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**Course Descriptions**

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WORKSHOPS (6 - 9 points)

**FICTION – OPEN (6 points)**

Sam Lipsyte  
*Monday, 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Mark Doten  
*Monday, 6:15pm-9:15pm*

Adam Wilson  
*Tuesday, 10am-1pm*

Heidi Julavits  
*Tuesday, 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Victor LaValle  
*(for novels, Second-Years only)*  
*Tuesday, 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Ben Marcus  
*Tuesday, 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Laura van den Berg  
*Tuesday, 6:15pm-9:15pm*

Elissa Schappell  
*Wednesday, 3:15pm-6:15pm*

Darcey Steinke  
*Wednesday, 3:15pm-6:15pm*

Paul Beatty  
*Thursday, 12:05pm-3:05pm*

Deborah Eisenberg  
*Thursday, 1:10pm-4:10pm*

Ben Metcalf  
*Thursday, 3:15pm-6:15pm*

Emily Barton  
*Friday, 2:15pm-5:15pm*

**NONFICTION – THESIS (9 points)*

Phillip Lopate  
*Monday, 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Lis Harris  
*Tuesday, 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Richard Locke  
*Tuesday, 2:10pm-5:10pm*

Margo Jefferson  
*Wednesday, 10am-1pm*

*Second-Years only*
NONFICTION – OPEN (6 points)

Cris Beam
  Monday, 10am-1pm
Leslie Jamison
  Monday, 10am-1pm
Patricia O’Toole
  Monday, 2:10pm-5:10pm

POETRY – OPEN (6 points)

Richard Howard
  Tuesday, 4pm-7pm
Alan Gilbert
  Tuesday, 4:30pm-7:30pm
Timothy Donnelly
  Tuesday, 4:30pm-8:30pm
Dorothea Lasky
  Wednesday, 6:35pm-9:35pm
Robert Ostrom
  Friday, 11am-2pm
SEMINARS AND TRANSLATION COURSES (3 points)

——MONDAY——

Bharati Mukherjee (F)
Narrating the Nation
   Monday, 10am-12pm

Mark Wunderlich (P)
Rilke, Trakl, Celan
   Monday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Rebecca Godrey (F)
Anti-Heroines
   Monday, 12:15pm-2:15pm

Rivka Galchen (F)
Mysteries
   Monday, 2:20pm-4:20pm

Sigrid Nunez (F)
Narratives of Meditation,
   Reflection, and Speculation
   Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm

Brenda Wineapple (NF)
Writing Others
   Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm

Mike Harvkey (F)
The Mechanics of Tone
   Monday, 4:25pm-6:25pm

Erroll McDonald (F)
William Faulkner and World Fiction
   Monday, 5:15pm-7:15pm

Mitzi Angel (F)
The Long and The Short of It
   Monday, 6:15pm-8:15pm
Lis Harris (NF)
Family Matters
  Tuesday, 10am-12pm

Leslie Jamison (NF)
The Ethics and Aesthetics of
  Documentary Writing
  Tuesday, 10am-12pm

Matvei Yankelevich (TR)
Literary Translation: Introductory Workshop
  Tuesday, 10:30am-1pm

Dorothea Lasky (P)
Beyond Confessionalism: A Poetics of
  the Everyday
  Tuesday, 11am-1pm

Phillip Lopate (NF)
The English and American Essay Tradition
  Tuesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Patricia O’Toole (NF)
Thickening the Plot
  Tuesday, 5:15pm-7:15pm
Deborah Paredez (P)
Witness, Record, Document: Poetry and Testimony
   Wednesday, 10am-12pm

Natasha Wimmer (TR)
Roberto Bolaño and the Total Novel  Wednesday, 10am-12pm

Deborah Eisenberg (F)
Studies in Short Fiction
   Wednesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Elissa Schappell (F)
Where Are You Going, How Do You Get There?
   Wednesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Binnie Kirshenbaum (F)
The Excruciating
   Wednesday, 1:10pm-3:10pm

Susan Bernofsky (TR)
Imagining Berlin
   Wednesday, 2:10pm-4:10pm

Matthew Sharpe (F)
Space in Stories
   Wednesday, 2:10pm-4:10pm

Ann DeWitt (CG)
The Writer as Teacher
   Wednesday, 3:15pm-6:15pm

Alan Gilbert (P)
Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Poetry  Wednesday, 4:30pm-6:30pm

Joshua Furst (F)
The Novella
   Wednesday, 6:35pm-8:35pm

Michael Greenberg (NF)
The Shock of the Ordinary
   Wednesday, 6:35pm-8:35pm
Eliza Griswold (NF)
Writing Trouble
  Thursday, 10am-12pm

Susan Bernofsky (TR)
Literary Translation: Advanced Workshop
  Thursday, 11am-1:30pm

Lara Vapnyar (F)
Building a Scene
  Thursday, 11am-1pm

Hilton Als (NF)
Bent
  Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

B.K. Fischer (CG)
The Comma Sutra: Grammar, Syntax, & Praxis
  Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

James Lasdun (F)
The Art of the Short Story
  Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Paul Beatty (F)
Too Soon or Not Soon Enough:
An Examination of Social Irresponsibility in Satirical Fiction
  Friday, 12pm-2pm
LECTURES (3 points)

—— MONDAY ——

Joshua Cohen  
Twentieth-Century Fiction: A Primer  
Monday, 10am-12pm

Katy Lederer  
Sensibility, Style, and Vision  
Monday, 6:40pm-8:40pm

—— TUESDAY ——

Christopher Sorrentino  
The Unblinking "I": An Incomplete Survey of the First Person  
Tuesday, 4:20pm-6:20pm

Ben Metcalf  
An Earnest Look at Irony  
Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm

—— THURSDAY ——

Richard Locke  
Twentieth-Century Literary Nonfiction  
Thursday, 2pm-4pm

—— FRIDAY ——

Benjamin Taylor  
In the Americas  
Friday, 2:15pm-4:15pm
MASTER CLASSES (1 – 1.5 points)

——TUESDAY——

James Wood
Fictional Technique in Novellas and Short Stories
(1 point)
Tuesday, 4:10pm-6:10pm
Sept. 15 - Oct. 6

Nalini Jones
The Child in Fiction
(1.5 points)
Tuesday, 4:10pm-6:10pm
Oct. 20 - Dec. 1 (no class Nov. 3)

Parul Sehgal
For Love and Money: The Art (and Pleasure) of Criticism
(1.5 points)
Tuesday, 6:15pm-8:15pm
Oct. 6 - Nov. 17 (no class Nov. 3)

——WEDNESDAY——

Rachel Sherman
Divorce in Short Fiction
(1.5 points)
Wednesday, 10am-12pm
Oct. 7 - Nov. 11

Patricia Marx
Humor Writing
(1 point)
Wednesday, 1:10pm-3:10pm
Oct. 28 - Nov. 18

Jonathan Wilson
The Campus Novel
(1 point)
Wednesday, 4:30pm-6:30pm
Oct. 14 - Nov. 4

——THURSDAY——
Jon Cotner
Walking
(1.5 points)
Thursday, 12pm-2pm
Oct. 29 - Dec. 10 (no class Nov. 26)

Rowan Ricardo Phillips
The Art of the Voice in Translation
(1.5 points)
Thursday, 2pm-4pm
Sept. 17 - Oct. 22

Lauren Grodstein
Plot
(1.5 points)
Friday, 12pm-2pm
Sept. 25 - Oct. 30

Mark Rotella
Writing about Food: Evoking Sensory and Cultural Experiences
(1 point)
Friday, 12pm-2pm
Oct. 2 - Oct. 23

David Mikics
Emerson and His Children
(1 point)
Friday, 12pm-2pm
Oct. 30 - Nov. 20

Camille Rankine
The Poetry of Silence
(1.5 points)
Friday, 2:15pm-4:15pm
Oct. 2 - Nov. 13 (no class Oct. 23)

Sadie Stein
They Are What They Eat: The Role of Food in Fiction
(1.5 points)
Friday, 2:15pm-4:15pm
Oct. 30 - Dec. 11 (no class Nov. 27)

FRIDAY & MONDAY
Leonard Schwartz
Eco-Poetics: The Black of the Page
(1.5 points)
Fri, 2:15pm-4:15pm
& Mon, 2:15pm-4:15pm
Sept. 11 - Sept. 28
Queer writers ranging from Thomas Mann to Carson McCullers to Dennis Cooper have produced a body of literature that increases our understanding of difference as it’s played out in the larger world. So doing, they have also helped to widen our understanding of what “queer” might mean. Is a story, memoir, or piece of criticism queer because it’s written by a homosexual writer, or because it’s about a character’s “different” sexuality, or because a particular character lives in the margins, and feels at odds with society as a whole? What does “queer” mean to you, the writer, and how would you describe or represent those thoughts and feelings in your work? How does difference play itself out in contemporary society, where straight men, for instance, feel free enough now to say they’re queer identified, while some transgendered people don’t want to be called queer at all? In this seminar, we will read a number of short masterworks, mostly nonfiction, that give voice to these various issues. We will also look at a film that has a bearing on the issues the class raises.

