adventures that lay between lines, fighting sleep with the mantra, *just one more page.* In 1984, Kathryn Hume wrote, “[fantasy] is the deliberate departure from the limits of what is usually accepted as real and normal.” This course will transcend reality into the forests of J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth and the depths of Neil Gaiman’s London Below, in our quest to answer one crucial question: What is it about fantasy that makes it such a delicious form of literature? We will begin by discussing what is meant by “fantasy,” considering the differences between “high” and “low” modes, identifying the fundamentals for suspending disbelief, and dissecting the conventions of modern fantasy. W.H. Auden’s “The Quest Hero” and selections from Joseph Campbell’s *The Power of Myth* will augment our discussion and understanding of such. We will also consider fantastic literature from a psychoanalytic perspective: What human purpose does it serve? Do we use it or abuse it? Similarly, we will examine fantasy as a subversive art form by placing texts and authors in relation to their social, political, cultural, and creative determinants. We will put our scholarly understanding of the fantastic into practice by analyzing short sections of fantastic work by Tolkien, Gaiman, Ray Bradbury, and Italo Calvino. Additionally, through weekly in-class writing exercises, students will have the opportunity to craft their own fantasy. Lastly, we will consider Jack Zipes’ argument in “Why Fantasy Matters Too Much” to grapple with the question—which-must-not-be-named: Does fantasy produce delusion? Students need not be familiar with the aforementioned works or authors, however they should have a healthy respect for house-elves, hobbits, and wizards.

**The personal connection: writing for yourself** *(NF)*  
**Fridays 9-10:30am**  
**Instructor: Jaclyn Petrow**

Keeping a journal calls for discipline, it teaches how to brush away laziness and order you to observe. It asks for you to experience and think freely. It demands that you bear witness to life and see the world around you and write about it. Journaling is a practice that very well may teach us better than any other form in writing how to be a better writer. In this class we will be exploring and analyzing these benefits and how the practice of every day journaling can later be applied to a writer’s ideas, creativity, experience, style, or even the sheer discipline that the practice of journaling calls for. We will be reading journal entries written by Virginia Woolf, C.S. Lewis, Ronald Reagan, Anne Frank, Angela Nissel, Henry David Thoreau, and Franz Kafka. You will be expected to keep your own daily journal. Daily entries of any length are expected. At the end of the course you will be handing in a paper, which may be either a creative writing piece inspired by an entry(ies) in your journal, or an analysis of one or more journal writer that we have read during this course. Whichever option you choose, a one to two page reflection on your journal keeping and how you feel it has contributed to your writing thus far must be included in your paper submission. **Journals should be present in every class. I will be looking to see the progress in your journal writing but I will not be reading the content, your journal is yours to write freely—a place where you can be exactly who you are.**

**Writing about music: The Pleasure and Practicality of criticism** *(NF)*  
**Saturdays 11:00am-12:30pm**  
**Samuel Sodomsky**

Concerning the futility of conveying the effects of music through words, Elvis Costello infamously argued that, “Talking about music is like dancing about architecture.” Whether or not he is right, music criticism has become an increasingly celebrated and complex genre of writing: often as layered and thoughtful as the music it describes. In a time when the ways we listen to music are constantly evolving, this course will examine how writers appreciate, understand, and relate to the music they listen to. We will also discuss the reasons why music has remained such a fruitful
topic for nonfiction writers, in both a practical and an aesthetic sense. Writers covered in the course will include Jessica Hopper, Lester Bangs, Greil Marcus, Joan Morgan, Rob Sheffield, Kim Gordon, Hilton Als, Rick Moody, and Nick Hornby. Additionally, subjects discussed will cover a range of genres, from opera to EDM. Prompts may include attending live concerts and crafting reviews as well as responding to in-class listening samples. Students will be encouraged to look at various methods of music writing, including the album review and the personal essay, and will leave class with the ability to artfully describe music, to avoid clichés, and to place their work in a greater literary context while also finding their own critical voice.

