Columbia University School of the Arts
Graduate Writing Program

Spring 2016

Coursebook

- Workshops
- Seminars
- Translation Courses
- Lectures
- Master Classes

Updated: December 23, 2015
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**Course Descriptions**

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WORKSHOPS (6 - 9 points)

FICTION – OPEN (6 points)

Robert Lopez  
Monday, 1:05pm-4:05pm

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

Nalini Jones  
Tuesday, 1pm-4pm

James Lasdun  
Tuesday, 4:10pm-7:10pm

Angela Flournoy  
Wednesday, 12:05pm-3:05pm

Joshua Furst  
Thursday, 10:50am-1:50pm

Mia Alvar  
Thursday, 2pm-5pm

FICTION – THESIS (9 points)*

Elissa Schappell  
Monday, 10am-1pm

Victor LaValle (by application only)  
Tuesday, 1pm-4pm

Ben Marcus  
Tuesday, 1pm-4pm

David Ebershoff  
Wednesday, 3:10pm-6:10pm

Gary Shteyngart  
Wednesday, 3:45pm-6:45pm

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

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

Rebecca Godfrey  
Friday, 2:10pm-5:10pm

NONFICTION – OPEN (6 points)

Leslie Jamison  
Monday, 10am-1pm

Eliza Griswold  
Monday, 1:05pm-4:05pm

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

Lis Harris  
Tuesday, 1pm-4pm

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

Cris Beam  
Wednesday, 10am-1pm

Michael Greenberg  
Thursday, 6:30pm-9:30pm

POETRY – OPEN (6 points)

Mark Bibbins  
Monday, 11am-2pm

Richard Howard  
Tuesday, 4pm-7pm

POETRY – THESIS (9 points)*

Lucie Brock-Broido  
Tuesday, 4:30pm-8:30pm

Timothy Donnelly  
Tuesday, 4:30pm-8:30pm

Dorothea Lasky  
Tuesday, 7:15pm-10:15pm

*Second-Years only
SEMINARS AND TRANSLATION COURSES (3 points)

——MONDAY——

Mónica de la Torre (P)
World of Echoes: Recent Poetry in Translation
  Monday, 2:05pm-4:05pm

Rivka Galchen (NF)
Scientists and Writers on Writing about Science
  Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm

Erroll McDonald (F)
The Peripheral Writer
  Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm

Paul La Farge (F)
Science Fiction
  Monday, 5pm-7pm

——TUESDAY——

Lis Harris (NF)
Profiles
  Tuesday, 10am-12pm

Leslie Jamison (NF)
Emotion and Sentimentality
  Tuesday, 10am-12pm

Alberto Manguel (F)
Borges: Twelve Texts
  Tuesday, 10am-12pm

Elissa Schappell (F)
What’s Your Point?
  Tuesday, 10am-12pm

Adam Wilson (F)
Weaponized Words: Confronting and Co-Opting the New Global Vernacular
  Tuesday, 10am-12pm

Phillip Lopate (NF)
Criticism as a Literary Genre
  Tuesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Gary Shteyngart (F)
Strangers in a Strange Land
  Tuesday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Patricia O'Toole (NF)
Investigations: The Art and Craft of Nonfiction Research
  Tuesday, 5:15pm-7:15pm

Ira Silverberg (F)
Writing from the Margins
  Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm
SEMINARS AND TRANSLATION COURSES (cont’d.)

— WEDNESDAY —

Lara Vapnyar (F)
Architecture of a Story
Wednesday, 10am-12pm

Matvei Yankelevich (CG)
The Art of the Book
Wednesday, 10am-12pm

Deborah Paredez (P)
Formally Yours: Experiments with Form and (Neo)Formalism in Contemporary American Poetry
Wednesday, 10am-12pm

Alan Ziegler (CG)
The Writer as Teacher
Wednesday, 12:05pm-3:05pm

Edith Grossman (TR)
The Genius of Garcia Márquez
Wednesday, 12:35pm-2:35pm

Joseph Fasano (P)
Prosody
Wednesday, 1:05pm-3:05pm

Chinelo Okparanta (F)
What Constitutes a Culture in Fiction?
Wednesday, 2:40pm-4:40pm

Lucie Brock-Broido (P)
The Practice of Poetry
Wednesday, 3:15pm-6:15pm

Binnie Kirshenbaum (F)
Construction / Creation
Wednesday, 4:45pm-6:45pm

Patricia O’Toole (NF)
Investigations: The Art and Craft of Nonfiction Research
Wednesday, 4:45pm-6:45pm

— THURSDAY —

Hilton Als (NF)
Capote, Didion, Mailer, Wolfe, Trow, and Adler: Mavericks of Nonfiction
Thursday, 10am-12pm

Susan Bernofsky (TR)
Word for Word Workshop
Thursday, 12:05pm-2:35pm

B.K. Fischer (CG)
The Comma Sutra: Grammar, Syntax, & Praxis
Thursday, 11:45am-1:45pm

Alyson Waters (TR)
Literary Translation Workshop
Thursday, 3:50pm-6:20pm

Barbara Epler (F)
Why Is Something a Masterpiece?
Thursday, 6:30pm-8:30pm

— FRIDAY —

Paul Beatty (F)
Mapping Los Angeles: Creating Place and Space
Friday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Monica Ferrell (CG)
The Art of Lying: A Cross-Genre Workshop in Fiction
Friday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Hilton Als (CG)
James Baldwin in Manhattan
Friday, 2:10pm-4:10pm
LECTURES (3 points)

— MONDAY —

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

Alice Quinn  
Intention and Surprise  
Monday, 6:45pm-8:45pm

— TUESDAY —

Christopher Sorrentino  
Bad Company: Dangerous Protagonists  
Tuesday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

— THURSDAY —

Richard Locke  
Beyond Category: A Survey of Fiction  
Thursday, 2pm-4pm

Brenda Wineapple  
The Historical Imagination  
Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm
MASTER CLASSES (1 – 1.5 points)

— MONDAY —

David Hinton
Writing Another Universe:
Ancient China, Modern America (1.5 points)
Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm
Mar. 21 - Apr. 25

Lauren Grodstein
Other Than Self (1.5 points)
Monday, 6:15pm-8:15pm
Jan. 25 - Feb. 29

Mike Harvkey
Drama, Conflict & Tension (1.5 points)
Monday, 6:15pm-8:15pm
Mar. 21 - Apr. 25

— TUESDAY —

Cary Goldstein
This One Pursuit (1.5 points)
Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm
Feb. 2 - Mar. 8

Meehan Crist
Writing the Brain (1 point)
Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm
Mar. 29 - Apr. 19

— WEDNESDAY —

Nicholas Delbanco
Travel Writing (1.5 points)
Wednesday, 1:05pm-3:05pm
Jan. 27 - Mar. 2

Joshua Bennett
Black Soundings in Contemporary Poetry (1.5 points)
Wednesday, 1:05pm-3:05pm
Mar. 23 - Apr. 27

Brigid Hughes
Editing and the Writer (1.5 points)
Wednesday, 1:05pm-3:05pm
Mar. 23 - Apr. 27

— THURSDAY —

Sandra Smith
Writing Dialogue in Translation (1 point)
Thursday, 11am-1pm
Mar. 3 - Mar. 31

Dinitia Smith
Memory (1 point)
Thursday, 1:45pm-3:45pm
Feb. 4 - Feb. 25

Maureen Howard
Virginia Woolf (1.5 points)
Thursday, 1:45pm-3:45pm
Mar. 24 - Apr. 28

Corinna Barsan
Revise Like An Editor (1.5 points)
Thursday, 6:30pm-9pm
Feb. 4 - Mar. 10

William Wadsworth
Rewriting Shakespeare (1.5 points)
Thursday, 6:30pm-8:30pm
Feb. 11 - Mar. 3, Mar. 25

— FRIDAY —

Rob Spillman
Establishing Authority (1.5 points)
Friday, 12:05pm-2:05pm
Jan. 29 - Mar. 11 (no class Mar. 4)

Cate Marvin
On Revision (1.5 points)
Friday, 2:10pm-4:10pm
Mar. 25 - Apr. 29
SEMINARS

Hilton Als

James Baldwin in Manhattan

(CROSS-GENRE) Friday, 2:10-4:10pm

This is a seminar about the fabled author who articulated many of America's more complicated arguments—about race, sex, and the pursuit of freedom. Born in Harlem in 1924, Baldwin was as influenced by literature as he was by movies, art, and theatre. This seminar will not only explore his work, but his various influences, including the city of his birth. In addition to in-class discussion we will, upon occasion, visit various museums, see films, and view theatre productions that had a direct influence on his work.