Requirements: Classroom discussion is key. Every student will be required to read their classmates’ papers, and offer a critique in class. The class will be divided into two parts. During the first section, we will discuss the reading assignment. The second part of the class will be devoted to critiquing student work.

**Note: Enrollment in this course is by application only.** Students must submit a sample of their work (4 to 6 pages maximum) to apply. Applications should be emailed to John McShane (jm4073@columbia.edu) by August 10th. The sample should be attached as a PDF and the subject of the email should read “ALS SEMINAR APPLICATION.”
realities of the publishing market, is at the same time curiously inattentive to the significant differences between short and long fiction for both readers and writers. In this class we will examine writers who have made the transition from the short story to the novel—or vice versa—and consider what demands the different lengths make of them, and conversely what opportunities each affords. Among others, we will be reading William Faulkner, John Cheever, Elizabeth Bowen, D. H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, Jennifer Egan, and Mary Gaitskill. Students will be asked to produce a piece of creative work in response to the classes: those currently working on short stories will expand a page or two from their work into ten pages of a novel; those at work on a novel will pick a scene and turn it into a story.

Paul Beatty

**Too Soon or Not Soon Enough: An Examination of Social Irresponsibility in Satirical Fiction**

(FICTION)  
*Friday, 12pm-2pm*

The best satirists are often excoriated with a disapproving “Too soon” for work that lambastes the morbidity and absurdity of life before one has had the chance to mourn and reflect, much less live it. Upon their release, books like *Portnoy’s Complaint* and *Huckleberry Finn* were banned, and then, after the book-buying public, if not the critics, declared that the dirty laundry had not only been sufficiently aired, but spray-starched to almost rigid conformity, these texts were folded neatly into the American canon and put away in our collective chest of drawers. A friend recently remarked that the appropriate response to books that get under our skins shouldn’t be “Too soon,” but “Not soon enough,” implying social critique and reprobation, no matter how funny, is always a case of “too little, too late.”

So what is the satirist’s responsibility? Film critic A.O. Scott suggests that Preston Sturges’s *Sullivan’s Travels* is a madcap celluloid self-criticism that asks, “What should movies do with all the problems in the world? Should they provide their audiences with a way of escaping or should they force us to engage the hard and difficult questions and crises that surround us?”

This class will ask similar questions regarding the satirical works of authors Edgar Hilsenrath, Fran Ross, and Roberto Bolaño, among others.

One short writing assignment will be required.
Ann DeWitt

The Writer as Teacher
(CROSS-GENRE)  Wednesday, 3:15pm-6:15pm

This is a hybrid course: part seminar and part practicum. We will cover an overview of research into the writing process and the place of the writer in the classroom, and address the pedagogical and editorial skills utilized in eliciting and responding to creative writing including: creating and presenting writing assignments; designing workshops; and presiding over group critiques and individual conferences. We will discuss the teaching of creative writing at all levels (primary and secondary schools, undergraduate and graduate programs), and there will be visits from exemplary practitioners of the art and craft of teaching. In the third hour, we will replicate classroom situations in small groups and individual presentations. (On any given class day, we may use none, some, or all of the third hour.) A wide variety of reading material will be handed out. There will be several short, practical papers (including informal responses to the readings). Attendance and punctuality are essential, as is active participation in class discussions and groups.

Deborah Eisenberg

Studies in Short Fiction
(FICTION)  Wednesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

One could say that the power of short fiction is generated by compression rather than compelling narrative per se. In this course we will read short things, so it will be possible for us to read slowly, with detailed attention, and to explore why we find each piece interesting, valuable, and alive. If we don’t believe (and I don’t happen to) that a piece of writing is excellent in so far as it conforms to ideas of how something ought to be written, then what is it that does make a particular piece of writing excellent?

And it is excellence of one sort or another—profundity, power, inexhaustibility, beauty, integrity, passion, ambition, strangeness—for which course readings have been selected, rather than for point-yielding properties or susceptibility to analysis and discussion. Although our main focus will be aesthetic matters, it should be interesting to note how fiction can address social concerns in a way that is different from the way nonfiction does, but which is surely equally powerful. And, conversely, to read some examples of work that is pristinely untouched by the “real” or “political” world that no one could consider trivial.
Some of what we read will probably be familiar to most and some will probably not; authors might include, for example, Isaac Babel, Katherine Mansfield, Heinrich von Kleist, Ivan Turgenev, John Cheever, Franz Kafka, Mavis Gallant, Junichiro Tanizaki, and Felisberto Hernandez. Short, informal response papers will be required.

B. K. Fischer

**The Comma Sutra: Grammar, Syntax, & Praxis**

(CROSS-GENRE) \( Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm \)

This course aims to convince the skeptic that even if Gertrude Stein was mistaken in saying "I really do not know that anything has ever been more exciting than diagramming sentences," grammar is at least the second most fulfilling human pursuit. Fundamental to our exploration will be a study of grammatical terminology and laws as an anatomy lab for language—a method for exposing its inner workings, mechanisms, and connective tissues to understand more fully its capacities and effects. This technical scrutiny will give rise to discussion of a variety of topics relevant to creative practices in poetry and prose, including patterns of syntax, parataxis and hypotaxis, the subjunctive, deixis and subjectivity, voice, vernaculars, rhythm, pitch, and tempo. Our analysis of grammar will dovetail with theoretical perspectives beyond subject and predicate, drawing insights from ethics, feminist linguistics, gaze theory, racial politics and aesthetics, and media studies. We will dissect and revel in sentences by Henry James, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Marilynne Robinson, Emily Dickinson, William Carlos Williams, Richard Howard, Jorie Graham, Claudia Rankine, Taiye Selasi, and Vampire Weekend among other examples, and read essays by Nietzsche, Hélène Cixous, Giorgio Agamben, Lyn Hejinian, and others. Taking the form of a sutra—texts threaded together to build a working manual—the course will focus in every class on how grammatical ideas are vital to writing praxis. Participants will write seven one-page responses to extend the seminar’s conversation, one of which must include graphic or visual elements, and a final paper of approximately six pages.

Joshua Furst

**The Novella**

(FICTION) \( Wednesday, 6:35pm-8:35pm \)

Novellas. Short novels. Long stories. Works of intermediate length have been called many things throughout the ages. Their popularity seems always to be rising and falling and yet they constitute much of the greatest fiction we have. James Joyce’s “The Dead.” Franz Kafka’s “Metamorphosis.” Albert Camus’ “The Stranger.” They’re all novellas. So are “The Turn of the Screw,” “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” and “Notes
from Underground.” In a recent essay in *The New Yorker*, Ian McEwan called the novella “the perfect form of prose fiction.” He wasn’t the first to make this claim.

A good novella requires the rigor and control—the polished beauty—of a short story while demanding the scope of vision and breadth of narrative—the complexity and depth—of a novel. The writer can't hide clunky sentences and extraneous descriptions in its bulk. He can't rely on the glitter of his style to carry the reader past the faults in his narrative. For the student of fiction, studying novellas allows for both close reading and a manageable examination of the variety of narrative tactics available to writers looking to move beyond the short story form.

In this class, we'll analyze a range of novellas, chosen for their formal and stylistic variety, and attempt to discern how they achieve their effects. Students will write the first ten pages of a novella and outline a plan for its completion.

Readings will include work by Herman Melville, Nathaniel West, Carson McCullers, Katherine Anne Porter, Juan Rulfo, Doris Lessing, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Cynthia Ozick, Denis Johnson, and Jean Phillipe Toussaint, among others.

Rivka Galchen

**Mysteries**

(FICTION)  
*Monday, 2:20pm-4:20pm*

Mystery once referred primarily to religious ideas: divine revelations, unknown rites, or the secret counsel of God. In the 20th century, the word began to be used in reference to more prosaic things, like whodunits. But what is coming to be known in a story? Why and what is a reader tempted to try to know, and what, today, can she possibly think is going to be revealed? When do the ‘tricks’ of withholding information annoy, and when do they compel? What are clues? What are solutions? In what ways can stories not straightforwardly written as mysteries use the tropes of mystery? What turns pages and why do cliffhangers compel? What techniques of mystery can we integrate into our own writings?