Poetry and sports: rhythms of play, writing, and life (P)
Saturdays 1-2:30pm
Dolapo Demuren

In a Nike commercial from the late 90’s, basketball legend Michael Jordan is quoted saying, “I’ve missed more than nine thousand shots in my career […] I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.” Success is a sweet, timeless luxury that virtually every person aspires to achieve. The arena of sports provides one of the most visual, exhilarating examples of this pursuit. Athletes acquire fundamentals, develop their idiosyncrasies and train rigorously in order to succeed. Writers, and human beings in general for that matter, go through similar processes to achieve success. This class will look at how writers and athletes of the past and present have written and spoken about sports, and how these works of art reveal the interconnectedness between sports, poetry and life. Those interested in taking this course can expect to leave this class with an invaluable understanding of how the games we play and watch can speak to us about the life we live. In this journey, we will discuss what makes a successful poem, and furthermore what makes a successful sports poem. You don’t have to have any prior knowledge of poetry or sports to join this course, however you must be able to make a lay-up—while blindfolded and reciting a Shakespearean Sonnet of my choosing (I kid, I kid). Students are expected, though, to complete reading assignments, write poems, participate in class and be themselves. Course material will include poetry from poets like Yusef Komunyakaa, Edward Hirsch and James Wright and a variety of sports videos. I am also open to including material suggested from students that is appropriate to the subject of the class.

Let’s get physical: The Making of concrete poems (P)
Saturdays 1-2:30pm
Nicholas Goodley

Poems are physical things. Poetry doesn’t have to be abstract, cerebral and inaccessible. There is a heart to a poem about a chair, expression behind a description of a fish, sensuality in the movement of the body. Poetry is for everyone, rooted in the real, physical world. Together we will learn to write these kinds of poems. We will discuss poetry that uses concrete images and sensory detail to connect with the reader in intimate and lasting ways. We will explore poetry that employs narrative techniques, objects and physicality to make meaning. We will read from such writers as Russell Edson (considered the godfather of American prose poetry), Allen Ginsberg, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and David Bottoms, among others. Students will turn in a poem once a week in response to a prompt and light reading to be workshopped during class.
Selfie in a convex mirror: poetry workshop concerning the First Person “I”
Saturdays 3-4:30pm
Christopher Blackman

What does it mean to write about the “I” in a contemporary moment when cameras are as likely to photograph the photographer as anything else? In the 1950s, W.D. Snodgrass drew criticism from instructors and peers alike by writing poems about his life, including his recent divorce. Snodgrass insisted upon using the first person “I” pronoun to describe himself and his experiences. His early forays into a personal “I” gave birth to the Confessional school of poetry. Conflating the persona of a poem with its poet is, even today, considered a cardinal sin in the genre—Academic poetry has erected a screen, however transparent it may sometimes be, to divide poems from the poet that created them. In this workshop, we will read works by both contemporary and twentieth century poets that play with the self and the “I” pronoun. We will read work by poets such as Roger Reeves, John Berryman, Ada Limón, Claudia Rankine and James Wright—using these poems as foundational texts, we will write and workshop poems of our own that explore the function and importance of the first person “I” to both the self, and poetics at large in the twenty-first century. Students will submit a poem each week for workshop with the expectation that we will discuss their poems at both a content and craft level. No reading will be expected outside of meetings. A single, one page assessment will be assigned for our final meeting, in which students will describe how the course’s topics affected the writing of their poems. Due with this assessment is a short, four-poem portfolio that best exemplifies the students’ work and the ideas discussed in the workshop.

