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**WORKSHOPS (6 - 9 points)**

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<th>NONFICTION – Open (6 points)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bharati Mukherjee</td>
<td>Cris Beam</td>
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<td>Joshua Furst</td>
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<td>Nelly Reifler</td>
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<td>Victor LaValle</td>
<td>Cathy Park Hong</td>
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<td>Elissa Schappell</td>
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<td>Timothy Donnelly</td>
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*Second-Years only*
SEMINARS AND TRANSLATION COURSES (3 points)

—MONDAY—

Paul La Farge (F)
Horror Fiction
Monday, 10am-12pm

Rebecca Godfrey (F)
The Estranged
Monday, 1:05pm-3:05pm

Mónica de la Torre (T)
Literary Translation: Advanced Workshop
Monday, 3:10pm-5:40pm

Maria Damon (P)
Poetry by Strange People and Phenomena (Micropoetries)
Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm

Erroll McDonald (F)
The Peripheral Writer
Monday, 5pm-7pm

—TUESDAY—

Lis Harris (NF)
What We Talk About When We Talk About War
Tuesday, 10am-12pm

Ada Limón (P)
Poetry and Place in the Modern Landscape
Tuesday, 11am-1pm

Maureen Howard (NF)
Travel Writing
Tuesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Rob Spillman (F)
Establishing Authority
Tuesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Phillip Lopate (NF)
The Essay Film: A History and Appraisal
Tuesday, 1:05pm-4:05pm

Roger Reeves (P)
Scarcity, Excess, and Doubt
Tuesday, 2:10pm-4:10pm

Richard Ford (F)
Being Smart on the Page
Tuesday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Ben Metcalf (F)
Voice As Protagonist
Tuesday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Alana Newhouse & David Samuels (NF)
Storytellers
Tuesday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Gary Shteyngart (F)
The Hysterical Male
Tuesday, 5:15pm-7:15pm

Ira Silverberg (F)
We Got The Beat
Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm
—WEDNESDAY—

Margo Jefferson (NF)
Criticism as Literature
Wednesday, 10:30pm-12:30pm

Lara Vapnyar (F)
Architecture of a Story
Wednesday, 10:30pm-12:30pm

Alan Ziegler (CG)
The Writer as Teacher
Wednesday, 12:40pm-3:40pm

Edith Grossman (T)
Writers You Should Know More About
Wednesday, 1:40pm-3:40pm

—THURSDAY—

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

Hilton Als (NF)
In Black and White: A Seminar
About James Baldwin
Thursday, 2:10pm-4:10pm

Brenda Wineapple (NF)
Explorations: The Art and Craft of Nonfiction Research
Thursday, 2:10pm-4:10pm

Stacey D’Erasmo (F)
Questions of Identity
Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Charles Siebert (NF)
The Art of Narrative Science
Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Alan Ziegler (CG)
Short Prose Forms
Thursday, 5:15pm-7:15pm

Corinna Barsan (F)
Revise Like an Editor
Thursday, 6:30pm-8:30pm

—FRIDAY—

Monica Ferrell (CG)
The Art of Lying: A Cross-Genre Workshop in Fiction
Friday, 12:05pm-2:05pm
LECTURES (3 points)

—MONDAY—

Alice Quinn
Tone, Tempo, Atmosphere, and the Pictorial Aspect in Prose and Poetry

*Monday, 6:15pm-8:15pm*

—TUESDAY—

Christopher Sorrentino
News from the Last Century

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

—THURSDAY—

Richard Locke
Beyond Category: A Survey of Fiction

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

Benjamin Taylor
Other People’s Secrets

*Thursday, 4:20pm-6:20pm*
MASTER CLASSES (1 – 1.5 points)

—MONDAY—

Adam Thirlwell
Reading Proust as a Novelist (Thief)
1 point
Monday, 11am-1pm
(Apr. 6 – Apr. 27)

Leslie Jamison
Confession and Shame
1 point
Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm
(Feb. 16 – Mar. 9)

Mike Harvkey
Ugly America
1.5 points
Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm
(Mar. 23 – Apr. 27)

— TUESDAY —

Zoe Heller
Representations of Sex in Fiction
1.5 points
Tuesday, 10am-12pm
(Feb. 3 – Mar. 10)

Patricia Hampl
First Figures: Writing about Mother and Father
1 point
Tuesday, 10am-12pm
(Apr. 7 – Apr. 28)

Binnie Kirshenbaum
How-To Be
1.5 points
Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm
(Jan. 28 – Mar. 4)

— WEDNESDAY —

Matvei Yankelevich
Creative (Mis)Translation
1.5 points
Wednesday, 10:30am-12:30pm
(Feb. 4 – Mar. 11)

John Jeremiah Sullivan
“Non”-Fiction, Yes, But What IS It?
1 point
Wednesday, 10:30am-12:30pm
(Apr. 1 – Apr. 22)

Binnie Kirshenbaum
The Sentence and Its Paragraph
1.5 points
Wednesday, 1:40pm-3:40pm
(Mar. 25 – Apr. 29)

Lynne Sharon Schwartz
Translating Nonfiction: Pleasures and Perils
1.5 points
Wednesday, 4pm-6pm
(Mar. 25 – Apr. 29)

Josh Bell
Devotional Poetry
1 point
Wednesday, 4pm-6pm
(Feb. 4 – Feb. 25)

— THURSDAY —

Leonard Schwartz
Literary Art and the Language of Philosophy
1 point
Thursday, 10am-12pm
(Apr. 9 – Apr. 30)

William Wadsworth
Rewriting Shakespeare
1.5 points
Thursday, 6:30pm-8:30pm
(Jan. 29 – Mar. 5, no class Feb. 26)

— FRIDAY —

Hannah Tinti
Cabinets of Wonder
1.5 points
Friday, 11am-1pm
(Feb. 6 – Mar. 13)
Note: Meets at American Museum of Natural History except for last class
Hilton Als

**In Black and White: A Seminar About James Baldwin**

(NONFICTION)  Thursday, 2:10pm-4:10pm

By the time James Baldwin died in 1987, he had, arguably, become the voice of black and queer America. As the author of numerous novels, essays, plays, and social commentaries, the Harlem-born author had managed, over his nearly forty-year career, to write about race, sex, gender, and the politics of difference in a style that was uniquely his own. His voice was personal, analytical, and highly literary, all at once.

