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**WORKSHOPS** (6 - 9 points)

**FICTION – OPEN (6 points)**

Sam Lipsyte  
*Mon., 12:05pm-3:05pm*

Julie Orringer  
*Mon., 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Mike Harvkey  
*Tue., 10am-1pm*

Victor LaValle  
*Year-long Novel Workshop*
(by application. 2nd years only.)  
*Tue., 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Heidi Julavits  
*Tue., 3:20pm-6:20pm*

Elissa Schappell  
*Wed., 12:05pm-3:05pm*

Eli Gottlieb  
*Wed., 1pm-4pm*

Deborah Eisenberg  
*Wed., 3:15pm-6:15pm*

Rivka Galchen  
*Wed., 3:15pm-6:15pm*

Joshua Furst  
*Wed., 3:45pm-6:45pm*

Alexandra Kleeman  
*Thu., 11am-2pm*

Nicholas Christopher  
*Thu., 2:10pm-5:10pm*

Ben Metcalf  
*Thu., 4:15pm-7:15pm*

James Canon  
*Fri., 1pm-4pm*

**POETRY – OPEN (6 points)**

Dorothea Lasky  
*Tue., 12:05pm-3:05pm*

Aracelis Girmay  
*Wed., 12:35pm-3:35pm*

Shane McCrae  
*Fri., 10am-1pm*

Mark Wunderlich  
*Fri., 1pm-4pm*

**POETRY – THESIS (9 points)*

Lucie Brock-Broido  
*Tue., 4:30pm-8:30pm*

Alan Gilbert  
*Tue., 4:30pm-8:30pm*

**NONFICTION – OPEN (6 points)**

Brenda Wineapple  
*Mon., 12:35pm-3:35pm*

Benjamin Taylor  
*Mon., 5:45pm-8:45pm*

Wendy S. Walters  
*Tue., 5:15pm-8:15pm*

Michael Greenberg  
*Wed., 3:15pm-6:15pm*

**NONFICTION – THESIS (9 points)*

Leslie Jamison  
*Mon., 10am-1pm*

Phillip Lopate  
*Mon., 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Lis Harris  
*Tue., 1:05pm-4:05pm*

Richard Locke  
*Tue., 2:10pm-5:10pm*

*Second-Years only
SEMINARS (3 points)

MONDAY

Monica Ferrell (CG)
Word and Image: Reading and Writing
Contemporary Poetry for Prose Writers
Mon., 10am-12pm

Natasha Wimmer (CG, TR)
Literary Translation Workshop
Mon., 10am-12:30pm

Wendy Xu (PO)
Toward Seeing: Writing into the Image
Mon., 3:40pm-5:40pm

Leslie Jamison (NF)
Regarding the Pain of Others
Mon., 4:10pm-6:10pm

Erroll McDonald (FI)
Introduction to the Bible as Literature
Mon., 4:10pm-6:10pm

Joshua Furst (FI)
The Sum of Its Parts: Short Story Collections
Mon., 6:15pm-8:15pm

TUESDAY

Lis Harris (NF)
Family Matters
Tue., 10am-12pm

Hari Kunzru (FI)
The Weight of the World
Tue., 10am-12pm

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts (NF)
Essay Films and Filmic Essays
Tue., 10am-12pm

Christine Schutt (CG)
In So Few Words: The Worlds of Flash Fiction
Tue., 10am-12pm

Deborah Eisenberg (FI)
Studies in Short Fiction
Tue., 12:05pm-2:05pm

Phillip Lopate (NF)
Studies in the Essay
Tue., 12:05pm-2:05pm

Gideon Lewis-Kraus (NF)
Reporting Non-News
Tue., 4:15pm-6:15pm

Mark Doten (FI)
Queer Form
Tue., 6:30pm-8:30pm

(FI) = Fiction
(NF) = Nonfiction
(PO) = Poetry
(CG) = Cross-Genre
(TR) = Translation
SEMINARS (cont’d.)