Note: Enrollment in this course is by application only. Please submit writing samples of no more than eight pages in length for admission to the class. Writing samples should be emailed to Clarence Coo (ckc2115@columbia.edu) by Mon, Jan. 4, 5pm. Samples should be sent as a Word or PDF attachment and the subject line of the email should read "BALDWIN SEMINAR APPLICATION". Students will be notified if they have been accepted into the class by Mon., Jan. 11.

Hilton Als

Capote, Didion, Mailer, Wolfe, Trow, and Adler:

Mavericks of Nonfiction

(NONFICTION) Thursday, 10am-12pm

This seminar will span approximately forty years of nonfiction writing, starting with the reporter Lillian Ross’ classic profile of Ernest Hemingway, to Tom Wolfe’s legendary report on “radical chic,” to George W.S. Trow’s profile of the late record producer Ahmet Ertegun. We will explore the ways in which long form narrative journalism began to experiment with form post-World War II, and how those various changes re-shaped our contemporary understanding of reporting, memoir, and the essay. Class participation is key.
Paul Beatty

**Mapping Los Angeles: Creating Place and Space**

(FICTION)  
*Friday, 12:05pm-2:05pm*

Writing, just like navigating L.A., is all a matter of cartography. One challenge is that the city is so fluid, ethnically and geographically, that it’s impossible to draw a complete map. Reading L.A. can be frustrating. It’s like the authors arrived in the city, after having made transcontinental drives, using only half a treasure map and an 1803 map of the Louisiana Purchase. The only landmarks are the beach, the palm trees, and the Hollywood Sign; everything else is a giant swath of unexplored urban sprawl simply labeled “Spanish Territory.” When it’s 70 degrees in December and folks plan their meals by triangulating the location of the Korean taco truck, it can be difficult to trust one’s sense of place and direction. Even the Thomas Guide, the quintessential L.A. mapping system, was intentionally sprinkled with fake streets and destinations. This class will explore L.A. in ways familiar and unfamiliar—using the city as a site of departure and cartography as a methodological opening, we will aim to map our own narratives, examine how places come to be, and investigate ways to make space. Readings will include Chester Himes, Wanda Coleman, Karen Tei Yamashita, Gina Sykes, John Fante, Art Pepper, Charles Mingus, and Bret Easton Ellis. Students will have to make two short presentations and write a short paper.

Lucie Brock-Broido

**The Practice of Poetry**

(POETRY: Open to 1st-Year Poetry students only)  
*Wednesday, 3:15pm-6:15pm*

Based on an unauthorized anthology which I’ve been shaping for twenty years (working title is *Even More & More Trouble in Mind*), we’ll be looking at an array of contemporary American poems through the lens of thirteen ways of inventing a Voice on the page. Each of these chapters is built around a particular assignment including: Leaping Poetry (Bly), the Numinous (Kunitz), the Duende (Lorca). We’ll be studying the construction of the line, the choreography of the voice on the page, the art of Violent Concision, the shaping of an American Sonnet, Closures, the Objective Correlative, the “Widerruf,” the Manifesto, Self-Portraits, Triggering Poems, the Art of Revision, and, finally, we’ll move toward a definition of a new School called “Feral Poetry”—(which does not exist). Until we construct it.

You’ll respond to each of the thirteen assignments. And these we’ll distribute and read aloud. And each of these assignments will be tailored to provoke a “subversive” exercise, that is to say—every rule may be bent unto broken.
This is a seminar for first-year poets only. The World According to Us. By way of introducing your work to your peers, please bring a poem to the first class that may be construed as either a Self-Portrait or an Ars Poetica.

Mónica de la Torre

**World of Echoes: Recent Poetry in Translation**

(POETRY) Monday, 2:05pm-4:05pm

In this seminar we will read new translations of contemporary poetry with a special focus on recent books published by small presses, often run by poets themselves. Examples of such books include *Belleza y Felicidad* by the Argentinean poets Fernanda Laguna and Cecilia Pavón (Sand Paper Press); from the French, Jean Marie Gleize’s *Tarnac, a preparatory act* (Kenning Editions); and Aleksandr Skidan’s *Red Shifting* (Ugly Duckling Presse) from the Russian. Besides the translated works, we will consider the ways in which their respective publishers choose to present them, with an eye toward identifying those elements that might resonate the most between the various communities that small presses help to build. We will also attend to translation issues and the aftereffects of cultural transmission, and will study some historical examples, e.g., Ashbery’s translations from the French and the Concretists’ efforts to disseminate American modernist poetry in Brazil. Students will be required to collaborate on a group presentation and to write a ten-page final response paper.

Barbara Epler

**Why Is Something a Masterpiece?**

(A Micro Approach to a Macro Sensation)

(FICTION) Thursday, 6:30pm-8:30pm

A seminar about what makes a given literary work great—as Gertrude Stein formulated it, what makes “the bell ring”? And to get at those unique essential qualities, often quite difficult to formulate (because genius can be so overwhelming and yet also so elemental), the aim with each of these books (published by New Directions) will be to discuss a suggested, specific aspect—a stretch of dialogue, a shift of scene, an approach, a key passage of the author. Through a little keyhole in each work, we’ll try to unlock some of the secrets of why many of us feel its author is a genius. (Or perhaps why you don’t.) The emphasis throughout will be on just what each author is up to, as embodied in the small selected focus. One paper will be required for the class: a short response paper or a short creative piece inspired by the reading.
Readings include: César Aira’s *Episode In The Life Of A Landscape Painter*; Roberto Bolaño’s “The Insufferable Gaucho” (in *The Insufferable Gaucho And Other Stories*); Fleur Jaeggy’s *Sweet Days of Discipline*; John Keene’s “Gloss, or the Strange History of Our Lady of the Sorrows” (in *Counternarratives*); László Krasznahorkai’s *Satantango*; Clarice Lispector’s *The Hour of the Star*; Joseph Roth’s *The Leviathan*; W.G. Sebald’s *The Rings Of Saturn*; Muriel Spark’s *The Driver’s Seat*; Yoko Tawada’s *The Bridegroom Was A Dog*; Regina Ullmann’s “The Old Tavern Sign” (in *The Country Road*); and selections from Robert Walser’s *The Microscripts*, among other works.

**Joseph Fasano**

**Prosody**

*(POETRY) Wednesday, 1:05pm-3:05pm*

This course will investigate the uses of rhythmic order and disorder in English-language poetry, with a particular emphasis on ‘formal’ elements in ‘free’ verse. Through a close analysis of poems, we will examine the possibilities of qualitative meter, and students will write original creative work within (and in response to) various formal traditions. Analytical texts and poetic manifestoes will accompany our reading of exemplary poems.

**Monica Ferrell**

**The Art of Lying: A Cross-Genre Workshop in Fiction**

*(CROSS-GENRE) Friday, 12:05pm-2:05pm*

This is a workshop in the writing of fiction for poets and nonfiction writers who are interested in trying out another genre. The course is designed to invite students to consider questions of language, image, credibility, narrative, character, point of view, style, tone, and structure from a fiction writer’s perspective. We will begin the semester by investigating how fiction writers choose to open their novels and stories, how one can get a story to move forward, and how sonic patterning operates in various prose works. We will read short fiction by Chimamanda Adichie, Kate Braverman, John Cheever, Aleksandar Hemon, Denis Johnson, Clarice Lispector, and Daniyal Mueenuddin, among others. We will also read two novels, the Lydia Davis translation of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and poet Ben Lerner’s *Leaving the Atocha Station*. Students will write two pieces of fiction—one full-length and one shorter—and present them for peer critique.