In this course we'll read novels, stories, and case histories with the intention of noticing how writers have borrowed, avoided, warped, translated, or disguised the structures of mystery.

Readings will include work by Edgar Allan Poe, Marcel Proust, Muriel Spark, Flann O’Brien, Vera Caspary, Kazuo Ishiguro, and others.
Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Poetry

This class will focus on the history of twentieth-century avant-garde poetry. We will begin briefly in the nineteenth century with Charles Baudelaire, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Lautréamont, Stéphane Mallarmé, and then examine various avant-garde, experimental, and non-mainstream poetry movements, including Symbolism, Imagism, Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Harlem Renaissance, Négritude, Black Arts Movement, Black Mountain School, Beats, New York School, feminist poetry, Objectivism, cross-cultural poetics, ethnopoetics, spoken word poetry, hip-hop, Language poetry, concrete poetry, and more. We will end by focusing on recent trends such as Flarf, Conceptual writing, and digital poetry. Along the way, we will pause to talk more extensively about important figures in this history such as T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Aimé Césaire, Charles Olson, Adrienne Rich, Amiri Baraka, John Ashbery, and Alice Notley, as well as read the work of a few younger writers. We will also occasionally reference parallel developments in twentieth-century avant-garde art, theater, and music. The writing requirement is a 12–15-page creative portfolio or a critical paper of equal length.

Anti-Heroines

In this seminar, we will explore the depiction of anti-heroines in works by a range of authors in order to closely examine how these unruly characters disrupt conventional notions of femininity, as well as the story itself. This course will explore the various ways anti-heroines, whether central or peripheral, complicate and enrich novels and the short story. The course will focus particularly on characterization, language, and voice in both contemporary and classic works. The anti-heroines discussed will often be wayward or unwanted—“fallen” women: recluses, seducers, imposters, grifters, eccentrics, and terrorists.

Readings will include:

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*
Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*
Jean Rhys, *The Wide Sargasso Sea*
Nella Larsen, *Passing*
Marguerite Duras, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*
Michael Greenberg

**The Shock of the Ordinary**

(NONFICTION)  

*Wednesday, 6:35pm-8:35pm*

To make the quotidian, the everyday, the unspectacular come alive; to make us experience differently and anew what we thought was familiar—this is one of the most unheralded and crucial aspects of good writing. Without it, our work, no matter how urgent or dramatic, will not take on a breathing life of its own. This seminar will focus on what is right in front of the writer’s, and everyone else’s, nose, yet goes unnoticed.

We’ll be reading a wide variety of writers, ranging from V.S. Naipaul to Nicole Leblanc, Philip Roth’s memoir *Patrimony*, and Joseph Roth’s Berlin pieces from the 1920s... We will also dip into the works of certain fiction writers whose eye for the living quotidian detail is applicable to nonfiction as well: Bernard Malamud’s early stories, Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*, and more. Our goal will be both to sharpen this aspect of writing as it pertains to our own work and to understand the range of possibility and individual style it may entail. Full reading list and syllabus will be available soon.

Eliza Griswold

**Writing Trouble**

(NONFICTION)  

*Thursday, 10am-12pm*

In this course, we’ll examine more than a century of reportage from Ida B. Wells and George Orwell to Katherine Boo and George Packer. The course will focus around issues of social justice in the United States and internationally. This is primarily a course in reading, which includes exercises and two short pieces of writing. The seminar is designed to help identity and practice some basic skills involved in reporting and writing literary nonfiction.
Lis Harris

**Family Matters**

(NONFICTION)  
**Tuesday, 10am-12pm**

An exploration of a wide spectrum of literary approaches to writing about the people who gave you life and then made it glorious or a living hell—and about those who huddled alongside in the primal pack. The course will closely examine some of the aesthetic, ethical, and research issues that arise from writing about family as well as the novelistic, meditative, and lyric strategies that can expand this subject’s breadth and depth. Authors—of nonfiction and fiction—whose work we will read include Mary McCarthy (*Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*), Jean Renoir (*Renoir, My Father*), Philip Roth (*Patrimony*), William Maxwell (*So Long, See You Tomorrow*), Colette (*My Mother’s House; Sido*), Tobias Wolff (*This Boy’s Life*), Paula Fox (*Borrowed Finery*), Per Petterson (*Out Stealing Horses*), Michael Ondaatje (*Running In the Family*), Vladimir Nabokov (*Speak, Memory*) and Adrian Nicole LeBlanc (*Random Family*).

Week 1  
First class

Week 2  
Jane Austen  
*Persuasion*

Week 3  
Mary McCarthy  
*Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*

Week 4  
Jean Renoir  
*Renoir, My Father* (excerpt)

Week 5  
Philip Roth  
*Patrimony*

Week 6  
Colette  
*My Mother’s House; Sido* (excerpts)

Week 7  
Vladimir Nabokov  
"Mademoiselle," from *Speak, Memory*

Week 8  
William Maxwell  
*So Long, See You Tomorrow*

Week 9  
Tobias Wolff  
*This Boy’s Life*

Week 10  
ACADEMIC HOLIDAY

Week 11  
Eric Liu  
*Dorothy Gallagher  
*The Accidental Asian* (excerpt)

Week 12  
Paula Fox  
*Borrowed Finery*

Week 13  
Per Petterson  
*Out Stealing Horses*

Week 14  
Michael Ondaatje  
*Running in the Family*

Week 15  
Adrian Nicole LeBlanc  
*Random Family*

Mike Harvkey

**The Mechanics of Tone**

(FICTION)  
**Monday, 4:25pm-6:25pm**

Tone is tricky. While it is often what makes a work of art linger in our consciousness, it is also the least discussed element of the writer’s craft—and often
the hardest to pin down. Is tone a component of voice, or is voice a component of tone? How is tone established on the page? How much control over this element does a writer actually have? In this seminar we will read a range of authors, including J.M. Coetzee, Lynne Tillman, Kasuo Ishiguro, and Toni Morrison, in an effort to better understand the components of tone. We’ll look at writing from different eras, genres, and schools to locate epoch-specific tonalities. We will also examine tone in other forms, including music and film, and undertake writing exercises so that we might learn techniques for creating and managing tone in our own work.

Leslie Jamison

The Ethics and Aesthetics of Documentary Writing

(NONFICTION) Tuesday, 10am-12pm

This course will examine the practice of documentary writing, the possibilities and perils of evoking, exploring, illuminating and (ultimately, inevitably) aestheticizing the lives of others. We’ll consider the ethical and aesthetic questions that attend the act of narrating vulnerability of all kinds—emotional, physical, political, socioeconomic—as they intersect questions of craft: how can consciousness be evoked with complication and dignity? How can perspective shift between individual and social scales? How do you link individual lives and subjective impressions to broader political stakes? What are the connections between anecdote and argument? How can reportage work alongside other modes (the lyric, the personal)? What role can a first-person “I” play in documentary writing—when is it necessary and when does it intrude?

We’ll look at book-length works by James Agee, Nellie Bly, George Orwell, William Vollmann, and Susan Sontag; essays by James Baldwin, Denis Johnson, Matthew Power, John Jeremiah Sullivan, and Eula Biss; and poetry by Claudia Rankine, C.D. Wright, and Mark Nowak. We’ll also look at photography and photojournalism from Walker Evans, Jacob Riis, and Fazal Sheikh, and films including Alma Har’el’s Bombay Beach, Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky’s Paradise Lost, and Chris Marker’s Sans Soleil.
“The worst is not
so long as we can say, ‘This is the worst.’”
— Shakespeare, *King Lear*

Our immediate response to pain is most often expressed not in language but in sound: a scream, a howl, or a whimper. To best describe and comprehend physical pain we rely on shared experience—a toothache, a skinned knee—and on familiarity with our own nerve endings and pain receptors. But still, we can’t *really* know someone else’s pain. So how, then, do we even begin to convey the experience of a pain that has no locus? When the answer to the question ‘Where does it hurt?’ is ‘Nowhere and everywhere,’ how do we, as writers, communicate the excruciating pains of despair, failure, loneliness, grief, humiliation, shame, regret, and rage? In this seminar, we will examine the ways and means in which writers give voice to excruciation that is lived as an infinite and silent scream, howl, or whimper.