—WEDNESDAY—

Rivka Galchen (FI)
Mysteries
_Wed., 10am-12pm_

Lara Vapnyar (FI)
Building a Scene
_Wed., 10am-12pm_

Deborah Paredez (CG)
Witness, Record, Document:
Poetry and Testimony
_Wed., 10:10am-12pm_

Margo Jefferson (NF)
Cultural Memoir
_Wed., 10:30am-12:30pm_

Keri Bertino (CG)
Writer as Teacher
_Wed., 12:05pm-3:05pm_

Matvei Yankelevich (CG, TR)
Revolt of the Word: Anarchy and Innovation
in Modern & Contemporary Poetry
_Wed., 12:05pm-2:05pm_

Binnie Kirshenbaum (FI)
The Excruciating
_Wed., 1:10pm-3:10pm_

Susan Bernofsky (CG, TR)
Through a Glass Darkly: German Romantic
& Gothic Tales of Wonder and Horror
_Wed., 2:10pm-4pm_

Camille Rankine (PO)
The Poetry of Silence
_Wed., 4:05pm-6:05pm_

—THURSDAY—

Susan Bernofsky (CG, TR)
Literary Translation Workshop
_Thu., 11am-1:30pm_

Nicholas Christopher (CG)
Mosaics: Unified Collections of
Fiction & Poetry
_Thu., 11am-1pm_

Nalini Jones (FI)
Spontaneous Combustion: The Joys of
Writing Beyond Our Experience
_Thu., 12:05pm-2:05pm_

Elissa Schappell (CG)
The Literary Magazine
_Thu., 12:05pm-2:05pm_

Rebecca Godfrey (FI)
The Uses of Violence
_Thu., 2:10pm-4:10pm_

Monica Youn (PO)
Race, Identity, and Experimentation
_Thu., 2:10pm-4:10pm_

B.K. Fischer (CG)
Comma Sutra: Grammar, Syntax, and Praxis
_Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm_

James Lasdun (FI)
Style, Form, and Meaning
_Thu., 5:15pm-7:15pm_

Lynn Steger Strong (FI)
Plotlessness
_Thu., 6:20pm-8:20pm_

—FRIDAY—

Lee Siegel (FI)
The Novel of Ideas
_Fri., 1:05pm-3:05pm_
LECTURES (3 points)

——MONDAY——

David Gates
The Quick and the Dead  
*Mon., 4:25pm-6:25pm*

Alan Felsenthal
Engraving the Infinite  
*Mon., 6:40pm-8:40pm*

——THURSDAY——

Richard Locke
Twentieth-Century Literary Nonfiction  
*Thu., 2:10pm-4:10pm*

Shane McCrae
Toward a Theory of (Poetic) Style  
*Thu., 4:30pm-6:30pm*

——FRIDAY——

Christopher Sorrentino
The Unblinking “I”: An Incomplete Survey of the First Person  
*Fri., 10am-12pm*
MASTER CLASSES (1 – 1.5 points)

---TUESDAY---

Richard Howard
The Richard Howard Hours (1.5 points)
*Tuesday, 4:10pm-6:10pm*
* I. Sept. 5-Oct. 10*
* II. Oct. 17-Nov. 28 (no class Nov. 7)*

Susan Shapiro
How to Write and Publish a Personal Essay
(1 point)
*Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm*
*Oct. 3-Oct. 24*

Jesse Sheidlower
Defining the Dictionary (1 point)
*Tuesday, 6:30pm-8:30pm*
*Nov. 14-Dec. 5*

---WEDNESDAY---

Meghan Daum
What’s Problematic? Reading Fearlessly, Writing Dangerously (1 point)
*Wednesday, 10am-12pm*
*Nov. 15-Dec. 6*

John Keene
The Contemporary Novella in Translation (1 point)
*Wednesday, 10am-12pm*
*Oct. 18-Nov. 8*

Matthew Burgess
Serious Play: Teaching Imaginative Writing to Young People (1.5 points)
*Wednesday, 4:05pm-6:05pm*
*Sept. 27-Nov. 1*

---THURSDAY---

Ru Freeman
Other Voices, Other Ways (1.5 points)
*Thursday, 12:05pm-2:05pm*
*Sept. 14-Oct. 19*

Rachel Sherman
Portraying Adolescence in Contemporary Short Adult Fiction (1.5 points)
*Thursday, 10am-12pm*
*Oct. 26-Dec. 7 (no class Nov. 23)*

Jay Deshpande
As One Admits the Bayonet: The Poems of Denis Johnson (1.5 points)
*Thursday, 6:45pm-8:45pm*
*Sept. 28-Nov. 2*

---FRIDAY---

Greg Jackson
Prose and Cons: On the Challenges of Political Fiction (1.5 points)
*Friday, 10:30am-12:30pm*
*Oct. 6-Nov. 10*

Alex Abramovich
Writing Music (1.5 points)
*Friday, 1:05pm-3:05pm*
*Oct. 27-Dec. 8 (no class Nov. 24)*