*This course is open to Nonfiction and Poetry students only.*
B. K. Fischer

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

(CROSS-GENRE) Thursday, 11:45am-1:45pm

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.

Rivka Galchen

**Scientists and Writers on Writing about Science**

(NONFICTION) Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm

In the 17th century, Sir Thomas Browne, the son of a silk merchant, wrote essays on unicorn horns, doxa, whales, and the discovery of some buried bronze age urns; those writings remain among the most beautiful thinking of our age. What does writing about science and nature look like today? In this course, we’ll consider a mix of contemporary and classic writers. Readings will include work by James Gleick, Lauren Redniss, Brian Greene, Jonathan Weiner, Rachel Aviv, Sir Thomas Browne, Plutarch, Annie Dillard, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Edward Hoagland, Freeman Dyson, Elizabeth Kolbert, and others.

One of the main features of this class will be visits every other week from the authors of the discussed works.
The writing requirement for the course will consist of four thoughtful written questions for the author, or about the reading, submitted each week before class.

Lis Harris

Profiles
(NONFICTION) Tuesday, 10am-12pm

One of the few forms of literary nonfiction available to serious writers that is still welcome in the magazine world, the profile form provides an opportunity to lavish attention both on the breadth of the profile subject’s life and on the profession, métier, or culture that is always the profile’s second subject. We will examine exemplary profiles by masters of the form, including A.J. Liebling, Joe Mitchell, Kenneth Tynan, and Lillian Ross, and identify the qualities their essays, as well as more recent pieces, have in common. The authors we study will be used as models for one profile submission at the end of the semester. The course will emphasize selection, interview, and research techniques and affords a rare opportunity to explore an off-campus reported subject in depth. The problems and process of each student’s work-in-progress will be discussed weekly.

Leslie Jamison

Emotion And Sentimentality
(NONFICTION) Tuesday, 10am-12pm

Emotional experience is one of our great literary subjects, but sentimentality is one of our biggest literary taboos. Oscar Wilde called a sentimentalist someone “who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it,” and these days sentimentality has inspired its own special breeds of fear, shame, and derision. This seminar will investigate what “sentimentality” means and why we strive so mightily to avoid it. We’ll think about how we might “earn” feeling on the page and what the payout might look like. (Also why the conversation about written sentiment has become so economic!) We’ll read poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, including works by Chris Kraus, Ben Lerner, William Faulkner, Claudia Rankine, Mary Gaitskill, John Berryman, Anne Carson, and Raymond Carver. The course will also include written assignments (in and out of class) exploring the evocation of feeling on the page.
“Necessity is the mother of invention.”
—Plato

“I never set out to be weird.”
—Frank Zappa

Most experiments fail or, even worse, produce results that are banal. But those experiments that do succeed have brought us the likes of James Joyce and penicillin. Altered narrative forms and innovative structures, such as playful framing devices, atypical design or layout, intertextual references, fractured pages, discretionary borrowing and so on, can add layers of texture and complexity to a work of literature. When use of an unorthodox technique results in a unified creation, the author’s intent is furthered, meaning is expanded and the reader’s experience is enriched. All is right with the world. But how do we know when a divergent structure or a foreign resource is intrinsic and organic to the work? When is it just a gimmick? Do we ask: What’s with the blurry photographs? Why would you begin at the end? Did the typesetter goof big time? Footnotes, footnotes, and still more footnotes? To what purpose? To what end? In this seminar we will aim to discover how, through successful innovation, the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts. We are going to examine a variety of literary inventions / re-inventions of composition and structure to study how technique informs content and vice versa. We will discuss how, why, and when a new technique is a necessity to the work. We will ask: Does the treatment arise from the need for it? Does function dictate form? Does content dictate structure? Or, are form and function symbiotic? Are we talking about the chicken and the egg?

The reading list will include novels, stories, and essays by J.M. Coetzee, Jennifer Egan, David Grossman, Lorrie Moore, Erna Broder, Clarice Lispector, Primo Levi, Roland Barthes, Roberto Bolaño, and Renata Adler, among others including the guy with all the footnotes. No gimmicks. All necessary. All great.

Students will be required to write a short story or essay inspired by the reading.
Paul La Farge

**Science Fiction**

(FICTION)  
*Monday, 5pm-7pm*

For the last hundred years or so, science fiction has been a way for writers to imagine the future, but also, implicitly or explicitly, to think about the present. In this class, we’ll read genre and mainstream works from the 1920s to the 2010s, with particular attention to the ways in which science fiction uses language to create a world, and the ways in which its created worlds cast light on technology, gender, race, politics, and other human notions. Readings by Isaac Asimov, Octavia Butler, Italo Calvino, Samuel R. Delany, Thomas Disch, Philip K. Dick, Jennifer Egan, Russell Hoban, Kazuo Ishiguro, Ursula K. LeGuin, Stanislaw Lem, H.P. Lovecraft, David Markson, Cormac McCarthy, James Tiptree Jr., and others.

Phillip Lopate

**Criticism as a Literary Genre**

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

This course will examine the lineaments of criticism in five art forms: movies, literature, visual art, music, and theater. The assumption is that a piece of criticism is an essay. The critic constructs a persona and establishes a sympathetic or antipathetic bond with the reader, while employing the most expressive prose style. We will be looking at the formal and intellectual possibilities of criticism—the strategies critics use to establish authority, construct an argument, find a balance between description and judgment, and entertain doubt. Polemics, appreciations, ambivalence, satire all go into the mix. Some of the authors discussed will include Otis Ferguson, James Agee, Manny Farber, Parker Tyler, Andrew Sarris, James Baldwin, Molly Haskell, and Pauline Kael; George Bernard Shaw, Max Beerbohm, William Hazlitt, and Eric Bentley; Hector Berlioz, Willa Cather, Virgil Thomson, Gerald Early, and Lester Bangs; Denis Diderot, John Ruskin, Charles Baudelaire, Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg, John Berger, and Ada Louise Huxtable; Virginia Woolf, Lionel Trilling, Elizabeth Hardwick, and Susan Sontag.
Alberto Manguel

**Borges: Twelve Texts**

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

The course will look in detail at twelve texts by Jorge Luis Borges in order to discuss his notions of literary genres and his understanding of literature as largely the creation of the reader. Throughout his life, Borges worked at blurring the definitions of genre, writing fiction under the guise of essays or poems, poems that read like stories or philosophical essays, biographies written with fictional devices. We will look at the sources of these subversive ideas in Borges’s eclectic library and read supplementary texts by a number of other writers: Cervantes, Kipling, Stevenson, Chesterton, Remy de Gourmont, Marcel Schwob, etc.

Of Borges’s work, we will be reading: “The Wall and the Books” (the essay) [from *Other Inquisitions*]; “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” (fiction and nonfiction) [from *Ficciones*]; “Death and the Compass” (the detective story) [from *Ficciones*]; “Ars poetica” (poetry) [from *Dreamtigers*]; “The Precursors of Kafka” (literary essay) [from *Other Inquisitions*]; and “The Search of Averroes” (biography) [from *The Aleph*], among others.

Erroll McDonald

**The Peripheral Writer**

(FICTION)  
*Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm*

What is literature’s global economy of prestige and what are its inequalities? Which is to say, where, how, why, and by whom is universal literary value conferred? If you are a writer from, say, Cape Verde, Romania, New Zealand, Jamaica, Algeria, Ethiopia, or even parts of the American South or Midwest—places whose literary traditions are deemed peripheral by the centers of consecration (Paris, New York, London, Barcelona, Rome, Frankfurt), what are the singular vicissitudes you must face, what literary norms at home or abroad must you either embrace or breach, to achieve international renown?

