

CA/T Community Classes (CCC)

Creative Writing | Columbia University



Carson McCullers, Columbia Writing alum

COURSEBOOK

Spring 2022

INFORMATION

CA/T Community Classes are free, non-credit creative writing seminars and workshops in fiction, poetry, nonfiction and cross-genre. Taught by MFA Writing Program students at Columbia University's School of the Arts, these classes are designed to facilitate discussions of literary pieces and provide a space for feedback on student work.

Courses are open to **all** current Columbia and Barnard students, staff, and affiliates and all School of the Arts alumni.

Classes meet weekly for four to six weeks, beginning on Monday, March 21st, through Sunday, May 1st. Classes are six weeks unless otherwise specified, and **all** classes this semester will meet **remotely over Zoom**.

HOW TO REGISTER:

Classes are first come, first served. You may register for up to two (2) CCC Creative Writing courses a semester. The registration period begins on Friday, March 4th at 5PM and will close on Friday, March 11th at 5PM. Classes are capped at 12 students. Those that fill up will be specified as **waitlist only**.

To choose your classes, please fill out the [registration form](#). The CCC coordinator, Rachel Raiola, will contact you the week before classes begin to inform you if you have been assigned a class or placed on a waitlist. Waitlisters will be notified should a spot open up in the class.

More information is also available at: <https://arts.columbia.edu/cat/CCC>.

If you have any further questions about registration, please email CCC coordinator, Rachel Raiola, at soa-writing-ccc@columbia.edu. If your question pertains to a specific course, please reach out to the instructor.

COURSE LIST

FICTION

GENERIC FICTION WORKSHOP | Rachel Raiola

Mon. 9:30am-11:30am

EXPLORING AND WRITING PLACE: FROM YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND BEYOND | Allison Rosa

Mon. 10:00am-12:00pm

BEAT FOR BEAT: THE HEARTBEAT OF THE SHORT STORY | Gabrielle McAree

Mon. 12:00pm-2:00pm

EPIPHANY IN SAUL BELLOW'S *HERZOG* | Kyle Graber

Sun. 3:00pm-5:00pm

POETRY

JUNK DRAWER POETICS | Iva Moore

Mon. 6:00pm-8:00pm

GENERIC POETRY WORKSHOP | Sarah Swinwood

Tues. 2:00pm-4:00pm

2022: THE POETRY OF CALAMITY | Zachary Erickson

Wed. 6:00pm-8:00pm

POETRY BEYOND THE BINARY | Ryan Cook

Thurs. 12:00pm-2:00pm

A MEDITATION ON POETRY | Rachel Higson

Thurs. 4:00pm-6:00pm

NONFICTION

GENERIC NONFICTION WORKSHOP | Stephanie Cuevo Wobby
Wed. 2:00pm-4:00pm

CROSS-GENRE

WEEKLY THEMES | Frances Lindemann
Tues. 2:00pm-4:00pm

TRANSLATING BETWEEN FILM AND PROSE | Aamir Azhar
Fri. 4:00pm-6:00pm

CHARTING THE TRANSCENDENT MOMENT | Luciana Siracusano
Sat. 3:00pm-5:00pm

FICTION

GENERIC FICTION WORKSHOP

Rachel Raiola

Mon. 9:30am–11:30am

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

This workshop aims to create an engaging, generative space of exploration and experimentation for writers at all levels.

EXPLORING & WRITING PLACE: FROM YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND BEYOND

Allison Rosa

Mon. 10:00am-12:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

There's nothing like picking up a story that transports you to another time or place: especially when you've been stuck quarantining in the same 500-square-foot apartment. The awe that authors generate with a rich and immersive setting is often accompanied by questions on craft. How do you activate setting? How much exploration went into creating one? How do you write a setting you don't have access to, whether that's because you can't travel there right now, or because it doesn't exist, like a fantasy world or dystopia?