Nicholas Delbanco
Travel Writing (1 point)
*Friday, 1:05pm-3:05pm*
*Nov. 10-Dec. 8 (no class Nov. 24)*

Joshua Bennett
Black Soundings in Contemporary Poetry (1.5 points)
*Friday, 3:10pm-5:10pm*
*Oct. 27-Dec. 8 (no class Nov. 24)*

Garnette Cadogan
The Way To See The World: Walking as Writing Teacher (1.5 points)
*Friday, 3:10pm-5:10pm*
*Oct. 6-Nov. 10*

---WEDNESDAY & FRIDAY---

Leonard Schwartz
Eco-Poetics: The Black of the Page (1 point)
*Wednesday, 10am-12pm, and Friday, 10am-12pm*
*Sept. 6-Sept. 15*
We’ve all been frightened by horror stories at some point in our lives, but how is this fear achieved? It’s all too easy for attempts to inspire fear to fall flat, resulting in anything from camp to farce. Truly frightening literature involves a feat of storytelling by which disbelief is so thoroughly suspended as to render the reader vulnerable to the most improbable fears. We are perhaps most nakedly human when confronted by what unsettles us. By carefully reading these classic works of (mostly) nineteenth century wonder and horror, we will study the ways in which these effects are achieved and the ways in which writing about the supernatural serves the writers’ political and psychological goals. Throughout the semester, we’ll also be talking about issues of translation when applicable. The course has three main goals: 1. to acquaint students with the general history of wonder/horror writing in the German Romantic and Gothic traditions; 2. to get students thinking about translation and the ways it impacts how we read; and 3. to inspire students to explore the use of the techniques employed in these works for use in their own writing.

Readings to be chosen from among the following:

- Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)
- Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794)
- Ludwig Tieck, *Blond Eckbert* (1796)
- Brothers Grimm, “Juniper Tree” and other fairy tales (1812)
- Adalbert von Chamisso, *Peter Schlemihl’s Miraculous Story* (1814)
- E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sandman* (1816) & Freud’s essay on “The Uncanny”
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)
- John William Polidori, *The Vampyre* (1819)
- Joseph von Eichendorff, *The Marble Statue* (1819)
- Edgar Allen Poe, “Fall of the House of Usher,” etc. (1839)
- Jeremias Gotthelf, *The Black Spider* (1842)
- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847)
- Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* (1872)
- Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886)
- Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)
- Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897)
- Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)
Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem* (1914)  
Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (1915)

This is an advanced-undergraduate seminar open to graduate MFA students and may be used to fulfill LTAC seminar coursework requirements.

Keri Bertino  
**The Writer as Teacher**  
(CROSS-GENRE)  
*Wed., 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.

Nicholas Christopher  
**Mosaics: Unified Collections of Fiction & Poetry**  
(CROSS-GENRE)  
*Thu., 11am-1pm*

We will examine assorted volumes of interconnected stories and book-length sequences of poems and prose-poems. The complex tension in such collections between the discrete, often eclectic, elements—whether stories or poems—and the unified whole make them a potent form that rivals the novel or long poem in imaginative resonance. By virtue of their verve and uniqueness, these books have influenced many others in their particular genres.

The reading list is international, and thematically varied:

- *A Universal History of Iniquity*—Jorge Luis Borges  
- *The Bloody Chamber*—Angela Carter  
- *Madwomen: The “Locas Mujeres” Poems*—Gabriela Mistral  
- *My Education: A Book of Dreams*—William S. Burroughs
Mark Doten

Queer Form

(FICTION)  

Tue., 6:30pm-8:30pm

What is queer about form? Can we speak of a queer form? How do we as fiction writers write queerly? In this class we will read queer lit and criticism in order to provide us with strategies for writing outside, or against, or just differently from what I’ll call for the moment simply that which is not queer. We will also think about the meaning of the word queer, which is by nature slippery and contested (Can a novel by a queer writer still be queer if it only involves straight characters? Can a straight writer write queer forms? And if we answer yes to these questions—and personally I think that the answer is yes—how does that work, and why, and under what circumstances?) Readings will include work by Aristotle, Michel Foucault, Herman Melville, Virginia Woolf, Judith Butler, Audre Lorde, Andre Gide, Heather Lewis, Dennis Cooper, Djuna Barnes, Edmund White, Octavia Butler, Tony Kushner, John Keene, Justin Torres, Eileen Myles, R. Zamora Linmark, Garth Greenwell, and Leo Bersani.
Deborah Eisenberg

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

There’s no better instrument than fiction to explore the complex relationships between an individual and his or her context, and we’ll be reading outstanding pieces of fiction whose characters are enmeshed, for the most part, in intense or unstable societal situations.