In this course, we will not only examine James Baldwin’s career but also the times that defined him. How did the Harlem-born native become our premiere poet of exile? Baldwin always said that when he moved to Paris in 1948, it was, in part, to save himself from becoming “merely a Negro writer.” Did Baldwin’s self-exile make him, ultimately, a quintessentially American artist, our greatest critic, or merely another commentator defending the liberal cause from a distance?

“In Black and White” will be conducted as a seminar, so classroom discussion is key. Discussions will be divided between analyzing student writing and various Baldwin texts. To supplement your understanding of the author’s life and work, I recommend David Leeming’s *James Baldwin: A Biography* (Henry Holt paperback). We will also screen a documentary about Baldwin early on in the semester.

Corinna Barsan

**Revise Like an Editor**

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

The revision process is one of the most important aspects of writing and one of the most difficult. In this course, we will take an editor’s perspective on polishing your work. The class will be structured as a standard workshop and we will devote most of our time to peer reading and critique. But we will do this under a magnifying glass 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 dialogue, pacing, point of view, and syntax. 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.

*Fiction students will be given priority to this course although it is also open to Nonfiction students.*

Maria Damon

**Poetry by Strange People and Phenomena (Micropoetries)**

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

If, as Allen Ginsberg proposed performatively with the publication of “Howl” in 1956, an animal scream can be a poem, what else can a poem be? If, as Stephen Henderson proposed in *Understanding the New Black Poetry*, James Brown is a poet, who else is a poet? We will read unorthodox work by people acknowledged as writers and people who have made their names (if indeed they have) in other ways. Will Alexander, Sun Ra, Minou Drouet, Hannah Weiner, Cecil Taylor, John Wieners, Ernst Herbeck are some possibilities, though I am open to other work people might want to bring to the table. While there is no good term for what could be called “outsider writing,” the strange effects wrought by the cross between brilliance and unorthodox intellectual wiring makes for a potent brew for which it may be useful to develop an analytical language. The wider category, provisionally considered “micropoetries,” comprising found but also non-human and asemic phenomena, will also be studied.

Stacey D’Erasmo

**Questions of Identity**

*(FICTION)  Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm*

Who do your characters think they are? What sort of book do they inhabit? What happens when identity, of characters and/or text, is fluid, liminal, problematic, reversible, or challenged at the root? In this class, we will take a close look at a variety of work that questions, mourns, upends, and gets anxious about identity. With any luck, we’ll get a little productively anxious, at least as writers, as well.

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.*

Richard Ford

**Being Smart on the Page**

(FICTION)  
**Tuesday, 4:15pm-6:15pm**

A suite of readings, both practical/critical and imaginative (novels and stories), from which we’ll attempt to identify nothing less than what makes fiction good—when it is. The notion of “being smart on the page” (clearly a figure of speech) will extend to all sorts of authorial strategies; from settling on a story or a novel’s premise, to choosing individual words in sentences. The point here is to demonstrate and encourage fiction’s potential richness as it originates in the discretion of its makers.

*This course is open to 2nd-year Fiction students only.*

Rebecca Godfrey

**The Estranged**

(FICTION)  
**Monday, 1:05pm-3:05pm**

Why is the orphan such a recurring, appealing fictional character? In this seminar, we will closely explore what authors might gain by exploring the lives of characters who are abandoned, untethered, or, in some way, alone. We will explore the great
variety of ways these characters both evade and desire community and family. We’ll look at how voice, style, and narrative can be used to create estrangement and its often-unexpected counterpart: connection. Readings will include classic and contemporary portraits of the orphan, the occasional fairy tale or case study, and larger narratives of exile and escape. Among the writers whose work will be discussed are Dickens, Brontë, Beckett, Ian McEwan, Louise Erdrich, Denis Johnson, Marilynne Robinson, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Lis Harris

**What We Talk About When We Talk About War**

**(NONFICTION)**

Tuesday, 10am-12pm

This seminar will be an exploration of works of nonfiction, fiction, and some poetry about war and wartime experience. It’s a course for students interested in literary reporting, human rights issues, and works about the extremity of loss suffered when the familiar is stripped away. We will scrutinize narratives that examine war aims and illusions and narratives about people losing or struggling to hold on to their identities. As an approach to looking at general principles related to handling dramatic and emotionally charged content, and shifting attitudes toward war, we will read accounts of fear, heroism, cowardice, cunning, duplicity, brutality, will, and survival. We will compare the reporting of witnesses with the writing of objective narrators and consider works that explore the boundaries of history and memory and the changes wrought by modern industrial warfare to the ancient martial ideas of honor and glory. Readings will include Thucydides (“The Sicilian Campaign” from *The Peloponnesian War*); Simone Weil (*The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*); George Orwell (“My Country, Right or Left” and “Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War”); Wilfred Owen (*Collected Poems*); Pat Barker (*Regeneration*); Jiri Weil (*Life with a Star*); Primo Levi (*Survival in Auschwitz*); Eugenia Semyonovna Ginzburg (*Hope Against Hope*); John Hersey (*Hiroshima*); A.J. Liebling and other WWII New Yorker reporting; Jonathan Schell (*The Village of Ben Suc*); Phil Klay (*Redeployment*); and Ishmael Beah (*A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*).

Maureen Howard

**Travel Writing**

**(NONFICTION)**

Tuesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

Where are you going? Where have you been? When we travel we take our past with us, which may enlarge or limit the trip. I would like to work together in a reading of writers, some known for their adventures on the road, some given to contemplation of where they have been. It’s a trip to read Melville write to Hawthorne “I have
written a wicked book, and feel spotless as the lamb.” We may not have a whale to chase but we have excursions, local and distant, to render into stories—the walk to school, the first view of the World Trade Center, Columbia Library with its Ancients forever viewing us from above.

Henry James, having rejected photography as a limitation, finally gave in and let the scene of a shop window be placed in a story of the New York edition of his work. Students may illustrate a passage of writing with their smart phone, or clip a picture from their computer to accompany the text.

Travel: We will read passages of Jack Kerouac’s *The Town and the City* and read around in Robert Stone’s *Prime Green: Remembering the Sixties*, with text and pictures, which stop by Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey, the guys—some from Columbia—who were on the bus. Illustrations of the next installment of a work by Charles Dickens were displayed in shop windows for those who could not read the stories that they loved. We will look at passages of John Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.* illustrated by Reginald Marsh in a mapping of American life from the end of the First World War to the trip home.