This course offers close readings of works in English or translation by 20th-century writers from around the world who were once marginalized but are now considered central to literary enterprise. The authors and books considered are likely to be:

- *The Loser*, Thomas Bernhard (Austria)
- *Pedro Paramo*, Juan Rulfo (Mexico)
- *Solibo Magnifique*, Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique)
- *The Blind Owl*, Sadegh Hedayat (Iran)
- *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner (New Albany, Mississippi)
Ferdydurke, Witold Gombrowicz (Poland)
The Passion According to G.H., Clarice Lispector (Ukraine, Brazil)
The Box Man, Kobo Abe (Japan)
A Bend in the River, V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad and Tobago)
My Name is Red, Orhan Pamuk (Turkey)
The Ten Thousand Things, Maria Dermout (Dutch West Indies)
Broken Glass, Alain Mabanckou (Republic of the Congo)

While the course aims to identify and examine their singularity of achievement by way of assimilation or differentiation, it is chiefly concerned with similarities and dissimilarities of narrative structure and strategy, language and syntax, imagery, time and place, and character development.

The course requirements are: a short (3-5 pages) piece of literary criticism on a clearly defined topic to be determined in consultation with the instructor—which will be orally presented to the class—and a 12-15 page final exercise in imitation of any writer covered during the semester.

Chinelo Okparanta

**What Constitutes a Culture in Fiction?**

(FICTION)  
**Wednesday, 2:40pm-4:40pm**

This seminar will concentrate on the notion of culture in relation to setting, character, voice, and language in fiction. What constitutes a culture for a work of fiction set in Iowa City versus in New York City, for instance? Can there exist instances of culture in places and spaces where everything appears homogenized? Is culture so ubiquitous that it should cease to be given attention? Or, is it so ubiquitous that each instance merits exclusive attention? What about stereotypes and clichés? How do we successfully tread the line between reality and stereotypes in fiction? Ultimately, we will arrive at the following questions: In what ways do authors realistically and un-stereotypically reflect the idea of culture(s) in their fiction? In what ways can language and narrative style serve as a device for depicting even the most inconspicuous of cultures?

This course will focus on short fiction (novella and short stories). We will be reading works from a diverse range of cultural perspectives, which might include stories by Anton Chekhov, Joseph Conrad, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Chimamanda Adichie, Uwem Akpan, Ha Jin, ZZ Packer, Walter Mosley, Jhumpa Lahiri, Allan Gurganus, Raymond Carver, Alice Munro, Michael Byers, Adam Johnson, Annie Proulx, among others.

Students will be asked to produce one short response paper at the end of the semester.
Patricia O'Toole

Investigations: The Art and Craft of Nonfiction Research

(NONFICTION) 

Tuesday, 5:15pm-7:15pm or Wednesday, 4:45pm-6:45pm

Required course for first-year nonfiction students unless they have extensive reporting experience or extensive research experience from fields such as law. If there is space available, second-year students who did not take a research-based course in the 2014-2015 academic year will be able to enroll.

Students will be assigned to one of two sections: Tuesday, 5:15pm-7:15pm or Wednesday, 4:45pm-6:45pm.

Each student brings to the seminar a subject he or she wants to investigate, mines it in depth using a wide variety of research tools and techniques, then begins extracting the story from the ore. Many of the projects begun in the seminar have since been published as books, and many more became published articles. The seminar provides an introduction to research in archival, electronic, reportorial, and other worlds. Interviewing and unconventional methods of gathering information are discussed, as are questions of interpretation, systems for organizing research materials, and the ethical standards and problems of research and reporting. Assignments, which leave students entirely free to pursue their topics, include independent reading (from a highly focused list compiled by the student), a face-to-face interview of a source relevant to the research topic, and a 10-page narrative incorporating a significant portion of the research the student has been doing. From time to time there will be short exercises that combine research and writing from the research. Starting in about the sixth week of the course, students will make brief in-class presentations on their research progress and problems.

The bulk of the reading will be works related to the student’s research project. In consultation with the professor, each student will draw up a focused reading list.

Deborah Paredez

Formally Yours: Experiments with Form and (Neo)Formalism in Contemporary American Poetry

(POETRY) 

Wednesday, 10am-12pm

From Marilyn Hacker’s lesbian sonnets to the Afro-formalist invention of the bop, a wide array of American poets are engaging with and encouraging radical
reconsiderations of received forms. How and why are poets—particularly from historically underrepresented communities—turning to and reimagining form and formalism? What exactly does (neo)formalism mean in recent years and who are the poets who are shaping this terrain? How have the formal experimentations by queer, feminist, Black, and other poets of color transformed and transgressed the borders of American poetry? Each week during the first two months of the semester we will study and produce a selection of contemporary poetic experiments with particular received, traditional, newly invented, or ghost forms such as sonnets, sestinas, villanelles, triolets, blues, and prose poems. We will spend the last month of the semester studying collections by contemporary poets who deploy a variety of received and new forms. What do these forms and their rules, restrictions, and reconfigurations make possible for both the poets we study and for our own practice?

Required Books:

- Finch, Annie & Katherine Varnes, eds. *An Exaltation of Forms*
- Guerrero, Laurie Ann. *A Crown for Gumecindo*
- Hacker, Marilyn. *Love, Death, and the Changing of the Seasons*
- Joseph, Allison. *My Father’s Kites*
- Nelson, Maggie. *Bluets*
- Nelson, Marilyn. *A Wreath for Emmett Till*
- Sedarat, Roger. *Ghazal Games*
- Trethewey, Natasha. *Native Guard*

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

Elissa Schappell

**What’s Your Point?**

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

Narrative point of view is, simply put, the lens through which the reader experiences the story. In this seminar we will be focusing on the wide range of lenses available to writers of fiction—including the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, Omniscient, Collective, and Contagion. We will look at the way the masters use point of view to create tension, emotion, distance, intimacy, and authority. In addition to critical analysis of text we will also be doing in-class exercises that will allow you to experiment with varying points of view. For example, writing from the p.o.v. of an all-knowing-all-seeing-God, a synth-pop boy band, a dog. Yes, a dog. If you can’t see yourself getting into the head of a dog, I see you being much happier in another class. Texts will include work by Jorge Luis Borges, Virginia Woolf, Daphne du Maurier, John Kennedy Toole, Lorrie Moore,
Junot Diaz, Jane Austen, Margaret Atwood, Kate Walbert, Jonathan Swift, Kazuo Ishiguro, Joshua Ferris, and more.

Gary Shteyngart

**Strangers in a Strange Land: Immigrant Literature in the 20th Century**

*(FICTION)*

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

This class will survey 20th- and early 21st-century immigrant literature in the United States. We will begin with Henry Roth’s *Call It Sleep*, a brutal tale of one boy’s assimilation in the Yiddish-speaking New York of the early 1900s, to be followed with Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pnin*, a novel chronicling the comic misadventures of a high-born but disaster-prone Russian émigré in the 1950s. The class will then focus on the incredible explosion of hyphenated literature in the past fifteen years, including writers such as Chang-rae Lee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Akhil Sharma, and Junot Díaz, with special attention paid to the way native and foreign cultures are blended together in language and description. We will also read Sigrid Nunez’s recent novel *The Last of Her Kind*, and consider the ways in which working class and immigrant narratives both differ and complement one another. A paper, at least five pages in length, either analytical or a work of fiction related to the material covered, will be due at the end of the class.

Readings:

- Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep*
- Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin*
- Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker*
- Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*
- Junot Díaz, *Drown*
- Akhil Sharma, *An Obedient Father*
- Sigrid Nunez, *The Last of Her Kind*

Ira Silverberg

**Writing from the Margins**

*(FICTION)*

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

Beginning with the premise that to be inside the margins is to be part of the mainstream of society, this forum seeks to articulate the confines of these margins and then hop the fence. We will focus on literature that represents voices,
perspectives and subject matter that is defined and refined by its outsider status and marginal existences. We will explore “others” and “notions of otherness,” which can include but are not limited to ethnicity, sexual and gender orientation, sexual deviation, mental health, political marginalization, and rebellion. We will also look at issues of isolation of class, of being trapped in a social strata whether it be of the elite or struggling classes.