We’ll attempt first to talk about how the essence of each piece might be described, and, further, why the piece is more compelling or vital than another piece that could be described in a similar way. Then we’ll look closely at how the piece builds into something distinctly individual and excellent.

Readings will include two short novels but otherwise will consist of stories. I will expect students to have read each story a few times before the class in which it is to be discussed, so that we can all be intimately familiar with it before we talk about it.

Much of the reading is likely to be familiar to students—for example James Joyce’s “The Dead,” James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues,” and Franz Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony.” Detailed discussion is a priority and we’ll proceed—sometimes very—slowly, but I hope we’ll also be able look at stories by Gregor von Rezzori, Isaac Babel, Katherine Anne Porter, Felisberto Hernandez, Sergio Ramirez, Mavis Gallant, Varlan Shalamov, and/or others. The two short novels are by Ivan Turgenev and Dezso Kostolanyi. Short response papers will sometimes be required.

If you find a slow pace frustrating or if your objective is to read a great deal, this course would probably be a very poor fit for you.

Monica Ferrell

Word and Image: Reading and Writing Contemporary Poetry for Prose Writers
(CROSS-GENRE)  
Mon., 10am-12pm

Open to Fiction and Nonfiction students only. This is a workshop-format course in the reading and writing of poetry for students of fiction and creative nonfiction. With a focus on contemporary poetry, we will discuss various approaches to how to read a poem, and examine a range of aesthetics including modernism, formalism, confessional writing, the New York School, and hybridity. We will also discuss free and formal verse, the prose poem, and the lyric essay. Topics explored will include music and sound, word choice, imagery, line-break and stanza-break, repetition, syntax, silence and the unsaid, and poetic closure. We will attempt to write a new
poem each week, as we consider work by such authors as Wallace Stevens, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, John Ashbery, Claudia Rankine, Olena Kalytiak Davis, Shane McCrae, Cynthia Cruz, and Morgan Parker.

B. K. Fischer

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

*(CROSS-GENRE)*  
*Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm*

This course aims to convince the skeptic that even if Gertrude Stein was mistaken in saying “I really do not know that anything has ever been more exciting than diagramming sentences,” grammar is at least the second most fulfilling human pursuit. Fundamental to our exploration will be a study of grammatical terminology and laws as an anatomy lab for language—a method for exposing its inner workings, mechanisms, and connective tissues to understand more fully its capacities and effects. This technical scrutiny will give rise to discussion of a variety of topics relevant to creative practices in poetry and prose, including patterns of syntax, parataxis and hypotaxis, the subjunctive, deixis and subjectivity, voice, vernaculars, rhythm, pitch, and tempo. Our analysis of grammar will dovetail with theoretical perspectives beyond subject and predicate, drawing insights from ethics, feminist linguistics, gaze theory, racial politics and aesthetics, and media studies. We will dissect and revel in sentences by Cornelius Eady, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Marilynne Robinson, Emily Dickinson, Lydia Davis, 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 five pages. The course also includes editorial support for your own sentences—during class and in conferences—as well as ongoing “sentence labs” that will help you refine and develop the grammatical and syntactic strategies in your own work.

Joshua Furst

**The Sum of Its Parts: Short Story Collections**

*(FICTION)*  
*Mon., 6:15pm-8:15pm*

How can a collection of stories cohere into more than the sum of its parts? The best story collections are more than simply collections of stories.
Every writer who has dedicated any portion of his or her attention to writing short stories eventually arrives at a moment when he or she wonders, is this a book? Sometimes this question is answered by the simple fact that the writer has accumulated enough stories to justify lassoing them together. But the best story collections strive for something more than this. They build relationships and arcs of experience for the reader out of their seemingly randomly connected parts. They create a larger unity.

In this course, we will look at the variety of tactics writers have used to create unity in their story collections. We’ll study examples of collections built around place, milieu, character, conceit, idea, theme, and combinations of more than one of these aspects of fiction. We’ll explore the ways that aesthetic relationships develop from story to story within single collections and the ways that writers can sometimes use contrasting storytelling techniques to arrive at broad and sometimes surprising connections.

Students will write one short essay analyzing the aesthetic and formal components of a published collection of stories of their choosing. They will also explore, both in writing and classroom conversation, their ideas for unified collections of their own.