To convey and to know unarticulated pain requires that we identify with these fictional characters in the traditional definition of literary identification; that is *not* to see ourselves reflected in the characters, but to transcend ourselves to see and feel what it’s like to *be* them. The works we will read have been selected solely for variety of excruciation, for the different experiences of bleeding without evidence of blood (and also because the novels aren’t doorstoppers).

We will read short stories by Anton Chekhov, Sherwood Anderson, Mavis Gallant, Delmore Schwartz, Flannery O’Connor, Natalia Ginzburg, Richard Yates, and Alice Munro, along with:

- *Notes From Underground* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
- *Mr. Phillips* by John Lanchester
- *Home* by Toni Morrison
- *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* by Brian Moore
- *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* by Leo Tolstoy
- *Mrs. Bridge* by Evan S. Connell
- *Senselessness* by Horacio Castellanos Moya
- *The Hour of the Star* by Clarice Lispector
- *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* by Jean Rhys
- *The Day of the Locust* by Nathanael West

Students will be required to write one creative work influenced by the reading.
James Lasdun

**The Art of the Short Story**

*(FICTION)*

*Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm*

What is the essential nature of the Short Story? How does it differ from that of the novel? Looking closely at the relationship between style, form, and meaning in a range of classic and contemporary short stories, this seminar will attempt to illuminate some of the mysteries of narrative economy and structural inventiveness that give this most artful of literary forms its peculiar power to move and disturb. Authors whose work we’ll study will include at least some of the following and probably many others: Chekhov, Kafka, Colette, Hemingway, Flannery O’Connor, John Cheever, Angela Carter, Raymond Carver, Lydia Davis, George Saunders, and Daniyal Mueenuddin.

Dorothea Lasky

**Beyond Confessionalism: A Poetics of the Everyday**

*(POETRY)*

*Tuesday, 11am-1pm*

In this course, we will explore the work and lives of four key American poets of the past century: Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Bernadette Mayer, and Hannah Weiner. Primarily our inquiry will be seeking to uncover how and why moving forward the term *confessionalism* does and does not apply to their poetry and how we might revise a consideration of their writing more as a kind of poetics of the everyday, which examines and exalts the beauty of experiential living and the workaday imagination as fodder for the poem. During this exploration, we will traverse the work of other writers in both poetry and prose, such as Maggie Nelson, Audre Lorde, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Roxane Gay, Eileen Myles, and Claudia Rankine.

Participants can hope to not only read and write directly in response to class texts, but also to engage on a widening path of what their own work can do and to use the course as a way to revise their thinking and engagement with a burgeoning poetics that seeks not to just rehash old memories on the page, but to use the space of the poem to make new ones.
Phillip Lopate

The English and American Essay Tradition

(NONFICTION) Tuesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

We will be examining the development of the essay form, through the great line of essayists in the English language. Starting in eighteenth-century England, with Francis Bacon, Samuel Johnson, Jonathan Swift, Addison & Steele, through the great nineteenth-century practitioners, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, R. L. Stevenson, Thomas De Quincey, and John Ruskin, and the twentieth-century masters, such as Max Beerbohm, G.K. Chesterton, Virginia Woolf, and George Orwell, then hopping over the Atlantic to Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, H. L. Mencken, James Thurber, E.B. White, Mary McCarthy, James Baldwin, and M.F.K. Fisher. We will be looking at how the same writers handle personal and impersonal essays, memoir pieces, and literary criticism, to investigate the techniques of narrative structure and suspense in essays, and how the mysterious projection of authorial personality traverses any and all situations.

Erroll McDonald

William Faulkner and World Fiction

(FICTION) Monday, 5:15pm-7:15pm

Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez unabashedly claims William Faulkner as “my master,” says that “Faulkner is present in all the novels of Latin America,” and mischievously insists that “The Hamlet is the best South American novel ever written.” Since the 1950s, other major writers from around the world have similarly trumpeted the crucial influence of Faulkner on their writing. Why? What about Faulkner excited their imagination and inspired their work, allowing them to achieve their own singularities? This course aims to elucidate not only Faulkner’s formal inventions and literary techniques but his social and moral concerns, so as to examine how they inform such writers as Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique), Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombia), Antonio Lobo Antunes (Portugal), Toni Morrison (United States), Juan Rulfo (Mexico), and Kateb Yacine (Algeria).

Among the works we will read are: Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, Sanctuary, and The Sound and the Fury, Chamoiseau’s Solibo Magnificent, Garcia Marquez’s The Autumn of the Patriarch, Lobo Antunes’s Act of the Damned, Morrison’s Beloved, Rulfo’s Pedro Paramo, and Yacine’s Nedjma. The course will conclude with a reading of selections from Faulkner, Mississippi, meditations upon the writer by Martinican poet and critic Edouard Glissant.
The course requirements are: a short (3-5 page) piece of literary criticism on a clearly defined topic to be determined in consultation with the instructor—this essay will be orally presented to the class—and a 12-15 page final exercise in imitation of any writer covered during the semester.

Bharati Mukherjee

Narrating the Nation

(FICTION)  Monday, 10am-12pm

When I arrived as an international student at the Writers’ Workshop, University of Iowa, in the early 1960s, about ninety-five percent of the MFA students were white, male Americans, many of them Korean War veterans on the GI bill, all of them obsessed with writing “The Great American Novel,” in the manner of Norman Mailer. Having grown up in a multi-lingual, multicultural, newly independent India still wracked by fierce ethnic loyalties, I became intrigued by my fellow-students’ ambition to dramatize an “American” national identity through fiction, and by their unselfconscious dismissal of American women and minority characters as central vehicles for the American national consciousness.

Is it possible for novelists to capture a “national” identity, especially in this age of mass migrations and globalized economy? Or are foundational national myths invented in times of social and political crises? How is the narration of national identity complicated in the case of “post-settler,” or “post-colonial” sovereign nations, for example, Australia, Canada, and South Africa? How do transnational U.S. and British authors negotiate the perilous journey between adopted “home” and inherited “homeland”? How do transnational Anglophone authors, for example, V.S. Naipaul, Zadie Smith, Junot Diaz, and Salman Rushdie, expand and energize traditional British English? We’ll look closely at each selected author’s choice of narrative strategy.

We hope to read David Malouf, Remembering Babylon; Michael Ondaatje, In the Skin of the Lion; V.S. Naipaul, A Bend in the River; J.M. Coetzee, Disgrace; Salman Rushdie, Shame; E.M. Forster, Howards End; Zadie Smith, White Teeth; Edwidge Danticat, The Dew Breaker; Junot Diaz, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.

Seminar participants will write a 7-10 page fictional narrative inspired by one of the novels on the reading list.
Sigrid Nunez

Narratives of Meditation, Reflection, and Speculation
(FICTION)  
Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm

According to Spanish novelist Javier Marías, “There is a tradition within the novel form... which embodies what I call literary thinking or literary thought. It’s a way of thinking which takes place only in literature—the things you never think of or hit upon unless you are writing fiction.” In this course we will study novels and short fiction that, without necessarily eschewing traditional elements of action, characters, story, and so forth, include this special kind of thinking: reflection, digression, deliberation, argument, speculation, meditation, reminiscence. We begin with Rilke’s only novel, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, and move on to works by Thomas Bernhard, Milan Kundera, V.S. Naipaul, J. M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Hardwick, William Gass, Renata Adler, David Markson, W.G. Sebald, Amy Hempel, Marilynne Robinson, Jenny Offill, Lydia Davis, Teju Cole, and Marías, among others.

Patricia O'Toole

Thickening the Plot
(NONFICTION)  
Tuesday, 5:15pm-7:15pm

Reality, the stuff of nonfiction, is disorganized, formless, random, unending. In short, reality has no plot. Authors of nonfiction narratives must discover the meanings and patterns in their subject matter and impose a plot—the force that gives a good narrative its momentum, tension, and direction. Through readings, class discussion, in-class exercises, and written assignments, students will explore a wide range of plots and plot devices, principles for selecting one plot over another, and techniques for imposing a plot on the chaos that is reality. The class might also take in a movie, or visit a museum, in order to consider “plot” in other arts and in nature.