Outsider literature will often take formal risks and although we will read mostly fiction, we will not be confined to one genre. Students will be required to write one paper and present multimedia biographical portraits of the writers studied to the class.

We may view documentaries about some of the writers we study.

Potential reading includes:

- Dorothy Allison, *Bastard Out Of Carolina*
- William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*
- Nami Mun, *Miles from Nowhere*
- David Wojnarowicz, *Close to the Knives*
- Jean Genet, *Querelle*
- Reinaldo Arenas, *Old Rosa* or *Before Night Falls*
- Alexander Trocchi, *Cain's Book*
- Sapphire, *American Dreams* or *Push*
- Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero* or *American Psycho*
- Dennis Cooper, *God, Jr.*
- Iceberg Slim, *Pimp* or *Doom Fox*
- Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues*

Lara Vapnyar

**Architecture of a Story**

*(FICTION)*

*Wednesday, 10am-12pm*

We will start the class with the analysis of this famous quote by Alice Munro:

“A story is not like a road to follow... it’s more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows.”

We will discuss what it is about a story that makes it “more like a house,” and which elements of the story could be considered windows, rooms, or corridors. Then we will examine all the significant types of structure, from traditional to experimental,
and study how to determine which structure to choose for a particular type of a narrative.

The readings will include short stories and novels by Alice Munro, Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, Italo Calvino, Margaret Atwood, Ryunosuke Akutagawa, Jennifer Egan, and Elena Ferrante.

Adam Wilson

**Weaponized Words: Confronting and Co-Opting the New Global Vernacular**

*(FICTION)*

*Tuesday, 10am-12pm*

The accelerated pace of technological advancement has had many effects, from the depletion of attention spans to the ease in streaming old episodes of *Seinfeld*. Perhaps most interesting to us as writers, however, is technology’s effect on language. More than a simple expansion of the lexicon, our reliance on technology is changing the very ways our brains process language. A new syntax is emerging, and with it come new metaphors and meanings. We live in the days of emojis, and LOL, and 140 character tweets. We live in the era of JavaScript, and Urban Dictionary, and globalized hybrids like Spanglish. As writers, how must we react and respond? And how can we co-opt this language in a way that won’t feel instantly dated? In this class, we’ll look at a variety of texts to see how authors are exploring these shifts, and incorporating this evolving vocabulary into their work. We’ll read books that take place online, in meatspace, and in the grey area between that is the human mind. We’ll read contemporary works that address things like G-Chat and drone strikes, as well as older works, that, in their time, explored correlative issues. While others decry the coming obsolescence of the printed word, we’ll consider its growing necessity in helping us examine the world in which we live.

Possible readings include:

**Stories**
- “The Machine Stops” by E.M. Forster
- “Black Box” by Jennifer Egan
- “Great Rock and Roll Pauses” by Jennifer Egan
- “The Semplica Girl Diaries” by George Saunders
- “The Jon Lennin X-Perience” by Rachel B. Glaser

**Novels**
- *Lightning Rods* by Helen Dewitt
- *I’m Trying to Reach You* by Barbara Browning
- *Taipei* by Tao Lin
Matvei Yankelevich

**The Art of the Book: A Practical and Historical Guide to the Book as (Art) Object**

(CROSS-GENRE)  

*Wednesday, 10am-12pm*

The focus of this course is the book’s potential existence as an art object and—simultaneously—as a container of *and* vessel for literary texts. We will investigate the practical aspects of the invention, design, and making of books, with special emphasis on issues of editorial practice, DIY production tactics, distribution strategies, and the social nature of the small press endeavor.

To provide context for our own book-making endeavors, we will survey the history of the artist’s book, and the literary artist’s book in particular, beginning with the illustrated books of William Blake and William Morris, the *livre d’artiste* tradition, the modernist experiment (Blaise Cendrars & Sonia Delaunay’s *Prose of the Trans-Siberian* and Russian Futurist books), experiments in visual language (Bob Brown, Henri Michaux, Aram Saroyan, Letrisme, and CoBrA), and conceptual book projects. The work of contemporary artists/writers (Johanna Drucker, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Tom Phillips, and Jen Bervin), and literary artists’ books by presses (Coracle, Granary), will provide an important backdrop for our conversations and class projects. Topics of reading and discussion will include: the democratization of art in the post-Ruscha “multiple” and its influence on literary culture (zines, etc.); the role of the book-object in the tradition and contemporary practices of little magazines and chapbook presses; the place of the book in the digital age.
Students will be given a basic grounding in book craft and assigned a variety of individual book-making projects that involve both research and original writing, and the formulation of aesthetic vision and editorial practice. In addition to practicums, readings, and discussions, we will have guest speakers (writers, book artists, artist book publishers, book-arts collectives) and a field trip or two to significant book-arts organizations.

Alan Ziegler

**The Writer as Teacher**

(CROSS-GENRE)  

Wednesday, 12:05pm-3:05pm

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.
TRANSLATION COURSES

Susan Bernofsky

Word for Word Workshop

Thursday, 12:05pm-2:35pm

The *Word for Word* workshop offers students the chance to engage in a project of mutual collaborative translation with a partner selected specifically for each student from a French, German, Italian, or Spanish language MFA program. (All participants must know one of these languages at the intermediate level or better.) Over the course of the semester, students will translate short works of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry by their partners while their own work is being translated in the opposite direction. Regular conversations between the partners about the work-in-progress will take place via email and/or video conferencing. Reading assignments and introductory exercises will prepare for and support this work, logs detailing the process of collaboration will be discussed in class, and multiple drafts of the translations will be workshopped. At the end of the semester, participants may compete for a limited number of travel grants to facilitate a visit to the partner’s home country.

Prior translation experience is not required, and students need not be pursuing the LTAC joint course of study. The workshop is designed to serve as an introduction to literary translation and to provide a framework for and coaching through the process of working with an exchange partner. Anyone interested in working in close collaboration with another writer and curious about the ways in which translating and being translated can enrich his or her own writing is encouraged to apply.

Exchange partners this year will come from one of the following institutions: University of Paris XIII (France); Deutsches Literaturinstitut Leipzig (Germany); Scuola Holden, Turin (Italy); and NYU’s Creative Writing in Spanish MFA program.

**Note: Enrollment in this course is by application only.** Students will be selected primarily on the basis of the quality of the written text they submit for faculty evaluation, with translation experience and skills a secondary consideration. Application instructions will be emailed by Clarence Coo; complete applications must be sent to *Word for Word* coordinator Alicia Meier (amm2376@columbia.edu) by November 9. Students will be informed whether they have been accepted into the workshop with their course assignments on November 23.
Universally recognized as one of the most significant and influential novelists of the twentieth century, Gabriel García Márquez was a prolific author whose work had a pivotal impact on other writers in many languages. He was a direct heir to Cervantes’s unique inventiveness, profound originality, and creative influence.

Most famous as a novelist and as a committed working journalist, he also wrote short stories, novellas, and nonfiction. The reading list includes his groundbreaking novels, a selection of his many short stories, the novella that is his last published work, his never-completed memoir, and a major piece of investigative journalism.

- Living to Tell the Tale
- One Hundred Years of Solitude
- Strange Pilgrims
- Of Love and Other Demons
- Love in the Time of Cholera
- The Autumn of the Patriarch
- The General in his Labyrinth
- News of a Kidnapping
- Memories of My Melancholy Whores

Attendance is mandatory. Class participation is decisive.