In this course, we will explore the question of how to activate setting in our own writing. Together, we will employ strategies for finding inspiration and creating setting through generative and sometimes unexpected means, including: analyses of short passages, mindful walking exercises, social media, real estate listings, and more. We will read short selections from writers such as George Saunders, Jean Rhys, Alice McDermott, and Kazuo Ishiguro, among others. We will discuss different ways in which authors immerse readers in new settings through imagery, sensory details, dialogue, character, and more. Through in-class writing prompts, students will have the opportunity to apply these strategies in writing their own settings.

BEAT FOR BEAT: THE HEARTBEAT OF THE SHORT STORY

Gabrielle McAree

Mon. 12:00pm-2:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

In this six-session course, we will dive into the short story and dissect the mechanics of the character, structure, shape, and perspective and how they impact pacing. In the first half of each class, we will read and discuss excerpts from short stories. For the remainder of the class, students will be given a writing exercise in response to the readings. In the third week, students will have the opportunity to submit the beginning of a story, which they will develop over the next two weeks, for feedback.

Tick, tick, tick. What keeps a reader reading? How do we get from one beat to the next while maintaining control of the narrative and grounding the reader? What does pacing look like when a piece is one page, ten, twenty? How do character and dialogue function in shorter texts? How do we employ certain devices to satisfy expectations?

Readings will be provided in-class and may include excerpts from Ottessa Moshfegh, Amie Barrodale, Leopoldine Core, Miranda July, Emma Cline, Carmen Maria Machado, and Anthony Veasna So.

EPIPHANY IN SAUL BELLOW'S *HERZOG*

Kyle Graber

Sun. 3:00pm–5:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st, no class on April 17th *5 weeks!*

A man is gumshoeing outside a house with a pistol tucked into his greatcoat. Beneath his feet crunch the pebbles of the driveway; above his head, stars hang in awesome silence. This man is Moses Herzog, a literary academic of good standing, who in the agony of his divorce has resolved to kill the man for whom his wife left him. But when he catches the homewrecker in the window, tenderly helping his daughter get ready for bed, Herzog's resolve breaks. He realizes that, like everything else in his scholastic, ivory-tower life, the gun is "nothing but a thought."

In this course we'll be talking about the nature of epiphany, both in fiction as well as in real life. Saul Bellow's *Herzog* will foreground our discussion. Why is it that Herzog's revelations throughout the book—and there are *many*—feel believably destined, instead of unnaturally shoehorned? How does Bellow set them up, execute them, and move on from them? When we aren't answering these and other related

questions, we'll be pouring revelations on the heads of our *own* characters, and offering up our work to the consideration of the class.

Passages from Herzog will be distributed and read aloud in class; writing assignments, also, will be fulfilled during class time.

POETRY

JUNK DRAWER POETICS

Iva Moore

Mon. 6:00pm–8:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

Gertrude Stein wrote, “A seal and matches and a swan and ivy and a suit.” In this part seminar, part writing studio, we will consider how objects are used to establish mood in poetry. Think about poems as closets, cabinets, exhibits, mood boards, and chambers: how do the objects contained within create intrigue? What does it mean to find a pistachio and a hammer in a hatbox?

By extracting, examining, and at times rearranging the nouns in writing by C.D. Wright, Chelsey Minnis, Harmony Holiday, John Ashbery, Molly Brodak, and David Berman, among others, we will get a better understanding of the noun as poetic tool. Each week we will read a modest group of poems by a variety of poets to discuss the aesthetic and poetic role of objects in their work.

The second half of each class will be treated as a writing studio. Students will be asked to bring a piece of in-process writing to share with the class. By identifying how nouns function in our work, we will discover new approaches to meaning making through imagery. We will revise poems toward the peculiar, embodied, and distinct.

GENERIC POETRY WORKSHOP

Sarah Swinwood

Tues. 2:00pm-4:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

This workshop aims to create an engaging, generative space of exploration and experimentation for writers at all levels.

2022: THE POETRY OF CALAMITY

Zachary Erickson

Wed. 6:00pm-8:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

Is this the promised end?