Among the readings will be Tobias Wolff, “Bullet in the Brain”; essays by Richard Holmes and Jonathan Freedland; journalism by Katherine Boo; selections from E.M. Forster’s Aspects of the Novel and Robert Caro’s Master of the Senate and Sven Lindqvist’s Exterminate All the Brutes; a couple of novels (Evan Connell’s Mrs. Bridge and Ian McEwan’s Saturday); and some book-length works of nonfiction, including Alexander Masters’ Stuart: A Life Backwards and Adam Hochschild’s King Leopold’s Ghost.
Deborah Paredez

Witness, Record, Document: Poetry and Testimony

(POETRY) 

This seminar takes up the terms witness, record, and document as nouns and verbs. What is poetry of witness? Documentary poetry? Poetry as (revisionist) historical record? What labor and what ethical, political, and aesthetic considerations are required of poets who endeavor to witness, record, or document historical events or moments of trauma? How is this approach to poetry informed by or contributing to feminist theories, aesthetic innovation, and revisionist approaches to official histories? Course materials include: 1) essays that explore the poetics and politics of “poetry of witness” or “documentary poetry”; 2) a range of contemporary American poetry that has been classified as or has productively challenged these categories; and 3) audio, video, and photographic projects on which poets have collaborated. Our encounters with this work will be guided by and grounded in conversations about ideas of “truth,” “text,” the power relations of “documentation,” and issues of language and representation in poetry. We will also critically examine the formal (rhyme, rhythm, diction, form, genre, point of view, imagery, etc.) and philosophical components and interventions of the work we study and create.

Required books are:

- Nox, Anne Carson
- Each and Her, Valerie Martinez
- Blood, Shane McCrae
- Coal Mountain Elementary, Mark Nowak
- Zong!, M. NourbeSe Philip
- Citizen: An American Lyric, Claudia Rankine
- The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser, Muriel Rukeyser
- One Big Self: An Investigation, C.D. Wright

Note: This class is cross-listed with the undergraduate creative writing program and is open to both graduate and undergraduate students.

Elissa Schappell

Where Are You Going, How Do You Get There?

(FICTION) 

Wednesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

It’s ironic the stories that we most need to write, the ones that we alone can write, are often ones we are not writing. Why? The stakes are too high. The material makes us uncomfortable. We simply feel unequal to the task. Ridiculous. All we need are
new traps. We need new tools, forms, and narrative devices that will allow us to move beyond our comfort zone under cover of artifice, so we can write something true. In this class, we will be doing both in- and outside class exercises, guided by the voices of authors such as Jayne Anne Phillips, Margaret Atwood, Amy Hempel, David Means, Padgett Powell, Ishmael Reed, Virginia Woolf, George Saunders, Toni Morrison, and Mary Robison.

No creeps, no whiners.

Matthew Sharpe

**Space in Stories**

(FICTION)  

*Wednesday, 2:10pm-4:10pm*

“Dear sublet of a wormhole. Dear molecular square footage. Dear zero perched on the neck of a god.”

—Suzanne Wise

Space is everywhere. That is the premise of this seminar, an examination of how space signifies in short stories and novels. It—space—is inextricable from plot, point of view, the development of characters and themes, figurative language, and, as Albert Einstein and others have shown, time. With our bodies—which exist in space, and whose existence is one of the main reasons space is so important to us in literature and in general—we’ll read a few novels, a few essays, and more than a few short stories. Then we’ll talk about them in a classroom, which is a space that sometimes can feel oppressively small, and at other times can feel like a portal to infinity; I’ll ask you to join me in going for the latter type of spatial experience by reading and thinking expansively and conversing beautifully on our chosen subject. There’ll be an essay due as well, which I will expect you to give to me on pieces of paper measuring 8.5 by 11 inches early in the month of December.

Some things we’ll probably read:

Lara Vapnyar

**Building a Scene**

*(FICTION)*

*Thursday, 11am-1pm*

Individual scenes are important building blocks of any prose narrative, yet the craft of designing a scene is often neglected by aspiring writers. In this class, we will study all the aspects of building a successful scene: setting, inner plot, inner structure, spotlight on the characters, P.O.V., choreography of physical movement, dialogue. We will study how to write sex scenes, death scenes, party scenes, battle scenes, nature scenes.

The readings will include short stories, novels, or excerpts from novels by Marcel Proust, Leo Tolstoy, Elena Ferrante, Roberto Bolaño, Jonathan Franzen, Annie Proulx, Alice Munro.

Brenda Wineapple

**Writing Others**

*(NONFICTION)*

*Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm*

“Biography first convinces us of the fleeing of the Biographied,” Emily Dickinson once wrote. But biography and the biographical narrative are all around us, whether in books as dense as bricks or in the few, quick sentences of a daily obit.

What makes a good biography? Character, among other things. And to the extent that biography depends on character, this course looks closely at how such characters are created from *real* people: how a living, breathing person seems to arise out of a mass of sometimes contradictory “facts”; how characters are made to *change*, that is, if they do; how characters can make a story move; and, of course, how traditional biography can be liberated from its brick-like borders. These are a few of the topics we’ll investigate by reading around in the so-called genre of biography.

Writers/books may include Plutarch, Suetonius, Lytton Strachey, Natalie Zemon Davis (*The Return of Martin Guerre*), Virginia Woolf (*Orlando*), Richard Holmes (*Footsteps*), Janet Malcolm (on Sylvia Plath biographies), Candace Millard on the assassination of James Garfield (*Destiny of the Republic*), Adam Phillips on Freud, Rebecca Solnit on Eadweard Muybridge (*River of Shadows*), and Stephan Zweig on Magellan.
In this seminar, we will read, discuss, and write about the work of these three great twentieth-century German-language poets, all three of whom were born in what was once Austria-Hungary, and none of whom would have called themselves “Germans.” We will look carefully at the ways in which Trakl, Rilke, and Celan reinvented and wrote against the received poetic conventions of their times, and how, as visionaries, they came to shape and change the German language. Readings will be in English.
TRANSLATION COURSES

Susan Bernofsky

Imagining Berlin

Wednesday, 2:10pm-4:10pm

How can one imagine a city in a piece of writing with such vividness that the place springs to life as a mythical metropolis? The city of Berlin, which has often been at the crossroads of history in its asphalt-and-cobblestone reality, has developed a fictional life as well, inspiring countless writers. We’ll take this city as a model for writing about place, exploring the ways in which descriptions function in narrative to create a backdrop that fuels a story and provides atmospheric support for its unfolding. To begin with, we’ll read some of the important modernist works that established Berlin as a literary locus, mirroring the city’s vibrant life in the early decades of the 20th century. Later readings will show us Berlin in its wartime and Cold War incarnations, the city bisected into East and West, followed by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and its aftermath. Some of the narratives we’ll be reading will be historical, some highly imaginative, some fantastical. Several films will provide counterpoint. We’ll end the term with recent fictional approaches to the city by writers of several nationalities. For the books written in languages other than English, we’ll be reading with attention to the translations. No knowledge of any language other than English required.

Readings to include many of the following:

*Berlin Childhood around 1900* by Walter Benjamin
*Berlin Stories* by Robert Walser
*What I Saw: Reports from Berlin 1920-1933* by Joseph Roth
“The Dancing Girl” (舞姫 Maihime) by Mori Ogai
*Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Döblin (excerpts)
*Berlin, Berlin* by Kurt Tucholsky
*The Artificial Silk Girl* by Irmgard Keun
*Berlin Stories* by Christopher Isherwood
“A Guide to Berlin” by Vladimir Nabokov
*Every Man Dies Alone* by Hans Fallada
*Berlin Diaries, 1940-1945* by Marie Vassiltchikov
*A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City: A Diary* by anonymous
*The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* by John LeCarré
*Christiane F., or We Children of Bahnhof Zoo* [film] dir. by Ulrich Edel
*Heroes Like Us* by Thomas Brussig
*Wings of Desire* [film] dir. by Wim Wenders (screenplay by Peter Handke)
The Innocent by Ian McEwan
Stories from The Museum of Unconditional Surrender by Dubravka Ugresic
Tschick by Wolfgang Herrndorf
Berlin: City of Light/City of Smoke [graphic novel] by Jason Lutes
The Lives of Others [film] dir. by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
Visitation by Jenny Erpenbeck
Book of Clouds by Chloe Aridjis
March Violets by Philip Kerr
A Coffee in Berlin [film] dir. by Jan Ole Gerster
The History of History: A Novel of Berlin by Ida Hattemer-Higgins

Note: This class is cross-listed with the undergraduate creative writing program and is open to both graduate and undergraduate students.

Susan Bernofsky

**Literary Translation: Advanced Workshop**

*Thursday, 11am-1:30pm*

This is a workshop for advanced apprentices in the field of literary translation. The goal for the semester is to help you refine your skills as a translator, developing an enhanced feeling for and control over the style, tone, and texture of your translations with an end toward representing and producing linguistic and literary innovation in English. In consultation with the instructor, each participant will choose an individual project to work on over the course of the term; this can be thesis material for students pursuing the LTAC joint concentration. Weekly readings, mostly of essays by accomplished writer-translators, will familiarize participants with a range of perspectives on translation and its relationship to writing.