Eudora Welty attended Columbia for her graduate degree in photography. We will read Eudora’s “Learning to See” and “Listening” in *One Writer’s Beginnings* and view close-ups of Alfred Kazin’s once-upon-a-time New York in *A Walker in the City*. We must give time to viewing the pages of Walker Evans’ *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a documentary of the South, with text and photos, in the Depression.

I will tack on a love scene from Samuel Beckett’s *Watt*, in which Mrs. Gorman takes a trip of several pages to implant a kiss on the invalid Mr. Watt.

Two short papers: travel contemplated and/or taken. Write home.

Margo Jefferson

**Criticism as Literature**

*(NONFICTION) Wednesday, 10:30am-12:30pm*

This course will examine the lineaments of twentieth and twenty-first century criticism in six art forms: movies, theater, music, dance, visual art, and literature. The assumption is that a piece of criticism is an essay, first and foremost; 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, ambivalences, all go into the mix. From the arts, we will move to the landscape of cultural criticism, looking at
writers who probe the boundaries between art, sociology, politics, and autobiography. Writers in this latter group are likely to include Richard Rodriguez, Marilynne Robinson, Kamau Brathwaite, Ander Monson, Terry Castle, and Sharifa Rose-Pitts.

Paul La Farge

**Horror Fiction**

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

Pleasure is one part of the aesthetic experience of fiction; another part is terror. This course will be a survey of major works of horror fiction from the 19th century through the present. We’ll pay particular attention to the techniques of writing horror, and the uses to which fiction writers have put them, from psychological examination through social critique and beyond. Works by Poe, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Edith Wharton, Henry James, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, H.P. Lovecraft, Vladimir Nabokov, Joyce Carol Oates, Brian Evenson and others.

Ada Limón

**Poetry and Place in the Modern Landscape**

(POETRY)  
*Tuesday, 11am-1pm*

In this online era, the mutability of self and setting is causing a crisis of location in contemporary poetry. This class will examine how a sense of place is constructed as well as offer techniques that encourage authentic presence. We will explore poems that create sensual physical landscapes as well as poems that exist in a surreal anti-space. We will read and respond to work that tackles the “between space” of borderlands, reveals “solastalgia,” or drops anchor in the classic pastoral.

Reading list will include selections from:

- Elizabeth Bishop, *Geography III*
- Frank O’Hara, *Lunch Poems*
- Larry Levis, *Elegy*
- Natalie Diaz, *When My Brother Was An Aztec*
- Rigoberto Gonzalez, *Unpeopled Eden*
- Eduardo C. Corral, *Slow Lightning*
- Victoria Chang, *The Boss*
- Alex Lemon, *The Wish Book*
- Jennifer L. Knox, *Mystery of the Hidden Driveway*
- Dawn Lundy Martin, *Discipline*
There will also be packets with additional place-centric poems, as well as essays from Wendell Berry, Charles Baxter, James Galvin, Camille Dungy, and snippets from the "Poetry in Place" series in *The Oxford American*.

Phillip Lopate

**The Essay Film: A History and Appraisal**

(NONFICTION)  
*Tuesday, 1:05pm-4:05pm*

The love-child of literature and cinema, “galvanized by the intersection of personal, subjective, and social history, the essay film has emerged as the leading nonfiction form for both intellectual and aesthetic innovation,” according to critic Paul Arthur. We will investigate such questions as: What exactly is an essay film? What distinguishes it from a documentary? Why have essay films been rare until recently, and why are they experiencing such a resurgence now? How does this kind of film influence our thinking about the relationship between sound and image? What is the relationship between the literary essay and its cinematic equivalent? How do you film a flow of thought?

We will be looking at some of the key examples of the essay film, including work by the French school of Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin, Guy Debord, and Agnes Varda; American filmmakers Orson Welles, Ross McElwee, Alan Berliner, Thom Andersen, Robert Gardner, Jerome Hill, Su Friedrich, and Barbara Hammer; German filmmakers Werner Herzog, Harun Farocki, and Wim Wenders; Italian filmmakers Pier Paolo Pasolini and Nanni Moretti; British filmmakers Patrick Keiller and Terence Davies, and Canadian filmmaker Guy Maddin. In addition, we’ll examine some of the roots of the essay-film in the work of Luis Buñuel, Humphrey Jennings, Joris Ivens, and Pare Lorentz.

Assigned readings will include critical and theoretical texts by Alexandre Astruc, Paul Arthur, Michael Renov, Timothy Corrigan, and Laura Rascaroli, as well as some exemplary literary essays. Students can choose between handing in a written paper or essay film.

Erroll McDonald

**The Peripheral Writer**

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

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.

Ben Metcalf

**Voice As Protagonist (in Nabokov, Woolf, Barthelme, Didion, Foster Wallace, Sebald, and Others)**

(FICTION)  
*Tuesday, 4:15pm-6:15pm*

In this spring seminar, we will ask after “voice,” that concept much referred to in writing programs and publishing endeavors but seldom truly examined. What do we mean, honestly, when we talk about voice in writing? What do we specifically not
mean? Why do we put such an emphasis on “finding” one’s voice yet criticize certain texts for being too “voicey”? Is the difference between voice-driven writing and character-driven writing (or story-driven writing, or mood-driven writing) really so large as we pretend?

We will also ask what makes for a proper protagonist. Do we always “buy” that which (not whom, in this particular case) is presented as the main character in a work? When we do so, why? When not, why not? How does our experience of a protagonist differ if the text in which it dwells is written in the first person, or the second, or the third? Are these persons not people in the proper literary sense, and do their “voices,” at least in successful texts, not fairly overwhelm the “characters” they contain and promote?

This course will explore the nexus of, and divide between, character and voice. We will discuss “built” vs. “found” voices, voice as a strategy for identifying with an intended audience, the heightened or “elevated” voice, the lowered or “damaged” voice, and many additional aspects of this fascinating and, for writers, absolutely crucial concept.

With readings from Vladimir Nabokov, Herman Melville, Virginia Woolf, Donald Barthelme, Joan Didion, T. S. Eliot, W. G. Sebald, Stevie Smith, Eudora Welty, Robert Frost, Alice Munro, James Joyce, Jamaica Kincaid, Flannery O’Connor, Brendan Behan, David Foster Wallace, James Baldwin, Saki, J. M. Coetzee, James Thurber, Veronica Geng, Zadie Smith, Renata Adler, and others.