Or image of that horror?

—*King Lear* (5.3.263-264)

2022 is the centennial year of the poem that, for the 20th century, was the poem of calamity: T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. How relevant is this famous poem to our present sense of calamity, or lack thereof? What poets writing today are we reading to make sense of our current era? And how is our own work starting to deal with the odd bundle of emotions that we're tentatively calling The New Normal? In this course, students will discuss why, in their view, the pandemic (and calamity in general) is relevant to art.

Whether you know in your heart that Lord Byron has nothing on you, or you just want to get a taste for How Poetry Works, this course will be a pleasant investigation of how poetry, including our own, tries to build a new world out of the rubble.

This half-seminar and half-workshop will begin with a close look at *The Waste Land* and a discussion of why people in 1922 thought that it “expressed the disillusionment of a generation”; this will culminate in a brief look at Eliot's *Four Quartets* and possible visions of rebirth. Then we will look at other poets, living and dead, who face disaster and attempt to rebuild. Finally, we will workshop our own poems and make some conclusions about “the poetry of calamity.” Writing exercises will be interspersed throughout.

POETRY BEYOND THE BINARY

Ryan Cook

Thurs. 12:00pm–2:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

Gender fluid snow aliens, a trans erasure of Dracula, shapeshifting smut set in the 90s, meteors having sex with people telepathically from light years away: if you related to or were intrigued by any of these, then you might be interested in poetry beyond the binary.

In this class, we will talk about how different poetic forms have been used by writers cis and trans alike to explore gender experimentation, defiance, and risk. We will be examining excerpts from artists like Gertrude Stein, Ursula K. Le Guin, Claude Cahun, Chase Berggrun, Andrea Lawlor, CA Conrad, Never Angeline Nørth, and others.

This course will act as both a seminar and workshop, working through questions of gender with a weekly optional submission of poems and assignments alongside discussions about the link between gender and form. Writing assignments will be offered, and students will have the opportunity to workshop their poems. We will explode the binary, prying open all the gendered gunk that lies beneath the fingernail, and like the great ocean god Ea in the descent of Inanna myth, we will create ourselves a being not of gender, but of pure light.

A MEDITATION ON POETRY

Rachel Higson

Thurs. 4:00pm–6:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

No matter the “happenings” themselves, we have more than enough presence in an hour of living to write a whole chapbook of poetry. We might not know it yet, but the water is already down there, waiting for us. It’s just a matter of fine-tuning our awareness and emptying our buckets before casting them down. Our main goals of this course will be:

- Why meditate?
 - We will stray into the scientific realm as we get to know why meditation has such a powerful effect on mental and physical health, work performance, creativity, and so on.
 - Documentary: [Joy of Mind](#)
- We will read poetry by Rumi, Lao Tzu, Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Audre Lorde, Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, and the list goes on!
 - We will also explore the art within various other genres including music, art, dance, etc. for inspiration.
- We will practice some meditation techniques in class to get you started.
- Then we will harness the productivity of clear-headedness by participating in some writing exercises.
 - This course is exactly whatever you want to get out of it. There’s no pressure to produce, share, or receive feedback, just opportunity.

Poetry in its deepest roots is exchange: a diffusion of ideas and energy. And we will learn to write beyond the mirror, accessing a poetic reservoir that exists somewhere below the mind chatter created by and creating the superficial world around us. Once we break through and reach our “edge-shaped core of darkness” as Virginia Woolf puts it in *Mrs. Dalloway*, we will discover or rather recover our infinite potential to appreciate nature, living, connection, and humanity. And write about it.

NONFICTION

GENERIC NONFICTION WORKSHOP

Stephanie Cuevo Wobby

Wed. 2:00pm–4:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

This workshop aims to create an engaging, generative space of exploration and experimentation for writers at all levels.