Alyson Waters

**Literary Translation Workshop**

*Thursday, 3:50pm-6:20pm*

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.
lectures

Joshua Cohen

Twentieth-Century Fiction: A Sequel

Monday, 10am-12pm

“Twentieth-Century Fiction: A Sequel” is a continuation of last semester’s “Twentieth-Century Fiction: A Primer,” however students need not have completed that course to enroll. Traditional academic analysis of the assigned texts will be subordinated to discussions regarding how the assigned texts were made, which implies, how that making may shape one’s own “practice.” Further, an ironic stance will be cultivated regarding use of the word “practice.” Joseph Conrad’s The Secret Agent, Ford Madox Ford’s The Good Soldier, Jean Genet’s Our Lady of the Flowers, Witold Gombrowicz’s Cosmos, Graham Greene’s The Power and the Glory, Henry James’ The Turn of the Screw, Herman Melville’s Bartleby, the Scrivener, Gerald Murnane’s The Plains, Andrei Platonov’s The Foundation Pit, Jean Rhys’ Good Morning, Midnight, Joseph Roth’s The Radetzky March, and Muriel Spark’s The Driver’s Seat 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.

Richard Locke

Beyond Category: A Survey of Fiction

Thursday, 2pm-4pm

A survey of stories and novels written since the 1880s that demonstrate the energy, variety, strengths, and limitations of different kinds of literary fiction in ways that elude such familiar critical categories as realism, modernism, and postmodernism. Most of these works are marked by a spirited if often troubling interpenetration of private and public, past and present, and high and low rhetoric. Their forms and themes portray many different kinds of intense self-interrogation driven by narrative circumstances, and many exhibit the self-conscious play with literary conventions and genres that produces a fiction of artifice, anxiety, and artful dodging. These fourteen writers changed the form of fiction in ways that still matter.

  “The Kiss” (p. 115)
  “The Name-Day Party” (p. 155)
  “The Lady with the Little Dog” (p. 414)
  “In the Ravine” (p. 428)
Feb 4  Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (Harcourt)
Feb 11 Jorge Luis Borges, selections from *Collected Fictions* (Penguin):
  “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” (p. 68)
  “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*” (p. 88)
  “Death and the Compass” (p. 147)
  “The South” (p. 174)
Feb 18 Samuel Beckett, selections from *The Complete Short Prose* (Grove):
  “First Love” (p. 25)
  “The Expelled” (p. 46)
  “The Calmative” (p. 61)
  “The End” (p. 78)
Feb 25 Flannery O'Connor, selections from *Collected Works* (Library of America):
  “A Good Man is Hard to Find” (p. 137)
  “Good Country People” (p. 263)
  “Everything That Rises Must Converge” (p. 485)
  “Greenleaf” (p. 501)
  “Revelation” (p. 633)
Mar 3  Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (Vintage)
Mar 10 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (Vintage)
Mar 17 Spring Vacation
Mar 31 Donald Barthelme, selections from *Sixty Stories* (Penguin):
  “The Balloon” (p. 53)
  “Views of My Father Weeping” (p. 115)
  “Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel” (p. 160)
  “The Glass Mountain” (p. 178)
  “Critique de la Vie Quotidienne” (p. 183)
  “Rebecca” (p. 280)
Apr  7 Grace Paley, selections from *The Collected Stories* (FSG):
  “Goodbye and Good Luck” (p. 3)
  “Wants” (p. 129)
  “Distance” (p. 135)
  “Faith in a Tree” (p. 175)
  “Enormous Changes at the Last Minute” (p. 204)
  “A Conversation with My Father” (p. 232)
Apr 14 Marguerite Duras, *The Lover* (Harper)
Apr 21 Gabriel García Márquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (Vintage)
Alice Quinn

**Intention and Surprise**

*Monday, 6:45pm-8:45pm*

In this class we will read poetry, memoir, and fiction and explore with our guest authors the original ideas at the heart of each enterprise and the surprise turns their writing took along the way. We'll also have several classes devoted to the work of writers not visiting class. Students will be asked to write three short papers.

The poets joining us are:

Rowan Ricardo Phillips, author of *The Ground* (FSG, 2012) and *Heaven* (2015). He is the recipient of a Whiting Writers’ Award, the PEN/ Joyce Osterweil Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Marie Howe, author of *The Good Thief* (chosen by Margaret Atwood for the National Poetry Series), *What the Living Do*, and *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time* (W.W.Norton).


Robin Coste Lewis, author of the debut volume, *Voyage of the Sable Venus* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), currently shortlisted for the National Book Award in Poetry.

The memoirists:


The novelists:

Jesse Browner, author of the novels, Conglomeros (1992), Turnaway (Random House, 1996), The Uncertain Hour (Bloomsbury, 2007), and Everything Happens Today (Europa, 2011), and the recent memoir How Did I Get Here? Making Peace with the Road Not Taken.


Christopher Sorrentino

**Bad Company: Dangerous Protagonists**

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

In this class we will study novels and shorter fiction whose protagonists are defined by their voices (in fact, voice often is the one defining trait these characters have). Naturally, voice also defines the way the reader perceives the world created within these works. In a critical environment that often privileges the “realistic,” the well-rounded, and even the balanced viewpoint, these are distinctly unfair books: dangerously biased, skewed to a single and singular perspective, unreliable, exclusive, and often objectionable in many ways. For readers, the guidance these prejudiced, obsessive, and self-obsessed characters provide within the novels they dominate can be exhilarating and can refresh our sense of the possibilities of fiction, ratifying its status as a form of art not beholden to conventional wisdom, historical truth, or objective reality. For writers, these books directly take on issues that currently preoccupy literary—well, publishing—discussions: do characters need to be likeable? Are books required to offer a “payoff” to the dogged reader? Should writers avoid self-indulgence, or is writing fiction inherently self-indulgent? Authors whose work we will study may include J.M. Coetzee, Thomas Bernhard, Paula Bomer, Louis-Ferdinand Celine, Martin Amis, Lynne Tillmann, John Hawkes, Heather McGowan, Michel Houellebecq, and others.
Brenda Wineapple

**The Historical Imagination**

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

“‘Can’t repeat the past?’ Jay Gatsby cried incredulously. ‘Why of course you can.’”

How writers repeat the past when they write—and how they invent ways to depict or evade it—will be one of the main questions this course will raise. That is, how we relive the past, narrate it, break with it, or challenge the forms of it we’ve inherited from other writers: these issues will guide us over the course of the semester as we read a variety of authors and genres. We will examine how various writers wrestle with history, using or leapfrogging or reinventing it; how they capture in language the very real people of the past or narrate with precision and imagination very real past events; and how they have incorporated into their work memories of the past, whether their own or someone else’s. In fact, we will consider how and why they’ve imagined history, to what aim, and in what ways.

For as William Faulkner reminds us, “the past is never dead”—sometimes it’s not even past. The purpose of this course, then, is to consider and discover what history might mean in the context of narration, character, plot, research, and, in addition, in the context of the moral quandaries that confront a writer contemplating history as source, as inspiration, as burden, or as invention. Writers will include, most likely, among others: T. S. Eliot, Giuseppe di Lampedusa, Norman Mailer, Sybille Bedford, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Ryszard Kapuscinski, and Julia Blackburn.
MASTER CLASSES

Corinna Barsan

Revise Like An Editor

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Feb. 4 - Mar. 10

Thursday, 6:30pm-9pm

The revision process is one of the most important and challenging aspects of writing. In this six-week intensive master class, we will take an editor’s perspective on polishing your work. The class will be structured as a mini-workshop and we will devote most of our time to peer reading and critique with an emphasis on elements of developmental editing as well as line editing. Over the course of the semester, students will submit pages that have been previously workshopped and revised at least once. We will focus on refinement of style, structure, and content. Sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, we will sharpen your tools for revision. Strong editorial feedback will be shared to help each writer shape and strengthen the material. Additional light reading will be assigned for class discussion but mostly we will concentrate on student work.