Alana Newhouse and David Samuels

**Storytellers**

*(NONFICTION)*

Tuesday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

Great stories are shaped by talented, reckless, funny, arrogant, empathetic, cold-hearted, vengeful, loving and often misanthropic writers who combine a love for telling detail with the desire to re-imagine the world in an original and meaningful way. In this class, we will study how large-scale events and minute perturbations of the ether can register in a writer’s inner life and are transmuted into original narrative through control of his or her craft. We will pay particular attention to how the writer’s voice—the angle of approach to the world of his or her subjects—is made convincing through the precise and original use of language as well as the depth and range of reporting.

This class will attempt to further your personal designs on literary greatness by acquainting you with the reigning masters of long-form nonfiction narrative and encouraging you to write your own stuff. Learning how to read great nonfiction is part of learning how to write it. The readings fall squarely in what we consider to be
modern classics: Joe Mitchell (selections from *Up in the Old Hotel*); Tom Wolfe (*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*); Norman Mailer (*Armies of the Night*); Janet Malcolm; Anne Fadiman; Joan Didion (selections from *The White Album*); Susanna Kaysen (*Girl, Interrupted*); David Foster Wallace; and Anne Fadiman (*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*).

Roger Reeves

**Scarcity, Excess, and Doubt**

(POETRY)

Tuesday, 2:10pm-4:10pm

In this seminar, we will investigate the poetics of scarcity (austerity), excess, and doubt—our most post-postmodern of ailments. We will read contemporary poets such as Claudia Rankine, Terrance Hayes, Brigit Pegeen Kelly, Carl Phillips, Louise Glück, Ezra Pound, Dante Alighieri, and T.S. Eliot. We will also read *10:04*, a novel by poet-fiction writer, Ben Lerner. In the reading of these poets and novelist, we will explore the poetics of scarcity, excess, and doubt in the use of metaphor and trope, the line, stanza, accretion, syntax, image, and rhetoric. We will frame the discussion of these poets and their poems with essays by Louise Glück such as “On Impoverishment,” Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s “Language, Economy, and the Body” and “Poetry and Finance,” as well as selections from Lauren Berlant’s newest critical work, *Cruel Optimism*. In this seminar, we will explore the linguistic and aesthetic possibilities of our present world with its emphasis on hedge funds (a type of excess), financial crisis (scarcity), and diseases (doubt). Because this course seeks to mine the present world for language, we will use non-traditional source material such as interviews, web advertisements, Cialis and Viagra ads, and hip hop videos as potential reservoirs of language and linguistic material. Students will write seven to ten pages of poetry with a 500-word critical introduction to that portfolio. The critical introduction will discuss the ways in which the student inhabits, enacts, ventriloquizes, or plays with notions of scarcity, excess, and doubt in their poetic work.

Gary Shytengart

**The Hysterical Male**

(FICTION)

Tuesday, 5:15pm-7:15pm

The 20th century has been a complete disaster and the 21st century will likely be even worse. In response to the hopelessness of the human condition in general, and the prospects for the North American and British male in particular, the contemporary male novelist has been howling angrily for quite some time. This course will examine some of the results, from Roth’s Portnoy and Bellow’s Herzog to
Martin Amis’s John Self, taking side trips into the unreliable insanity of Nabokov’s Charles Kinbote, the muddled senility of Mordecai Richler’s Barney Panofsky and the somewhat quieter desperation of David Gates’s Jernigan. What gives vitality to the male hysterical hero? How should humor be balanced with pathos? Why are so many protagonists (and authors) of Jewish or Anglo extraction? How have early male hysterics given rise to the “hysterical realism” as outlined by critic James Wood? Is the shouting, sweaty male the perfect representation of our disastrous times, or is a dose of sane introspection needed to make sense of the world around us? How does the change from early to late hysterical novels reflect our progress from an entirely male-dominated world to a mostly male-dominated one? Do we still need to be reading this stuff?

Charles Siebert

**The Art of Narrative Science**

(NONFICTION) Thursday, 4:15pm-6:15pm

There is neither conflict nor antagonism between the realms of art and science. Indeed, the two infinitely complement and complete one another in ways so intimate, intricate, and oft times invisible that only great storytelling, artful narrative, can fully reveal them. A poet, through metaphor, builds bridges from entangled inscapes of thought and emotion to a place of shared understanding. A good science writer must do the equivalent with the often recondite minutiae of modern scientific exploration, and do so with ever increasing urgency as new discoveries and insights mount daily across a broad array of disciplines. As we’ll be highlighting in our course reading and discussion, all the key tenets of good storytelling are at play in effective science writing: voice, point of view, narrative arc, setting and scenes, engaging characters, dialogue, and action. Science, in this sense, is incidental to this course’s primary concerns. The singular challenge that science poses to writers, however, is how to not be overwhelmed by the often daunting complexities of the subject matter; how to, through your own observations, research, and persistent questioning, own the material in such a way that frees you to imaginatively represent it again to the reader as story.

This a challenge faced by both the layperson and the “popularizing” scientist who wishes to communicate with a general audience. As such we’ll be reading works from both camps, beginning somewhat indirectly with the 1st-century B.C. Roman poet Lucretius’ *On the Nature of Things*, one of the earliest and greatest science-infused poetic works ever written. Using this lyrical weave of science and poetry as our touchstone, we will then go on to read and discuss a variety of works such as Vincent G. Dethier’s *To Know A Fly*; Richard Fortey’s *Life: An Unauthorized Biography*; Lewis Thomas’ *The Lives of a Cell; Your Inner Fish* by Neil Shubin; Dava Sobel’s *Longitude*; *The Ghost Map* by Steven Johnson; *The Poisoner’s Handbook* by Deborah Blum; *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot; *The Human
Age by Diane Ackerman; as well as selected writings on scientific subjects by the likes of John McPhee, Michael Pollan, and Jonathan Weiner.

Along with active class participation, students may be asked to conceive of and compose their own science-based feature story about any science-based subject of their choosing.

Ira Silverberg

**We Got The Beat**

*(FICTION)*

Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm

As you might know, the infamous troika—Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William S. Burroughs—either attended or were affiliated with Columbia University and its environs. “We Got The Beat” will look at the aesthetic and political influence of this prescient post-war group of writers. Beginning with the early collaborative work of Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs, *And The Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*, through memoirs by Hettie Brown and Joyce Johnson, this seminar will explore the work of those writers associated with “The Beats.” Primary texts such as Ginsberg’s *Howl*, Kerouac’s *On The Road*, and Burroughs’ *Queer* will be read along with anthologies’ excerpts, which include minor characters who made up the fringes of the scene. The course will also include film, television interviews, and spoken word recordings for further insights. One writing assignment influenced by the reading will be required.