Poetry in polaroids: An intro to image driven poetics (P)
Fridays 9:00-10:30AM
Matt Huey

"The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."—

Say you are handed a pair of scissors and a copy of Country Garden Magazine and told to make a collage of images that depict the sorrow of having to euthanize a beloved family pet. You might be thinking that’s impossible—but it is not. Surely in a magazine about gardens, there are images of overturned dirt, images of empty water pales, spades, shovels, big trees, and wheelbarrows. You may not have an image of the pet, in fact it’s better if you don’t, for you have everything you need to illustrate the sentimentality of a backyard burial. In this workshop we will investigate poetry that, by use of imagery, objects, and events, force the reader to create sensible correlations between physical and emotional dominions. By looking at the work of authors such as Edgar Allen Poe, Allen Ginsberg, Ezra Pound, Ocean Vuong, Kim Addonizio, Roy Bentley, and Richard Siken, we will investigate what the seen has to say about the unseen. Each week, we will supplement these readings with writing exercises that implement a specific approach to metaphoric tangibility. At the end of this six-week workshop, each participant will have not only gained a better understanding of the “objective correlative,” but also 4-6 poems of his or her own.
**Conversing with “you” in Poetry: Addressing Second Person Point of View (P)**

Saturdays 11:00am-12:30pm

Isabella deSendi

“This was the double blade of how I felt about anything that hurt: I wanted someone else to feel it with me, and I also wanted it entirely for myself.”

--Leslie Jamison, *The Empathy Exams*

Eliot once wrote in a poem to his wife, “but this dedication is for others to read: These are private words addressed to you in public.” Some would argue that writing in second person voice creates a shared intimacy that is voyeuristic, intimate, jarring, intrusive, haunting, and capable of penetrating certain boundaries of writer-reader relationships as the “you” is transferred onto the subject of the poem. However, this voice can also be used for celebration, admiration, and even erupt in the writer a personal catharsis as they examine intricate relationships between their writing and the specified or unspecified “you.” Thus, in this hybrid seminar/workshop, we will explore the benefits and challenges of sharing privacies between one’s self and the “you” through the public platform of poetry. Why do we feel compelled to write to (or for) someone else? As writers and readers, we will explore the potential pleasures and risks of sharing secrets with strangers, shouting through whisper, and appropriating voice while learning how to maintain creative autonomy. We will reflect on the intimacy this perspective creates through reading work in this voice and through generating our own poetry vis-à-vis the weekly workshop. We will investigate the narcissistic compulsion (if that’s what it is) of creating a voice for the “you” while also considering the rewards and drawbacks of crafting poetry in this perspective. In order to better understand the mechanics of second person point of view, we will look at a variety of poems and lyric essays, including but not limited to writers such as Claudia Rankine, Maggie Nelson, Leslie Jamison, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, Dorothea Lasky, Dorianne Laux, and others. We will also look closely at two psychoanalytic essays including James Rose’s essay “Symbols: On their Formation and Use” and Samuel Weber’s “Spades and hearts: The Subject as Stylus” in order to gain an understanding of the unique relationship between subject and signifier, writer and the written “you.” Class will be held for one hour once a week for four weeks, in which you will produce one poem a week beginning the second class (3 poems total). The class will be divided into 20 minutes of lecture and 40 minutes of workshop.

**Acting for writers (CG Retreat)**

Instructor: Carla Stockton

November 6th, 2015

1:00-3:00PM

A day-long retreat during which writers will engage in the art of relaxing, breathing, and being in order to speak and enunciate clearly, with agency. We will play improvisation games that will enhance the writer’s ability to speak without notes, react to the stimuli around him without being rehearsed. And we will learn practice some basic acting exercises designed to enhance the writer’s ability to “act” a piece of her/his writing on the spot. These exercise could include but will not be limited to sense memory exercises, emotional memory exercise, guided meditations and simple movement games designed to make the writer feel at home in the reader’s body.

After each of the acting exercises, we will engage in a writing exercise that employs the technique explored. Our final exercise of the day will be a session at the microphone, where instructors will give pointers on reading aloud – projecting the voice and using the mic to best advantage, achieving the best posture, affecting a relaxed, engaging poise, etc.
Leading the session will be a pair of seasoned pros. Carla Stockton, SOA Creative Nonfiction ’16, has taught theater and writing in a variety of venues and directed youth theater in Connecticut for fifteen years. Assisting Stockton is Jamie Winnick, a well-versed theater director, theater instructor, actor, acting coach and life coach.

Refreshments will be served.