Joshua Bennett

Black Soundings in Contemporary Poetry

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Mar. 23 - Apr. 27

Wednesday, 1:05pm-3:05pm

As it stands, black popular culture constitutes something of a lingua franca in our historical moment. A space of gathering across lines of perceived difference, an intercontinental commons spanning race, class, or tongue. But how might we reckon with work of black popular culture, and black popular music in particular, in contemporary U.S. American poetry, a field which is so often framed in public discourse as illegible, arcane, the utter antithesis of the popular? Put differently, how might we work toward a more robust theory of the popular—and what’s more, a theory of black feeling, a theory of feeling black—via sustained attention to the ways that the blues, jazz, funk, hip-hop, and R&B mark our understandings of contemporary poetry and the literary traditions that have helped shape it? For the purposes of this class, we will read the works of Gwendolyn Brooks, Sun Ra, Terrance Hayes, Lauryn Hill, Christopher Gilbert, Morgan Parker, Tupac Shakur, Amiri Baraka, Aracelis Girmay, Langston Hughes, Tyehimba Jess, Safia Elhillo, Outkast, and others toward the end of not only thinking together about the role of black popular culture as global force—especially as it pertains to U.S. American self-fashioning, and the very fabric of the way we understand something like a fundamentally U.S. American
identity—but also producing works of experimental writing in ensemble that reflect the aesthetic practices these writers make available to us.

Meehan Crist

Writing the Brain

4 sessions (1 point) / Mar. 29 - Apr. 19  Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm

Writing about the brain has always meant writing about the mind. The tradition includes poets, clinicians, patients, reporters—curious observers of human nature, all of whom offer distinct perspectives on the mysteries of human experience and contribute to our kaleidoscopic and staggering incomplete understanding of the human brain. In this course, we will consider writing from each of these perspectives, exploring the pitfalls and advantages of each, as well as considering the ways we are, as writers, always writing about the brain. Readings will include Anne Finch, Frigyes Karinthy, William Styron, Larissa MacFarquhar, Susanne Antonetta, Oliver Sacks, and Brian Christian.

Nicholas Delbanco

Travel Writing

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Jan. 27 - Mar. 2  Wednesday, 1:05pm-3:05pm

Travel writing is, in central ways, coeval with writing itself. We move and remember the place that we left; from a distance we send letters home. Those scribes who first kept laundry lists in Nineveh or Babylon, those men in Egypt naming names belong to the one genre. The Tibetan Book of the Dead, the Hindu epic Mahabarata, The Tale of Genji on his wanderings: all these record departure and new terrain traversed. One way to read the Book of Genesis is to consider that expulsion as a journey out of Eden; so too is The Aeneid a travelogue that starts in Troy and ends hard years later in Rome. Although we’re not certain how widely he traveled, Avon’s Bard set many of his plays abroad; it sometimes seems as though all texts we hold to be enduring ones evoke a world of wonders that at first seem passing strange...

Ours is a six-week journey, and we won’t begin at the beginnings of the form. Rather, the two required texts are The Tao of Travel, a compendium of travel writing edited by Paul Theroux, and The Best American Travel Writing, 2015, edited by Andrew McCarthy. Written work will consist of (y)our own travel writing, whether of the trip you took to get to Dodge Hall or took in childhood through the Gobi desert. We’ll talk about the ways that travel writing is intrinsic to the genres of poetry and prose fiction, and how it can inform your own ongoing work.
Cary Goldstein

This One Pursuit

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Feb. 2 - Mar. 8

Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm

“I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit.” So confesses Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's classic novel about the destructive consequences of a single-minded obsession. This six-week course will focus on novels of infatuation, possession, pursuit, and perseveration, and consider the various ways in which a character’s obsession impacts the decisions a writer makes about voice, setting, perception, relationships, time, and pacing. We’ll read novels and short stories, including *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* by Patricia Highsmith, *The Collector* by John Fowles, *Perfume* by Patrick Suskind, *Crash* by J.G. Ballard, and *Loverboy* by Victoria Redel, as well as selections from the work of writers such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Herman Melville, Vladimir Nabokov, Ralph Ellison, and Mary Gaitskill, among others. Students will be required to write one short work of fiction influenced or inspired by the readings and discussion.

Lauren Grodstein

Other Than Self

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Jan. 25 - Feb. 29

Monday, 6:15pm-8:15pm

“Write what you know” is stalwart advice but boring practice. In this master class, we’ll look at novels and stories written by authors who dare to imagine protagonists of different genders, races, nationalities, and/or all of the above. We’ll also write our own fiction that pushes past the boundaries of who we are and what we assume about ourselves. Readings will include works by William Boyd, Zadie Smith, ZZ Packer, and Hanya Yanagihara.

Mike Harvkey

Drama, Conflict & Tension

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Mar. 21 - Apr. 25

Monday, 6:15pm-8:15pm

What we try to avoid in life we should embrace in writing. We should also try to understand where drama comes from, how to sustain conflict, and when to let the tension die. In this master class seminar we’ll read short stories and short plays with a specific focus on drama, conflict, and tension in the narrative, in the characters, in the form, and in the spaces in between. Rather than address the cliche “is character plot or is plot character?” we’ll examine the myriad ways that plot and
character coexist and clash to create drama that leads to transformation and catharsis. We’ll pay close attention to techniques authors use to increase and sustain tensions established early on, and look closely at the ways in which consciousness and backstory can become domains of conflict rather than information. Readings may include Edward P. Jones, Louise Erdrich, David Mamet, Flannery O’Connor, Tobias Wolff, and Ali Smith.

David Hinton

**Writing Another Universe:**

**Ancient China, Modern America**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Mar. 21 - Apr. 25  
*Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm*

The ancient Chinese picture of the universe is fundamentally different from the picture that has dominated our Western tradition, and it has produced the distinctive form of Chinese culture. However distant it may seem, this worldview also feels remarkably contemporary in our secular and scientific age. In this picture, the Universe is a living and harmonious whole, constantly self-generating (and so, female in nature), and humans are an integral part of that whole. This integration of human and Universe is the deep subject of ancient China’s major art forms: poetry, painting, and calligraphy. It is also the subject of a contemporary philosophical movement called “deep ecology,” and it has had a profound influence on the arts in America during the last century, most important for us in this course: avant-garde poetry.

In this course we will try to stretch our minds into this other mode of thought/experience and literary creation. We will read philosophical and poetic texts from ancient China (in English translation), together with modern American poetic texts that engage and transform that worldview in various ways. In terms of practice, we will write poetry and nonfiction of our own that also tries to engage and transform the possibilities that other worldview offers. In particular, we will consult the I Ching each week as a way of generating writing from within that worldview. We will also experiment with translating classical Chinese.

No knowledge of Chinese is required for this course.

Maureen Howard

**Virginia Woolf**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Mar. 24 - Apr. 28  
*Thursday, 1:45pm-3:45pm*

In 1981, I wrote an introduction to Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* presuming her
commanding work of the modern novel. I lifted modern from my reading of what the writer was up to, a confrontation with the past in the wars of the present. The Woolfs’ house in Sussex had been strafed. She viewed the damage to their house in London. As each survivor lives to the end of Clarissa Dalloway’s day (she was to have a party that night)—the writer lays claim to the novel’s stories: passing round a lost lover, a wounded vet, Mrs. Woolf unpacks fragments woven into Clarissa’s day. Her favorite nephew had recently been killed in the Spanish Civil War. In our reading, or rereading, I’ll call attention to Dalloway as a war novel, to the writer’s observation of wounds and recovery, her own health an important page of daily life.

Let it be known that Virginia Woolf invested in political work—speaking to and teaching illiterate women; that she was in need of community whether in London or Sussex, of political correspondence, gossip, or afternoon tea with T.S. Eliot whose dreary wife, Virginia notes, had swollen ankles. She would have brewed Eliot’s tea in the cottage of The Hogarth Press, in the back yard with her husband Leonard Woolf who read her every word and encouraged Virginia’s public life. Reading our work in Dodge Hall, we might take note of Virginia Woolf’s editorial standards, what an essay or story must yield to make its mark. I’d like to have a considerable look at her reviewing, her correspondence—vast, frivolous, envious, loving, and dead-on important to her writing fiction.

War novel: Looking ahead to Between the Acts, published after her death, 1941. Scene: an English village as the local pageant produced in a barn takes place from Time beginning to the German planes Woolf heard in the distance before she lifted the script of recurrent pain, mental and physical, as her own and killed herself. No memories, fragments, news brought home from the morning walk. No party. Students may have a go at their war of choice—their mother’s, brother’s, their own, or join the Occupy gang on Wall Street, the few hanging in, recently seen them myself.