Rob Spillman

**Establishing Authority**

*(FICTION)*

Tuesday, 12:05pm-2:05pm

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 sentences and first pages across forms, including work from Karen Russell, Samuel Beckett, Don DeLillo, Joe Wenderoth, 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, some unsuccessful openings, and analyze how the author has or hasn’t firmly captivated the reader.

The seminar will include workshopping openings from students, 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. We will also work on revising and sharpening student openings over the course of semester. Homework will also include students bringing in successful openings, from the famous to the newly discovered.

Lara Vapnyar

Architecture of a Story

(FICTION)  Wednesday, 10:30am-12:30pm

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: Alice Munro, Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, Italo Calvino, Margaret Atwood, David Foster Wallace, Jennifer Egan, and Elena Ferrante.
Brenda Wineapple

**Explorations: The Art and Craft of Nonfiction Research**

(NONFICTION)  
*Thursday, 2:10pm-4:10pm*

The seminar provides an introduction to research methods for those nonfiction, fiction, and poetry students who incorporate historical, documentary, or other primary and secondary materials into their work. We will therefore discuss public, archival, and/or electronic sources (where to find them, what to do with them) as well as reportorial and other techniques for gathering, organizing, filing, synthesizing, and ultimately using such material. We’ll begin with an overview of method and technique, answering how we determine what materials or sources we need, how we go about locating them, what we do with the material (or people) we discover, and how to evaluate what we find. Because each student must bring to the seminar a specific subject that he or she is researching, during the seminar students will also discuss what kind of research conundrums they have encountered so that we can focus specifically on individual projects and the questions—empirical and ethical—they raise.

Assignments will therefore leave students free to pursue their topics, which include independent reading (from a highly focused list or bibliography compiled by the student), interview(s) if possible or necessary of a source relevant to the research topic, and a 15-page narrative incorporating a significant portion of the research the student has been doing. Together, as a class, we will discuss assigned articles and/or books that deal with questions of research (such as Arlette Farge’s *The Allure of the Archives*) and talk about research methods with guest writers, invited to the class, who will answer questions about their work. And we will devote some period of the semester to circulating the students’ written work that we’ll discuss in workshop-like fashion.

Alan Ziegler

**Short Prose Forms**

(CROSS-GENRE)  
*Thursday, 5:15pm-7:15pm*

Prose poem, short-short story, brief essay, and fragment are wild cards in the writer’s deck. How they are defined depends on the dealer and can change from hand to hand. Many prose poems are indistinguishable from short-short stories or flash fiction; brief essays from prose poems; and fragments from prose poems and brief essays. They all go together in this cross-genre hybrid seminar/workshop.

Sessions will be divided between seminar discussions of texts (many of which will be handouts from *Short: An International Anthology of 500 Years of Short-Short Stories, Prose Poems, Brief Essays, and Other Short Prose Forms*) and modified
workshops of student writing. We will consider a wide range of forms, approaches, and styles, spanning the last 175 years (with some precursors). In addition to works in English, we will read translations from the French, German, Italian, Spanish, and other languages.

Requirements include: three or four short prose pieces (of any kind, as long as they are prose, short, and a complete unit), several one-draft exercises, and a brief classroom presentation.

Some of the authors whose work will be considered: Charles Baudelaire, Aimee Bender, Thomas Bernhard, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Anne Carson, Gianni Celati, Luis Cernuda, Bernard Cooper, Lydia Davis, Russell Edson, Eduardo Galeano, Ray Gonzalez, Kimiko Hahn, Joy Harjo, Lyn Hejinian, Amy Hempel, David Ignatow, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Max Jacob, Juan Ramon Jimenez, Joseph Joubert, Franz Kafka, Bob Kaufman, Yasunari Kawabata, Etgar Keret, Jamaica Kincaid, Clarice Lispector, Stéphane Mallarmé, Czeslaw Milosz, Harryette Mullen, Ron Padgett, Jayne Anne Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Renard, Arthur Rimbaud, Sonia Sanchez, Nathalie Sarraute, Ana María Shua, Charles Simic, Mark Strand, Luisa Valenzuela, Diane Williams, and Mikhail Zoshchenko.

Alan Ziegler

**The Writer as Teacher**

(CROSS-GENRE)  
Wednesday, 12:40pm-3:40pm

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

Literary Translation: Introductory Workshop

Thursday, 11am-1:30pm

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.

Mónica de la Torre

Literary Translation: Advanced Workshop

Monday, 3:10pm-5:40pm

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.
Edith Grossman

**Writers You Should Know More About**

*Wednesday, 1:40pm-3:40pm*

These six authors, from Colombia (Mutis), Cuba (Montero; Alberto), Guatemala (Monterroso), Peru (Roncaglio), and Spain (Ríos), all expatriates, are well known and highly respected in many parts of the world, but not in the United States. The aim of this course is to introduce you to representative works in the hope that you will continue to explore their writing. Eight of the books are novellas; one is a collection of short stories; three are novels.

There are three required papers, three pages each. Late papers are not accepted. As you know, attendance is mandatory. Active participation in class discussions is expected.

*Week 1: Introduction*
*Week 2: Álvaro Mutis, The Snow of the Admiral*
*Week 3: Mayra Montero, In the Palm of Darkness*
*Week 4: Julián Ríos, Loves That Bind*
*Week 5: Álvaro Mutis, Ilona Comes With the Rain*

**First paper due**

*Week 6: Mayra Montero, Dancing to Almendra*
*Week 7: Augusto Monterroso, Complete Works and Other Stories*
*Week 8: Eliseo Alberto, Caracol Beach*
*Week 9: Mayra Montero, The Messenger*

**Second paper due**

*Week 10: Álvaro Mutis, Un bel morir*
*Week 11: Santiago Roncaglio, Red April*
*Week 12: Mayra Montero, The Red of His Shadow*
*Week 13: Álvaro Mutis, The Tramp Steamer’s Last Port of Call*

**Third paper due**

*Week 14: Conclusions*
LECTURES

Richard Locke

Beyond Category: A Survey of Fiction

Thursday, 2:10pm-4:10pm

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 realistic, modernist, and postmodernist. 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 offer 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.