Natasha Wimmer

**Roberto Bolaño and the Total Novel**

*Wednesday, 10am-12pm*

Some novels seek a perfect smallness, others a messy vastness. Bolaño experimented with both extremes, but his heart was with the “great, imperfect, torrential works, books that blaze paths into the unknown.” Unlike the timid pharmacist in 2666, he chooses The Trial over The Metamorphosis, Moby-Dick over Bartleby, Bouvard et Pécauchet over A Simple Heart. His friend Rodrigo Fresán, borrowing a term coined by Mario Vargas Llosa, called
Bolaño’s literary project the Total Novel. Even his shortest novels are full of stories within stories, and all of his fiction together can be read as a many-layered single work, full of familiar but constantly mutating characters and themes. The sense the reader gets is not just of overlapping worlds, but of a single world progressing through different incarnations.

In this class, we will attempt to map those incarnations, reading for clues in the spirit of Bolaño’s own literary detectives. How do *The Savage Detectives* and *2666* hold together? How do the novels and stories interconnect? What are the through-lines? How do abundance and connection fuel Bolaño’s work? What is the nature of his particular brand of literary ambition? Our goals will be 1) to pursue total immersion (we will read as much Bolaño as we can); and 2) to explore the workings of the Total Novel. Readings will include all or most of *Last Evenings on Earth, Distant Star, Nazi Literature in the Americas, The Savage Detectives, 2666, Amulet*, and *By Night in Chile*. No knowledge of any language other than English required.

Matvei Yankelevich

**Literary Translation: Introductory Workshop**

*Tuesday, 10:30am-1pm*

This course is designed to introduce students to the art of literary translation and to encourage them to explore ways in which translation can enrich their own writing and revision process. Participants will work with the instructor to develop individual projects that will be revised and workshopped over the course of the term. Weekly readings (including essays by accomplished writer-translators and selections of multiple translations of a single text) will familiarize students with a range of perspectives on translation and its relationship to writing. We will be particularly concerned with nuances of style and tone, voice and cadence, and methods of representing and producing linguistic and literary innovation in English. This course is designed to accommodate both students with strong knowledge of a foreign language and previous translation experience and rank beginners. Basic reading knowledge of a second language is desirable, but students without foreign-language skills who are interested in experimenting with translation are also encouraged to register.
Joshua Cohen

Twentieth-Century Fiction: A Primer

Monday, 10am-12pm

Covering the totality of last century’s fiction in the course of a single semester is folly, but formal experience with folly is perhaps the best preparation for a writer’s life, and this is a class for writers. Traditional academic analysis of assigned texts will be subordinated to class lectures and discussions regarding how the assigned texts were made, which implies how that making can shape one’s own “practice.” Further, an ironic stance will be cultivated regarding use of the word “practice.”

Joseph Conrad’s Nostromo, Marcel Proust’s Swann’s Way, Edith Wharton’s The Age of Innocence, Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s Journey to the End of the Night, William Faulkner’s Absalom, Absalom!, Vladimir Nabokov’s The Gift, V.S. Naipul’s A House for Mr. Biswas, Doris Lessing’s The Golden Notebook, and Don DeLillo’s White Noise will be read and analyzed in terms including but not limited to “Voice,” “Point of View,” tense-deployment, time-manipulation, symbolism, description, dialogue, mood, pacing, genre conventions, the frustration of genre conventions, irony, frames, games, the essayistic or nonfiction mode in fiction, frustration.

Katy Lederer

Sensibility, Style, and Vision

Monday, 6:40pm-8:40pm

In this salon-style lecture class, which is designed to appeal to both poets and prose writers alike, we will ask some of the deepest and broadest questions that we can about our work: where does it come from? Why does it assume the particular forms that it does? And where do these forms and the ideas that they contain finally take us (or leave us)? Rather than approach these ancient questions from the outside in—from an examination of the artifact that is the piece of writing itself—we will start with these three fundamental aesthetic concepts and then work our way out using readings, group discussion, and guest lectures. The class will be both synchronic and diachronic, examining the history of these and related aesthetic terms (sympathy, negative capability, mimesis, etc.), and the ways in which they either consciously or unconsciously shape our current practice. The pedagogic method will be inquisitive as opposed to didactic, and the readings and class speakers will be selected as much for their own sensibility and style as for their
expertise or knowledge of the subject. The ultimate aim of the class is to develop a generative and intellectually refined sense of concepts and terms that we already bring to our own creative processes and shared aesthetic life.

We are lucky enough to have twelve extraordinary guests already confirmed, most of whom will be joining us from out of town:

**Susan Wheeler** is the author of the novel *Record Palace* (Graywolf) and six books of poems, the most recent of which is *Assorted Poems* (FSG).


**Claudia Rankine** is the author of five collections of poetry, including *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf), which received the 2014 National Books Critics Circle Award and the 2014 National Book Award for poetry.

**Shane McCrae** is the author of several poetry collections, including *Mule* (Cleveland State) and *The Animal Too Big to Kill* (Persea Books).

**Aaron Kunin** is the author of three books of poems and the novel *The Mandarin* (Fence Books).

**Laura Glenum** is the author of five books of poetry including *Art Sick* (Coconut Books).

**Prageeta Sharma** is the author of four collections of poems, most recently *Undergloom* (Fence Books).

**Camille Rankine** is the author of the chapbook *Slow Dance with Tripwire*, which was chosen by Cornelius Eady for the Poetry Society of America’s New York Fellowship. Her full-length collection of poetry, *Incorrect Merciful Impulses*, is forthcoming in fall 2015 from Copper Canyon Press.

**Frank Guan** is a founding editor of the magazine *Prelude*, and has written for *N+1* and *The New Republic*. He recently completed a translation of Baudelaire’s classic *Flowers of Evil*.

**Cathy Wagner** is the author of several books of poems, most recently *Nervous Device* (City Lights).
**CAConrad** is the author of several books of poems, most recently *ECODEVIANCE: (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness* (Wave Books).

Richard Locke

**Twentieth-Century Literary Nonfiction**

*Thursday, 2pm-4pm*

A survey of criticism, reportage, polemics, memoirs, and meditations from the 1920’s to the present that explores the variety and flexibility of nonfiction styles and genres.

The reading will include:

- *The Edmund Wilson Reader* (selections), ed. Lewis M. Dabney
- *The Common Reader: First Series* (selections), Virginia Woolf
- *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf
- *Goodbye to Berlin*, Christopher Isherwood
- *A Collection of Essays by George Orwell* (selections)
- *Homage to Catalonia*, George Orwell
- *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi
- *Speak, Memory*, Vladimir Nabokov
- *Essays of E.B. White* (selections)
- *Up in the Old Hotel* (selections), Joseph Mitchell
- *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live* (selections), Joan Didion
- *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston
- *Wittgenstein’s Nephew: A Friendship*, Thomas Bernhard
- *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, Edmund de Waal

Ben Metcalf

**An Earnest Look at Irony**

*Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm*

In this lecture, we will discuss works by several accomplished writers of fiction, and a few crackerjack poets, in order to determine what, precisely, we mean when we talk about irony on the page and what, precisely, we mean when we talk about earnestness. How are these very different effects (and affects) achieved? What are their benefits to the student author? What pitfalls, perceived or otherwise, attend the allure of each? What is the relationship of humor to earnestness, and of seriousness to irony? Is the absence of irony really the same thing as earnestness? Does the absence of earnestness somehow necessitate irony?
With an eye toward technique, we will explore these and further issues among the
sentences and strategies of those who fall all along, though often refuse to stay put
on, the earnest-ironic continuum. Students will be expected to write two short-short
(2- to 5-page) stories throughout the semester, exploring for themselves this
treacherous but eminently skiable slope.

With readings from Walter Abish, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), John Cheever, James
Thurber, Raymond Carver, Veronica Geng, Donald Barthelme, Mark Twain, T. S.
Eliot, Robert Frost, Vladimir Nabokov, Stevie Smith, Herman Melville, Samuel
Beckett, James Baldwin, Brendan Behan, James Joyce, Anthony Burgess, Alice Munro,
Zadie Smith, William Trevor, Cormac McCarthy, Flannery O’Connor, Max Beerbohm,
Margaret Atwood, Padgett Powell, Saki, W.E.B. Du Bois, Arthur Miller, Bruce
Chatwin, David Foster Wallace, Paul West, J. M. Coetzee, Katherine Anne Porter, and
others.