Readings include:

Sherwood Anderson – *Winesburg, Ohio*
Isaac Babel – *Red Cavalry*
Ernest Hemmingway – *In Our Time*
Bruno Schulz – *The Street of Crocodiles*
Mary McCarthy – *The Company She Keeps*
Italo Calvino – *Invisible Cities*
Shirley Hazzard – *People in Glass Houses*
Toni Cade Bambara – *Gorilla, My Love*
Grace Paley – *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*
James Alan McPherson – *Elbow Room*
Rohinton Mistry – *Swimming Lessons*
Lorrie Moore – *Self-Help*
Denis Johnson – *Jesus’ Son*
J.M. Coetzee – *Elizabeth Costello*
Jennifer Egan – *A Visit from the Goon Squad*
Rivka Galchen

**Mysteries**

(FICTION) 

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

In this course we will read with the intention of noticing how writers have borrowed, avoided, warped, translated, or disguised the structures of mystery. In this way, we will think about what techniques of mystery we might integrate into our own work.

Reading list to include works by: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Marcel Proust, Haruki Murakami, Penelope Fitzgerald, Edgar Allan Poe, Muriel Spark, Roberto Bolaño, James Baldwin, Vera Caspary and Kobo Abe.

Final Writing Assignment: a short mystery!

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Rebecca Godfrey

**The Uses of Violence**

(FICTION) 

_The seminar explores the use of violence in short stories and novels. We will examine how violence, be it emotional, political or physical, can serve to develop conflict and character in fiction. How does fictional violence serve to disrupt and unsettle not only the narrative, but the reader as well? To explore this, we'll read a range of works, beginning with Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and ending with two novels of our time, Ottessa Moshfegh's *Eileen* and Rachel Kushner's *The Flamethrowers*. We'll look at the use of emotional violence in stories by Ralph Ellison, Mavis Gallant, Jean Rhys, and Mary Gaitskill, and the formal innovations and evasions offered by noir and detective novels by Patricia Highsmith and Denis Johnson. Along the way, we'll meet assassins, prisoners, activists, and gangsters. How and why do these characters excite or repel us? How far can we push the characters in our own fiction, and how far should we? How can violence illuminate the larger political or societal forces that exist in specific moments of history? How does violence in fiction create an often unexpected, yet deeply significant, catharsis and consequence?_
Lis Harris

**Family Matters**

**(NONFICTION)**

*Tue., 10am-12pm*

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

**Week 1**
- First class

**Week 2**
- Jane Austen
- *Persuasion*

**Week 3**
- Mary McCarthy
- *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*

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

**Week 5**
- Philip Roth
- *Patrimony*

**Week 6**
- Colette
- *My Mother’s House; Sido* (excerpts)
- Vladimir Nabokov
- “Mademoiselle,” from *Speak, Memory*

**Week 7**
- William Maxwell
- *So Long, See You Tomorrow*

**Week 8**
- Tobias Wolff
- *This Boy’s Life*

**Week 9**
- ACADEMIC HOLIDAY

**Week 10**
- Eric Liu
- *The Accidental Asian* (excerpt)
- Dorothy Gallagher
- *How I Came Into My Inheritance* (excerpt)

**Week 11**
- Paula Fox
- *Borrowed Finery*

**Week 12**
- Per Petterson
- *Out Stealing Horses*

**Week 13**
- Michael Ondaatje
- *Running in the Family*

**Week 14**
- Adrian Nicole LeBlanc
- *Random Family*

Leslie Jamison

**Regarding the Pain of Others**

**(NONFICTION)**

*Mon., 4:10pm-6:10pm*

What does it mean to write about other people’s pain? Bearing witness to suffering is one of the most important things writing can do, and also one of the most perilous—a project attended by the dangers of reduction, exploitation, and voyeurism. Someone one asked me before a reading: “Do you ever feel guilty about the fact that your work
profits off the pain of other people?” This course has its origins in that question, and all the questions that attach to it. We will take Susan Sontag’s Regarding the Pain of Others as our starting point in examining the possibilities and perils of evoking, exploring, illuminating, and (inevitably) aestheticizing the lives of others. We’ll consider the ethical questions that attend the act of narrating vulnerability of all kinds—emotional, physical, political, socioeconomic—as these ethical questions intersect questions of craft: How can consciousness be evoked with complication and dignity? How can we represent pain without reducing anyone to victimhood? How can narrative perspective shift between individual and social scales? How do you link individual lives and broader political stakes, or relate subjective impressions to larger social critiques? What are the connections between anecdote and argument? How can reportage work alongside other modes—the lyric, the critical, the personal? What role can a first-person “I” play in writing about the lives of other people—when is it necessary and when does it intrude?