Readings will include:

- Henry James, *The Aspern Papers*
- Anton Chekhov, selections from *Chekhov’s Short Stories* (Norton Critical edition)
- Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*
- Jorge Luis Borges, selections from *Collected Fictions*
- Samuel Beckett, selections from *The Complete Short Prose*
- Flannery O’Connor, selections from *Collected Works*
- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
- Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*
- Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*
- Donald Barthelme, selections from *Sixty Stories*
- Grace Paley, selections from *The Collected Stories*
- Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*
- Gabriel García Márquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*
- Ben Okri, selections from *Stars of the New Curfew*
Alice Quinn

Tone, Tempo, Atmosphere, and the Pictorial Aspect in Prose and Poetry

Monday, 6:15pm-8:15pm

These qualities compose a sort of viewfinder to pinpoint aims, which most writers have to find a way to be memorable in the ear and the eyes of a good reader. With ten special writers, from a Sanskrit scholar whose debut volume of poems is forthcoming from Knopf to a highly respected former New Yorker fiction editor who is also a novelist and memoirist, we will explore a wide variety of superb writing—their own and others’—that achieves these effects. Nine of our ten guests are confirmed as of the moment:


Emily Bernard, essayist and author of Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Portrait in Black and White.

Jesse Browner, translator from the French (Rilke, Eluard, Cocteau) and author of the novels Everything Happens Today, The Uncertain Hour, Turnaway, and Conglomeros.


Robin Coste Lewis, Sanskrit scholar, professor, author of the forthcoming collection Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems (Knopf).

Daniel Menaker, celebrated fiction editor at The New Yorker and editor-in-chief of Random House, author of the books The Old Left and Other Stories and The Treatment, O. Henry-award-winning short story writer, author of the memoir My Mistake.

Mary Norris, superlative New Yorker copyeditor, author of the forthcoming memoir Between You & Me: Confessions of a Comma Queen (W.W. Norton).

Rowan Ricardo Phillips, poet, literary and art critic, and translator, author of the debut collection The Ground (FSG, 2012), winner of the PEN/Joyce Osterweil Award and a Whiting Writers’ Award, author of the critical volume When Blackness Rhymes with Blackness.

Atsuro Riley, author of the collection of poems Romey’s Order (2012), winner of the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, The Believer Poetry Award, and a Witter Bynner Award from the Library of Congress.
Christopher Sorrentino

News from the Last Century

Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm

In this course we’ll consider some of the prose techniques developed or refined during the twentieth century, particularly those that follow, or at least appear to follow, an alternate route to that of mimetic realism. Focusing mainly on works that attempt to extend the boundaries of convention, or overthrow it entirely, we’ll discuss not-yet-exhausted innovations in approach to dialogue, character, and plot; the use of metafiction and narrative disruption; the introduction of psychoanalytic concepts to fiction; use of generative devices, appropriation, and Détournement; the carnivalesque; the curious problem of the memoir; the uncanny; the historical novel and the idea of “genre”; and other relevant topics. Authors studied will include Augustine, Barthes, Beckett, Bernhard, Calvino, Carter, DeLillo, Dick, Didion, Ferrante, Freud, Mansfield, Plato, Robbe-Grillet, Woolf, and many others.

Benjamin Taylor

Other People’s Secrets

Thursday, 4:20pm-6:20pm

We read in order not to be confined to the inner life nature has assigned us; we read to make prolonged and intimate contact with other hidden selves. In life we are largely opaque to each other; in literature, by contrast, there are no secrets. What life habitually hides, writing broadcasts. Stories, novels, memoirs, biographies, personal essays, poems, and plays exist to reveal what’s really going on in the deep recesses. Our course will focus, across a broad range of genres and styles, on the endless varieties of inner experience, and how outer life disguises and intimates the fortress of secrets within.

We read most of the following:

Joseph Mitchell, Up in the Old Hotel
Samuel Beckett, Murphy (plus viewings of Waiting for Godot and Krapp’s Last Tape)
Hugh Trevor-Roper, Hermit of Peking
David Kidd, Peking Story: The Last Days of Old China
Gitta Sereny, Into That Darkness
Flannery O’Connor, Mystery and Manners (plus a selection of short stories)
Geoffrey Wolff, The Duke of Deception
Gabriel García Márquez, The General in His Labyrinth
James Merrill, A Different Person (plus a selection of poems)
Julia Blackburn, The Emperor’s Last Island
Simon Leys, *The Death of Napoleon* (plus a selection of essays)
Louise Erdrich, *The Round House*
Marilynne Robinson, *Lila* (plus a selection of essays)
Roz Chast, *Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*

Students are asked to read Geoffrey Wolff’s *The Duke of Deception* prior to our first meeting.
Josh Bell

**Devotional Poetry**

4 sessions (1 point) / Feb. 4 – Feb. 25

*Wednesday, 4pm-6pm*

“My thoughts are all a case of knives.”

—George Herbert, “Affliction IV”

In the four weeks of this master class, we will read and discuss selections from the devotional poetry of John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, and the later G.M. Hopkins. In conversation with these four poets, students will build and execute their own plaintive lyric “I,” design new ecstatic soundscapes, and plan and deliver the imagistic configurations that will best give them direct-line access to the God (or gods) of their own invention.

Go read the Old Testament’s *Book of Job* and “Psalm 22” if you want to get in the proper mindset now.

All assignments creative.

Patricia Hampl

**First Figures: Writing about Mother and Father**

4 sessions (1 point) / Apr. 7 – Apr. 28

*Tuesday, 10am-12pm*

The first and most enduring protagonists, living or dead, of our imaginations are mother and father, those giants looming over our earliest conception of character and narration.

In this four-session nonfiction master class, we will read pieces by a range of writers about their mothers or fathers—Kafka, Colette, Ondaatje, Toibin, to name a few. Our focus will be double: first, we will read to see how individual writers contend with these heroic figures, idealized or villainized, struggling them onto the mat of narrative; second, we will look at pieces in which writers consider the problems inherent in this supposedly most familiar relationship. If the first rule of writing is “Write about what you know,” writing about one’s parents should be—but turns out not to be—just the ticket to certainty.
This is not a writing workshop. But as a reading course for writers, it will offer chances to write from prompts developed from the readings, and opportunities to read this work in class to augment our consideration of the portraiture of family figures.