Christopher Sorrentino

The Unblinking “I”: An Incomplete Survey
of the First Person

Tuesday, 4:20pm-6:20pm

Originally used to sustain the illusion of realism and authenticity as the novel
gathered force as a narrative form, the first person voice was gradually adapted to a
variety of purposes: to narrow the reader’s view into the world of the narrative, to
mislead the reader, to gain access to the protagonist’s state of mind, to contrast the
versions of events related by several different narrators, to bear witness to the
adventures of other characters, to allow the author to disrupt his/her own
narratives, and sometimes all of these things at once and more. Now, with the
memoir emerging as a new and powerfully resonant form of fiction, voice and
viewpoint have come full circle, and the first person once again is being used to
assert authenticity and truthfulness. In this class we will read and discuss works
spanning eras and genres and demonstrating a variety of approaches. Readings may
include works by Austen, Akutagawa, Baldwin, Beckett, Bernhard, Bolaño, Brontë,
Chandler, Faulkner, Ferrante, James, Kavan, Melville, and many others.

Benjamin Taylor

In the Americas

Friday, 2:15pm-4:15pm
Our itinerary runs from Wall Street to a copper mine in Chile, from Chicago’s south side to the Galápagos Islands, from small-town Ontario to the cliff dwellings of the Anasazi, from a south Texas dairy farm to the Colombian littoral, from Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha to Borges’s Library of Babel. A course for writers curious about everything the word “American” has meant and means. We read the following:

“Bartleby, the Scrivener,” “The Encantadas,” and “Benito Cereno,”
Herman Melville
Song of Myself and Democratic Vistas, plus selections from Specimen Days,
Walt Whitman
Epitaph of a Small Winner, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis
The Professor’s House, Willa Cather
“Old Mortality,” “Pale Horse, Pale Rider” and “’Noon Wine,” plus selections from The Collected Essays, Katherine Anne Porter
As I Lay Dying, William Faulkner
Selected essays from Other Inquisitions; selected parables from Labyrinths;
and “An Autobiographical Essay,” Jorge Luis Borges
Black Boy, Richard Wright
The Optimist’s Daughter and One Writer’s Beginnings, Eudora Welty
Family Furnishings, Alice Munro
Deep Down Dark, Héctor Tobar

Prior to our first meeting, please read Gabriel García Márquez’s Living to Tell the Tale, one of the supreme autobiographical accounts of a young artist coming to power through ever widening knowledge of the world.
MASTER CLASSES

Jon Cotner

Walking

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Oct. 29 - Dec. 10* Thursday, 12pm-2pm
*no class Nov. 26

As Walter Benjamin notes in *The Arcades Project*: “Basic to flânerie, among other things, is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor. The flâneur, as is well known, makes ‘studies.’” This course will encourage students to make “studies”—poems, essays, stories, or multimedia pieces—based on their walks. We’ll read depictions of walking from multiple disciplines, including philosophy, poetry, history, anthropology, and urban planning. Authors include Diogenes, Matsuo Bashō, Henry David Thoreau, Walter Benjamin, Bruce Chatwin, Rebecca Solnit, and Jeff Speck. Occasionally we’ll walk together. An important point of the course is to develop mobile forms of writing. How can writing emerge from, and document, a walk’s encounters, observations, and reflections? What advantages does mobility bring to our work?

Lauren Grodstein

Plot

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Sept. 25 - Oct. 30 Friday, 12pm-2pm

Many authors find, counter-intuitively, that plot is the most challenging part of creating fiction: it’s easy to make up the people, but hard to figure out what to do with them. This is true even though plot is the most elemental part of storytelling, the thing we use when we relay gossip to our friends, tell our partners about our day, or explain the world to our children. This master class will help writers find the tools they need to create compelling plot. Students will study both commercial and literary fiction, examining the mechanics of action and the way that authors build sympathy for their characters and suspense about what’s going to happen to them next. Students will also find the connecting points between character, voice, and plot, and consider the way these crucial elements of fiction relate to one another.
Nalini Jones

**The Child in Fiction**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Oct. 20 - Dec. 1*  
*no class Nov. 3*  
**Tuesday, 4:10pm-6:10pm**

This class will be an exploration of the roles of children in fiction (but not in children’s literature) with particular attention paid to the ways writers craft their child characters. We’ll explore ways children can function in the fabric of a story or novel and the narrative opportunities they create in terms of plot, suspense, point of view, time and memory, emotional and moral stakes, and even setting. We’ll consider the differences in using children as narrators and writing children in the third person. We’ll also open the discussion to some of the common pitfalls in writing about children, sentimentalizing them, for example, or treating them as diminished adults. Readings (stories, short novels, and novel excerpts) will include work by Charles Dickens, Henry James, William Maxwell, Eudora Welty, Toni Cade Bambara, Grace Paley, Gish Jen, Rohinton Mistry, and Jim Shepard, among others. Students should come to the course having recently read Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

A written assignment inspired by the class will be required.

Patricia Marx

**Humor Writing**

4 sessions (1 point) / Oct. 28 - Nov. 18  
**Wednesday, 1:10pm-3:10pm**

“Humor is emotional chaos remembered in tranquility.”

—James Thurber

“Comedy has to be based on truth. You take the truth and you put a little curlicue at the end.”

—Sid Caesar

“Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall into an open sewer and die.”

—Mel Brooks

“...An amateur thinks it's really funny if you dress a man up as an old lady, put him in a wheelchair, and give the wheelchair a push that sends it spinning down a slope towards a stone wall. For a pro, it's got to be a real old lady.”

—Groucho Marx
“What is comedy? Comedy is the art of making people laugh without making them puke.”
—Steve Martin

“You know, crankiness is the essence of all comedy.”
—Jerry Seinfeld

“Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it.”
—E.B. White

“Patty Marx is the best teacher in the Creative Writing Program.”
—Patricia Marx

One of the above quotations is false. Find out which one in this humor-writing master class, where you will read, listen to, and watch comedic samples from well-known and lesser-known humorists, and complete weekly writing assignments, both take-home and in-class. Readings will include works by most or at least some of the following: Mark Twain, James Thurber, S.J. Perelman, Dorothy Parker, Charles Portis, Ian Frazier, Paul Rudnick, Steve Martin, Woody Allen, Nora Ephron, Roz Chast, David Rakoff, Fran Lebowitz, Meghan Daum, Miranda July, to mention just a few. You will have fun in this class—or else.

David Mikics

**Emerson and His Children**

4 sessions (1 point) / Oct. 30 - Nov. 20  
*Friday, 12pm-2pm*

In this class we’ll be thinking about why Emerson is the central American essayist, and then considering what we feel about him and why. We will also read essays by some writers influenced by Emerson’s way of thinking and writing: William James, John Jay Chapman, Ralph Ellison, Loren Eiseley, and Gretel Ehrlich.

Emerson’s enemies dismiss him as a mere optimist or mere solipsist, but the truth is that he’s a many-sided and profoundly strange writer, tough, evasive, and loaded with both darkness and light. He is funny, frightening, sublime, and best of all, underhanded.

Oliver Wendell Holmes said that Emerson when he lectured resembled “a cat picking her footsteps in wet weather.” On the page, too, the suspense in Emerson’s essays comes from the way he maneuvers from one sentence to the next. There’s much that a nonfiction writer can learn from Emerson’s technique of following his thoughts, shaping his prose in a way that both teases and sustains the reader.
As Americans, we speak Emerson all the time, usually without knowing it. By studying how Emerson works we can use him to our own writing’s advantage. Even if you think yourself far removed from Emerson’s stance and style, you will be surprised by how reading him can spur you.

The assignment will be a brief essay answering, arguing with, or appreciating one of our readings—or else an original work in the vein of something we’ve read by Emerson or his inheritors.

Rowan Ricardo Phillips

**The Art of the Voice in Translation**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Sept. 17 - Oct. 22    Thursday, 2pm-4pm

The voice. What is it? How do you identify it and what then? What is it composed of? How is it formed? What does it do now in our time? These are some of the central questions of both poetry and translation. If poetry is, as Frost aphorized, what gets lost in translation, then the voice is a light to guide the reader to where translation and poetry co-exist as a single practice. Voice is what is poignant within the perfunctory nature of translation. It is where your style and another poet’s embody a suitable truth. Literary history shows us how varied these suitable truths can be. Take Homer’s epics—which Pope translates into heroic couples, Lattimore translates one foot firmly left in the Greek, Fagles translates in the moods of the contemporary mind, and Logue translates as something close to cinema. As the work of the translator is to craft a convincing and sustained voice from the translated text, so is the work of the poet to craft a convincing and sustained voice from the written experience. In other words, literary translation and creative writing both concern themselves with problems of voice at the level of craft. For this reason, translation is a vital aid in the development of the poet’s voice.