CROSS-GENRE

WEEKLY THEMES

Frances Lindemann

Tues. 2:00pm-4:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st

“I was in no mood to write; it seemed impossible. Yet, when I had finished three pages, they were ‘all right!’” – Katherine Mansfield’s journals, January 1922

This course is premised on the notion that there is value in forcing oneself to write on a regular basis, even when it seems impossible; if not three pages like Mansfield, then at least one paragraph. After all, if half the battle of creative writing is finding inspiration, then surely the other half is committing to serious work. The course will be craft-based and focused on weekly writing exercises. Our primary goal is to demystify the creative process by framing great writing as a patchwork quilt of learned techniques that can be studied and replicated. Each class will begin with discussion of a particular aspect of craft—such as voice, setting, temporality, or character—and consideration of relevant passages drawn from writers such as Natalia Ginzburg, Lydia Davis, AM Homes, Kazuo Ishiguro, André Aciman, Maurice Sendak, Isak Dinesen, Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust. Students will then respond (in prose, fictional or not) to a set of writing prompts, utilizing the elements of craft discussed that day. We will workshop these paragraphs, and by the end of the semester students will leave class having produced a small body of their own work. We will also discuss the role of routine and methodology in our writing practices. There will be no assigned reading or writing outside the classroom, though students are welcome to revise their work before submitting. Students will also be asked to keep a diary of literary quotations that they find inspiring or instructive, to be shared with the group.

TRANSLATING BETWEEN FILM AND PROSE

Aamir Azhar

Fri. 4:00pm-6:00pm

Dates: March 21st—May 1st, no class on April 15th *5 weeks!*

The green light in *The Great Gatsby* is famous for being fawned over by high school English teachers nationwide. The movie adaptation tries to pay homage to it by showing Gatsby basked in the light multiple times, and explaining its significance at the end with words from the novel on the screen. Yet something is lost; the

dramatization of the movie diminishes the subtle beauty of the novel, which originally described this “single green light” as “minute and far away,” an image only noticed in passing by the characters, originally.

This class explores the relationship between film and prose, what works in one that is less effective in the other, when adaptations (in either direction) are inspired and when they fall flat. We will talk about the image versus the word: how film has access to space and time, whereas prose exists primarily in time.

We will watch scenes from films like *Moonlight* and compare them to their screenplays, analyze successful and unsuccessful scenes from adaptations like *Gone Girl* and *The Great Gatsby*, as well as look at how iconic graphic novels like *Watchmen* utilize their medium to create a scene. We will also watch video essays on film and read excerpts from such authors as Proust, examining whether one can translate their prose into film. Students are encouraged to bring material from any medium to analyze how it uses its medium to achieve its ambition through craft. An optional final assignment will be to “translate” a scene from your favorite—or least favorite—film (or painting, or anything) to prose, or vice versa.

CHARTING THE TRANSCENDENT MOMENT

Luciana Siracusano

Sat. 3:00pm–5:00pm

Dates: March 21st–April 29th

“I am someone who thinks and feels much more than is reasonable. And that is all.”
— Virginia Woolf

Certain moments in our lives reveal themselves as particularly poignant, present, or painful. These transcendent moments briefly pull back the curtain on the mundane world and draw us closer to the ecstatic nature of being. In this hybrid course (seminar and workshop), we will explore writing about life at its most intense, and examine what makes a moment sublime or sacred.

Each week we will consider a different emotional valence on the transcendent moment, such as madness, love, obsession, spiritual ascension, religious fervor, fear & paranoia, elation & rapture. We will engage with each week’s emotional state through the lens of a different short form, such as poems, monologues, and dialogue scenes, to focus on the range that can exist even in one brief form. Generative writing will give students an opportunity to explore their own moments of being. Students will

come away from the course with experience reading and writing in various genres, and, hopefully, with a better understanding of the transcendence in their own life.

Readings may include: the poems of Emily Dickinson, Keats, and Thomas Merton; short excerpts from Milton, Virginia Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston, Plato, and Dostoevsky; and musical passages of Beethoven and Mozart. No prior writing or musical experience necessary.