Mike Harvkey

**Ugly America**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Mar. 23 – Apr. 27  
Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm

In this course, we will read work that throws a bomb at the American Dream and then wades recklessly into the carnage. We will examine how authors—from right here and over there—have processed aspects of this nation that don’t fit into the image of freedom, opportunity, and prosperity that is projected around the globe on a daily basis. And we will examine how this image has changed in recent years. Over six sessions we will pay close attention to form and craft, studying techniques writers use to find humanity in the horrible. We will also analyze particularly American conventions, images, and ideas. Authors read will include Don DeLillo, Joan Didion, Susan Steinberg, Russell Banks, Edward P. Jones, Bobbie Ann Mason, James Salter, Toni Morrison, David Foster Wallace, and William T. Vollmann.

Zoe Heller

**Representations of Sex in Fiction**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Feb. 3 – Mar. 10  
Tuesday, 10am-12pm

In this six-week class, we’ll be looking at various ways of writing about sex acts in fiction. We’ll consider, among other things, why sex scenes have traditionally been considered hazardous for writers, how changes in sexual politics affect literary descriptions of sex, whether writing about “good” (life-changing, earth-moving) sex is harder than writing about the unsatisfactory sort, and the use of proper anatomical terms. Reading will include works by Leo Tolstoy, V.S. Naipaul, Philip Roth, James Salter, Mary Gaitskill, Sarah Waters, Alan Hollinghurst, Christine Schutt, Ian McEwan, Jonathan Franzen, Elizabeth Bowen, and Colm Toibin. Students will be asked to complete one short writing assignment inspired, or influenced, by the reading.
Leslie Jamison  

**Confession and Shame**  
4 sessions (1 point) / Feb. 16 – Mar. 9

Monday, 4:10pm-6:10pm

This course will explore the possibilities and perils of confession. We’ll examine the multiple meanings of the term “confession” itself and consider the widespread appeal—and frequent shaming—of the confessional form. How and why does confession get framed as giving oneself away, or forcing oneself onto the world? Why is confession so frequently associated with vulnerability? Does it necessarily entail a sense of culpability or guilt? How can we come to a sense of the confessional as a long-standing literary tradition rather than an unfortunate byproduct of a modern digital culture of oversharing? We’ll be reading essays and excerpts from Saint Augustine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William Hazlitt, Maggie Nelson, Jo Ann Beard, Meghan Daum, Sarah Manguso, David Shields, and Charles D’Ambrosio in order to think about the unexpected ways in which confession can make itself visible—through the seams of criticism or journalism, through formal innovation or experiment—and how to direct self-revelation to meaningful ends: How can confessional writing feel like something other than navel-gazing? How can exposure feel resonant rather than solipsistic?

Binnie Kirshenbaum  

**How-To Be**  
6 sessions (1.5 points) / Jan. 28 – Mar. 4

Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm

The Middle Ages saw a great rise in literacy—reading and writing—particularly among the noble and upper classes. Had there been at that time a Barnes & Noble in every village, you’d have found the Self Help section stacked with Conduct Books and Courtesy Guides. These books and pamphlets, written by fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, princesses, knights, nuns, and clergymen, were decidedly instructional and informational in content and intent. They explicated tenets of social conduct, offered pragmatic household tips, defined the codes of honor and devotion to God, outlined the rules of marriage, confided the need for keeping secrets, suggested the best way to cook a peacock, and how else would former prostitutes know that they could earn a living by taking in laundry? But in addition to all that practical knowledge, the guides are multi-dimensional elaborations on society, morality, and ethics. They reveal the essences, nuances, and universality of human psychology and behavior. Written with great literary panache and in a variety of forms including inquiry and response, dramatic dialogues, epistles, and verse, these books are witty, clever, bawdy, manipulative, shrewd, spiritual, loving, or tender in type. Although Medieval in time and culture, the Guides nonetheless can instruct and illustrate, even for us, ways to be.
In this class, students will each write a Conduct Guide of their own design as well as read and discuss excerpts from The Art of Courtly Love, The Treasure of the City of Ladies, Handbook For William, The Good Wife of Paris, A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry, and Cautionary Tales, among others.

Binnie Kirshenbaum

The Sentence and Its Paragraph

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Mar. 25 – Apr. 29  Wednesday, 1:40pm-3:40pm

What makes one sentence serviceable and another memorable? How does one sentence do the work of many? Can one sentence set the tone, establish character, twist the plot, make music, or tell a good joke? When can we say, “That’s a great sentence,” and what does that mean? Working within the confines of a single paragraph, we will address sentences each as a discrete unit. We will dismantle, deconstruct, dissect, re-arrange, revise, and rewrite our selected sentences. Words will be cut. Words will be added. Words will be replaced. Words will be shuffled. Syntax will surprise us.

Each of our now carefully constructed sentences will then be considered for content, chronology, rhythm, clarity, and necessity, etc., relative to its paragraph. We will eradicate the redundant, merge sentences for economy, and braid them for variety. We will determine where to place a particular sentence within the paragraph to enhance its impact or best create the desired effect.

When not obsessing about the crucial minutia of our own sentences, we will pick apart and carefully analyze masterful sentences written by others. We will take note of the timing, of the word choice, of placement, and of the efforts of the verb. We will emulate and mirror those masterful sentences as a way to break out from our syntactical comfort zones, and to invigorate our prose.

In addition to the numerous exercises and practices, students will be expected to perfect three paragraphs from their own writing.

Leonard Schwartz

Literary Art and the Language of Philosophy

4 sessions (1 point) / Apr. 9 – Apr. 30  Thursday, 10am-12pm

From Heraclitus to Nietzsche to Blanchot, philosophers have sought to speak as poets, that is, to create a language in order to speak of that which seems to lie
beyond language as commonly conceived. From Sappho to Proust, Artaud, or Pound, poets and fiction writers have engaged in epistemological inquiry and posed metaphysical questions, while delving into questions of narrative, time, image, perception, and the depiction of thought. To what extent can the language of philosophy offer an expressive register to our writing, be it poetry or fiction? By locating the central metaphors behind apparently rational arguments, and by asserting that poems and stories have cognitive and epistemic value, this master class seeks to broaden our sense of what is possible in writing. Readings will be drawn from the fragments of Heraclitus and Sappho, as well as modern and contemporary texts by Wallace Stevens, Pound, Italian writer Roberto Calasso, and Danish poet Inger Christenson. Always, the question is: how does the language of philosophy, once broached, add something to our range as writers?