This six-week course will focus on two central questions: How do we find a voice for a work we are translating? And, How does that voice relate to the poetic voice that inhabits our own work? We will, for the most part, study poets who have been translated frequently and whom you may have studied or have an interest in studying (regardless of your experience with the language or with translating): Homer, Virgil, Dante, Baudelaire, Rilke, Lorca. Open to all, no particular foreign-language proficiency required.
Camille Rankine

**The Poetry of Silence**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Oct. 2 - Nov. 13  
Friday, 2:15pm-4:15pm  
*no class Oct. 23*

“I think I am probably in love with silence, that other world. And that I write, in some way, to negotiate seriously with it.”  
—Jorie Graham, “Some Notes on Silence”

In this class we will examine the various ways that poets negotiate silence—through narrative, fragments, white space, erasure, the unsaid. Through reading, writing, and discussion, students will explore their own relationship to silence as we investigate how silence can operate as an active, enriching presence in poetry, opening up a space of tension and electricity. Readings will include work by Emily Dickinson, Michael Dickman, Kate Greenstreet, Louise Glück, Hoa Nguyen, Khadijah Queen, Claudia Rankine, Charles Simic, and more.

Mark Rotella

**Writing About Food: Evoking Sensory and Cultural Experiences**

4 sessions (1 point) / Oct. 2 - Oct. 23  
Friday, 12pm-2pm

“The Proust *madeleine* phenomenon is now as firmly established in folklore as Newton’s apple,” wrote *New Yorker* writer A.J. Liebling in 1962. “The man ate a tea biscuit, the taste evoked memories, he wrote a book.” In this seminar we will look at writers who have elevated the discourse on food. We encounter food in our everyday lives, and it is often by chance that a specific taste coincides with an experience that will resonate with us for years to come. We will discuss how these authors used a meal, or single ingredient, to create a transportive literary narrative. There will also be occasional writing exercises.

Liebling further conjectured about Proust: “On a dozen Gardiners Island oysters, some bay scallops, three sautéed soft-shelled crabs, a few ears of fresh-picked corn, a thin swordfish steak of generous area, a pair of lobsters, and a Long Island duck, he might have written a masterpiece.”

Readings will include:

*Between Meals*, A.J. Liebling
It can be argued that we can only write a Nature Poetry worthy of the ecological imperative when we realize we are inside both nature and language, vulnerable to the encounter, able to surrender a certain control... in other words, not outside Nature, positioned so as to write about Nature, but speaking from inside it, as if Nature were the Unconscious. Such writing might not even resemble “nature writing”!

What do literary texts and ecosystems hold in common? They are both complex systems, in which all elements are interrelated. In language, a single word added to or removed from a text can potentially alter the balance of rhythm, image, and meaning. Such is true of an eco-system as well. Languages and eco-systems are both polyvalent hybrids, capable of happening in multiple directions simultaneously. In this light, how do we work on our writing practice so as to maximize the strength and the growth of all those tendrils? What does it mean to write from the black of the page, as opposed to accepting the illusion of the white? Through writing exercises and a series of readings, this class will explore how an eco-poetics might respond to a global dilemma.

Readings will be drawn from Chilean poet Raul Zurita’s *Inri*, Camille Dungy’s anthology *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African-American Nature Poetry*, and Charles Baudelaire’s *The Flowers of Evil*; theoretical works like Brenda Iijima’s *The Eco Language Reader*, Jed Rasula’s *This Compost: Ecological Imperatives In American Poetry*, David Abram’s *The Spell of the Sensuous* and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and The Invisible*; and works of fiction such as S. Yizhar’s novella *Khirbet Khizeh*. The class is intended to address the needs and interests of poetry students, fiction students, and creative nonfiction students addressing the conundrum of writing about nature.
Parul Sehgal

For Love and Money: The Art (and Pleasure) of Criticism

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Oct. 6 - Nov. 17*  Tuesday, 6:15pm-8:15pm
*no class Nov. 3

We write criticism for love, and sometimes for money, to participate in the culture and to hone our visions for our own novels and nonfiction. In this class, students will engage with a wide variety of reviews—of literature, film, food, music, and painting. They will consider what elevates the review into an art form and how the practice of criticism can inform their own work. They will also have a hand at writing critical pieces of their own. Readings will include reviews by James Baldwin, Elizabeth Hardwick, James Schuyler, Pauline Kael, Renata Adler, and Zadie Smith, as well as selections from Virginia Woolf’s The Common Reader and Martin Amis’s The War Against Cliché.

Rachel Sherman

Divorce in Short Fiction

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Oct. 7 - Nov. 11  Wednesday, 10am-12pm

Narrative is inherent to the nature of divorce: as one story begins, another ends. This duality echoes that of the two partners’ own unraveling, each life affected in its own way. The fall-out trickles down to children, friends, families and even the dog, making for a perfectly messy story set-up.

Divorce in fiction affords a writer permission to allow their characters to experience situations and emotions that they might not otherwise have reason to access. The sudden abandonment of a pact based on hope can leave a character undone, manic, re-born or bed-stricken.

In this class we will unpack different ways divorce plays out as a narrative construct. Rather than being simply a device, divorce questions the reliability of characters and/or narrators and reminds us that unpredictability can ultimately be revealing.

Readings will include fiction by Justin Torres, Bharati Mukherjee, Helen Simpson, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Lorrie Moore, John Updike, Jhumpa Lahiri, Andre Dubus, John Cheever, and Grace Paley.

There will be some in-class writing, as well as short (1–2 page) weekly assignments.
Sadie Stein

They Are What They Eat: The Role of Food in Fiction

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Oct. 30 - Dec. 11*  
Friday, 2:15pm-4:15pm  
*no class Nov. 27

“Of course reading and thinking are important but, my God, food is important too.”  
― Iris Murdoch, The Sea, The Sea

Eating is as fundamental to life as breathing, sleeping, and sex. What, how, and when characters eat is an aspect of their lives that a fiction writer needs to address—even if by omission. To what extent are characters defined by what they eat? What can be learned about character, setting, place, time, and socio-economics based on the food on the table? What does the culture of food reveal to us about a society, its people, and their psyches? Is food metaphor? What is the intent behind the trend to include recipes in works of literature? Is their inclusion merely a clever device? Or, can recipes enhance a work of literature? Can a recipe be a work of literature?

We will explore ways in which food can be character, indicator, and illustration through the evolution of the meanings and uses of food in fiction—from American Psycho’s tartare to Anna Karenina’s oysters to Oliver Twist’s gruel. Authors read will include David Foster Wallace, Raymond Carver, and Philip Roth, among others.

Students will be required to write a short work of fiction that uses food—or its lack—in a way that tells the story.

Come hungry.

Jonathan Wilson

The Campus Novel

4 sessions (1 point) / Oct. 14 - Nov. 4  
Wednesday, 4:30pm-6:30pm

The American campus has been at war with itself for more than half a century, and its civil and not so civil eruptions, from dress codes to trigger warnings, have provided juicy material for novelists. In this four-week course we will contemplate both the sun and shadow of academic life, its sexual and intellectual politics from the discreet bow-tied charms of its early prejudices in the 1950s to its current blood-on-the-tracks crises. Navel-gazing can be a dangerous occupation, but the fiction that we will read is not immured but rather engaged with the world's
business as much as the comings and goings inside the ivory tower. We will read Vladimir Nabokov’s Pnin, Philip Roth’s Indignation, Susan Choi’s My Education and Julie Schumacher’s Dear Committee Members. This is not a writing workshop but students will be asked to complete one short writing assignment inspired or influenced by the reading and their own campus experience.

James Wood

**Fictional Technique in Novellas and Short Stories**

**4 sessions (1 point) / Sept. 15 - Oct. 6  Tuesday, 4:10pm-6:10pm**

In this class we will examine fictional technique in four short texts by Saul Bellow, Muriel Spark, Penelope Fitzgerald, and Lydia Davis. We shall be examining characterization, realism, style, and form, and reflecting on a century of fictional experiment.

Texts:

- Saul Bellow, *Collected Stories*
- Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*
- Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Blue Flower*
- Lydia Davis, *Collected Stories*