What a lark! What a plunge! Hillary and Putin sharing the front page—Mets pounding the cubs.

Brigid Hughes

**Editing and the Writer**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Mar. 23 - Apr. 27  
Wednesday, 1:05pm-3:05pm

This course will examine the past, present, and future of literary magazines, from the perspectives of both the editor and the writer. We will analyze specific issues by magazines such as The Paris Review, Granta, Monkey Business, Noon, Evergreen Review, Callaloo, Triquarterly, and others. We will discuss the elements that distinguish a magazine, including unifying themes, layout and design, and criteria for the selection process. The editorial relationships between known editors and writers will also be examined. Assignments will include exercises.
in editing, graphics selection, and assessing work from various sources. By the end of the seminar you will develop a mission statement and create a sample issue. This seminar is designed for writers who are interested in the editorial side of publishing, and how editor-writer relationships would shape their work.

Cate Marvin

**On Revision**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Mar. 25 - Apr. 29  
*Friday, 2:10pm-4:10pm*

“While there is nothing automatic about the poem... it is what I wanted it to be without knowing before it was written what I wanted it to be, even though I knew before it was written what I wanted to do.”

— Wallace Stevens, “The Irrational Element in Poetry”

“...the problem of revision is to make the poem become more itself, rather than another poem... to make the poem more of what it needs to be in order to do the emotional work it was intended to do.”

— Audre Lorde, Introduction to *Undersong*

Many would argue that revision is among the most crucial undertakings of any serious writer. But should the reviser approach the text as a surgeon does the body, or the way a mechanic attends to a car's faulty part? Or maybe revision is best thought of not as an act of repair so much as one of re-vision, of seeing anew the possibilities for the poem or prose piece that present themselves in the first finished draft. This class will consider a variety of approaches toward revision as exemplified in a number of significant works. How do we know when work calls for revision? Toward what end do we conduct our changes; what values privilege above others when we choose to revise? How much is too much? Whatever the process or its outcome, the act of revision necessitates risk, and it is, as such, often fraught with peril. Students will analyze the approaches of such poets as William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Langston Hughes, John Crow Ransom, Marianne Moore, Sylvia Plath, and James Wright, among others, as well as the efforts of such fiction writers as Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, Raymond Carver, and ZZ Packer, among others. Throughout the class we will consider practical approaches toward the re-envisioning of students’ own creative work. In addition to the assigned reading, students will be required to conduct a series of revisions to a piece or to a number of pieces that have heretofore resisted the writer’s efforts toward completion.
Dinitia Smith

**Memory**

4 sessions (1 point) / Feb. 4 - Feb. 25  
*Thursday, 1:45pm-3:45pm*

We are living in a world obsessed with memory, with museums, with memorialization, and with the memoir in literature. In this class we will cut a broad swath, examining some of the possible reasons behind this phenomenon, and the problems inherent in writing about memory—memory vs. historical truth, for instance, as it relates to Holocaust narratives. Central to the question of writing about memory, of course, is the issue of truth in the memoir. How do memoirs differ from fiction, and from conventional autobiography? Can there be an absolute truth independent of memory? We’ll be reading widely, including writings by such figures as Andreas Huyssen, Jonathan Spence, Alexander Luria, Frances A. Yates, André Aciman, and Mary Karr. We’ll also be reading and studying memoirs, paying attention, especially, to how they are constructed. Students will do writing exercises based on the topic of memory—and perhaps each student will construct a “Memory Palace” of his or her own.

Sandra Smith

**Writing Dialogue in Translation**

4 sessions (1 point) / Mar. 3 - Mar. 31  
*Thursday, 11am-1pm*

The ability to write dialogue in varying registers is key in many sorts of writing and especially in translation. People in different languages and cultures converse in unique ways, giving translators a lot to balance in their attempts to recreate both the tone and function of a section of dialogue while incorporating cultural references that may be unfamiliar to English language readers. Learning to take all these elements into account while still producing lively and engaging dialogue (or dour and cynical dialogue!) is a crucial part of any translator’s education—and useful for all types of writers as well.

To this end, we will read and discuss dialogues by a variety of authors and think about how various aspects of dialogue work. Here are some possible topics for discussion: Colloquial language (including slang); uneducated vs. educated speech; romantic/sexual dialogues; period dialogue; writing in foreign accents and local dialects; dialogue written from a child’s perspective vs. an adult’s perspective; soliloquies; and internal dialogues (free indirect speech—Flaubert’s specialty).

In the course of these four weeks, participants will produce original translations based on ‘literal’ English versions of a number of selected passages by authors such as Irène Némirovsky, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and
Gustave Flaubert. Participants will be invited to bring in examples from other languages as well. Questions to be considered will include:

- How can we identify and replicate a character's 'tone of voice'?
- How do translators deal with linguistic differences that have no equivalent in English (e.g., familiar and formal modes of address like *tu* and *vous*)?
- How to work with social and cultural issues that may have been understood as 'neutral' at the time of writing but might now appear problematic in certain ways (sexist, racist, etc.)?
- How should we approach 'dated' or period language? Are modernized versions desirable or a 'betrayal' of the original text?

Please note: No knowledge of French or any other foreign language is required for participation.

Rob Spillman

**Establish Authority**

*6 sessions (1.5 points) / Jan. 29 - Mar. 11*  
*Friday, 12:05pm-2:05pm*  
*(no class Mar. 4)*

From the first sentence, we know if we are in confident, capable hands. The best writers establish authority immediately. By authority I mean that there is a clear sense of control, and that this confidence is earned with particular language, tone, detail, cadence, and, most importantly, by creating urgency, a simple question of “why should I keep reading?”

Take the opening of Jim Shepard’s story “Boys Town”: “Here's the story of my life: whatever I did wasn't good enough, anything I figured out I figured out too late, and whenever I tried to help I made things worse.” Immediately we realize that this is a masterful writer using words as a weapon, that each word is placed exactly where it is intended, that the rhythms speak to a musicality that is in concert with the narrator and the action. We are propelled sentence to sentence by this musicality and we want to know more about the narrator and why he considers himself such a fatalistic mess.

No matter the form or genre, first, second, or third person, past or present, speculative or hyper-realistic, fiction, poetry, or nonfiction, establishing authority is the first and most important task of the writer. We will look at numerous first pages across forms, including work from Karen Russell, Don DeLillo, Joe Wenderoth, Lydia Davis, and dozens more. We’ll also take a close look at the entirety of Robert Stone’s
story “Helping,” paying attention to how Stone’s strong beginning establishes authority and how every detail of this passage pays off throughout the story.

We will look at mostly successful, and some unsuccessful, openings and analyze how the author has or hasn’t firmly captivated the reader.

The seminar will include workshopping openings from students’ work, close reading of openings across genres and forms, exercises, and revisions. With the close readings, we will subject the texts to the same cold reading standard I have at Tin House, where we receive upwards of 20,000 submissions a year. Homework will also include students bringing in successful openings, from the famous to the newly discovered.

William Wadsworth

Rewriting Shakespeare

5 sessions (1.5 points) / Thursday, 6:30pm-8:30pm
Feb. 11, 18, 25, Mar. 3 & Mar. 24

In this course we will spend four weeks re-reading and discussing King Lear, generally considered to be Shakespeare’s “most tragical of tragedies” and in some respects the greatest of all his plays. We will read supporting materials, including essays on Lear by the critics Harold Bloom and Jan Kott, as well as Samuel Beckett’s Endgame.

Students will be expected to read (or re-read) the whole of King Lear before the first session, and come to the first class having selected a scene from the play they find particularly memorable or interesting, and say why they chose that scene.

The third class will be a double session (four hours) during which we will watch a 3-hour performance of the play, and spend an hour afterward discussing the play in performance.

The written assignment will be either to rewrite a scene from the play or to write a new scene, in any form of your choosing (poem, prose narrative, dramatic monologue, or dialogue, etc.). At our final class after Spring Break, you will be asked to read and discuss your written assignment.