Lynne Sharon Schwartz

Translating Nonfiction: Pleasures and Perils

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Mar. 25 – Apr. 29

Wednesday, 4pm-6pm

This course, which is open to both translation and nonfiction students, will examine the translation of nonfiction from a variety of approaches. We’ll begin with two memoirs that describe and analyze the arduous psychological process of transferring one’s sensibility—thinking, feeling, imagining, verbalizing—from one language to another: Richard Rodriguez’s Hunger of Memory, on being a Chicano in a Spanish-speaking family, and Eva Hoffman’s Lost in Translation, on being a Polish immigrant. Following that, I will discuss my translations from Italian of Natalia Ginzburg’s essays, A Place to Live and Other Selected Essays, and Liana Millu’s Smoke Over Birkenau. We’ll look at the recent controversy over a new translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex. Other readings will include fundamental works on language usage and translation, such as Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language,” passages from George Steiner’s After Babel, as well as selections from Guy Deutscher’s The Language Glass, on how different languages perceive and portray the world in different ways: what problems does that present for the translator of nonfiction?

Students will hand in a five-page paper: translation students will do a brief translation from a nonfiction work and nonfiction students will write a brief essay on a translated work. If time and class size permit, students will present their projects at the last class.

Students should read Richard Rodriguez’s Hunger of Memory before the first class and be prepared to discuss it.
In comparison with fiction, poetry, and drama, nonfiction occupies an uncertain place in the tradition of English literature. The title of a well-known anthology that has done long service as a textbook says it all: Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing. Writing. Is the rest of it not writing? We say “literary prose,” but novels are also presumably written in prose. We are unsure even about what to call this creature, then, beyond naming what it is not, or carving it into confusing sub-genres. Yet if we look more closely (so this class will try to argue and illustrate) we find a surprisingly unified stream of books and essays flowing uninterrupted from the Renaissance down into the twenty-first century, representing a kind of concealed “fourth genre” of writing that both seeks to exert factual status and obeys a formal agenda, i.e., conceives of itself as a work of art. At the intersection of these two pressures, factual and aesthetic, this genre comes into existence. We will examine four key stages in its development, one per class. Students will be asked to produce a paper, which may be either creative or scholarly.

Adam Thirlwell

Reading Proust as a Novelist (Thief)

4 sessions (1 point) / Apr. 6 – Apr. 27 Monday, 11am-1pm

This class is based on two (precarious) generalizations: that Marcel Proust is the greatest novelist in the history of world literature; and also the most unread. Our class will examine Marcel Proust as a resource for future experiments: its argument is that In Search of Lost Time, this novel from the early twentieth century, still represents the most advanced novel ever written. Techniques and effects to steal might include: time zigzags, dissolving narrators, retrospective revelations, disordered sequence, fluid sexualities, polymorphous syntax, assumed identities, giant length…

The fact that this reading will all be done in the most recent English translation, published by Penguin Classics, will mean that translation students are also welcome: for the discussion will necessarily involve consideration of what techniques are portable internationally, and what are linguistically unique.

Before beginning the course, students are asked to have read as much as possible of the first volume, Swann’s Way. Readings during the course will be taken from the last volume, Finding Time Again. (One proposition to be examined will be whether this novel needs to be read in order, or in its entirety…) By the end of the course, I
hope, each student will have a new armory of techniques and styles at their disposal—which they will flaunt in one written assignment, either fictional or critical. And they will also have read (some of) Proust.

Hannah Tinti

**Cabinets of Wonder**

*6 sessions (1.5 points) / Feb. 6 – Mar. 13 Friday, 11am-1pm*

Natural History museums began with curiosity cabinets—small closets or boxes in a person’s home, full of items they had personally collected: bird nests, a snake skin, or a coin from China. The owners of these cabinets acted as museum curators: what they chose to go into the cabinets reflected who they were—just as everything we put into our own writing reflects us. This six-session class will take place at the American Museum of Natural History (located on West 81st Street & Central Park West). Each class will be held in a different gallery of the museum. We will read excerpts of works by naturalists Gerald Durrell, Henry David Thoreau, Charles Darwin, and Theodore Roosevelt, as well as literary figures who incorporate the natural world into their fiction and poetry, from Andrea Barrett and Rick Bass to Walt Whitman and Herman Melville. But the main focus of this course will be to inspire your own writing, drawing on the exhibits for on-site writing exercises and prompts. Notebook, pen, and ability to write on the spot and in public required. We will end by creating our own “curiosity cabinets.”

This class will be limited to 12 students. All sessions, except for the final one, will meet at the American Museum of Natural History. We will begin promptly at 11am then move to various locations in the building so students should allow themselves sufficient time to get to the museum (and then to any following appointments or classes).

William Wadsworth

**Rewriting Shakespeare**

*5 sessions (1.5 points) / Jan. 29, Feb. 5, Feb. 12 (double session), Feb. 19, and Mar. 5 Thursday, 6:30pm-8:30pm*

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.). After a two-week break during which you will compose your “rewrite,” you will be asked to read and present your work for discussion in our final session.

Matvei Yankelevich

**Creative (Mis)Translation**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Feb. 4 - Mar. 11  
*Wednesday, 10:30am-12:30pm*

Translation is at once a process, a procedure, and a metaphor. The practice of translation brings out our hidden prejudices, our ingrained biases; notions of the literary text that we take for granted come to the foreground and call on us to make crucial choices. The problems of translation “translate” over to the writing of fiction and poetry. By recuperating volition in the encounter with the authority(ies) present in any given text, the writer finds openings in and through translation. In this course, we’ll explore the generative aspects of translation and “mis-translation”: how translating might open up new reserves of language for us to mine; how it might loosen our grip on our own “voice” and let in others; and conversely, how our own language might affect our encounter with a foreign or faraway voice.

The reading for the course will include creative uses of translation (David Cameron’s “bad” translations of Baudelaire, erasure as translation in Jen Bervin’s reworking of Shakespeare, Christian Hawkey’s conversations with Trakl, Ivan Blatny’s multi-lingual poems); Paul Legault’s English-to-English translation of Emily Dickinson; a handful of writers’ meditations on translation (Pound, Nabokov, Göransson); and a few essays on the theory of translation (Schleiermacher, Benjamin). Through these readings, students will become acquainted with several procedural strategies (homophonic, Oulipian, computer-generated, etc.), and perform some translation exercises along similar lines. Assignments will be focused on short texts or excerpts, no more than a page long. **Knowledge of a foreign language is not required.**