We’ll also engage with other forms of art—film, photography, sculpture, painting—in order to think more broadly about the possibilities of witnessing and representing pain. We’ll look at prose by James Agee, Nellie Bly, Rachel Kushner, James Baldwin, Denis Johnson, Matthew Power, Lucas Mann, and Eula Biss; and poetry by Claudia Rankine, Solmaz Sharif, CD Wright, and Mark Nowak. We’ll look at photography and photojournalism from Walker Evans, Jacob Riis, and Sebastiao Salgado (in conjunction with Wim Wender’s film The Salt of the Earth), art by Doris Salcedo and Kerry James Marshall, and films including Alma Har’el’s Bombay Beach, Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky’s Paradise Lost, and Chris Marker’s Sans Soleil.

Margo Jefferson

**Cultural Memoir**

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

This course will look at works that explore the spaces between what we call the personal and what we call the cultural and social. How do we examine ourselves through historical movements and art forms, through landscapes and artifacts, even through ephemera? How do we probe the relations between our private and public selves? The syllabus will include memoirs, essays, experimental criticism and even some fiction. Examples of the writers to be studied include Sei Shonogon, Charles Baudelaire, Osip Mandelstam, Marina Tsvetaeva, Roland Barthes, Clarice Lispector, Kamau Braithwaite, Rebecca Solnit, Aminatta Forna, Maggie Nelson, Fran Ross, and Yiyun Lin.
Nalini Jones

**Spontaneous Combustion: The Joys of Writing Beyond Our Experience**

(FICTION)  
*Thu., 12:05pm-2:05pm*

The seminar, which takes its name from a scene late in *Bleak House* where Charles Dickens brought his fascination with spontaneous combustion into his novel, will celebrate the expansiveness of fiction. We will read with a close look at stories and novels that don’t rely on autobiographical material for character, plot, or situation. Readings, from reimagined fairy tales to fiction set in a doomed Minoan village in 1,600 B.C., will open up conversations about originality, inventiveness, writerly preoccupations, history, research, narrative authority (by which the unexpected, fantastical, or outrageous becomes persuasive or plausible), and of course, character and point of view. Through exercises, students will have the chance to experiment with new fictional directions of their own. Readings will include works by Angela Carter, Maxine Hong Kingston, Penelope Fitzgerald, Jim Shepard, Caryl Phillips, and Peter Carey, among others.

Binnie Kirshenbaum

**The Excruciating**

(FICTION)  
*Wed., 1:10pm-3:10pm*

The worst is not  
so long as we can say, “This is the worst.”  
—King Lear, Shakespeare

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

In addition to looking at psychic pain as it bears on the text as a whole, we will examine just how unarticulated pain is achieved on the page. We will identify and deconstruct those moments in the text where the pain becomes unbearable, where it is denied, how it gets concealed and when and how it provokes laughter. There will
be short in-class and out-of-class exercises in which we will attempt to convey all sorts of anguish (devoid of melodrama) in our own writing.

Reading will include work (short stories and short novels along with the occasional essay and poem) by Anton Chekov, Sherwood Anderson, Mavis Gallant, Delmore Schwartz, Flannery O’Connor, Natalia Ginzberg, Richard Yates, Irene Nemirovsky, Alice Munro, Horacio Castellanos Moya, Muriel Spark, Clarice Lispector, Marina Tsvetaeva, Nathanael West, and Kazuo Ishiguro, among others. The selected reading will be determined solely by the degree of excruciation, and myriad examples of bleeding without evidence of blood.

In addition to the short assignments, students will be required to write one creative work influenced by the reading.

Hari Kunzru

**The Weight of the World**

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

How should a writer be? How should she deal with questions of power and politics? When is it best to shut out the world and listen to the ‘still small voice’? We’re used to thinking about narrative ‘conflict’ largely in personal terms. However, individual lives are molded by wider social and political forces. Fiction is one of the most sophisticated tools we have for understanding the relationship between individual lives and the collective experience, but how can a contemporary writer make work that’s alive to the world without getting bogged down in ‘issues’ or crudely pushing a point of view?

We’ll look at writing from around the world, mostly fiction, but with a few incursions into poetry, always with a view to how things are made and how effects are produced on the page. This will include work by such writers as Nanni Balestrini, Roberto Bolano, Don Delillo, Mahmoud Darwish, Jenny Erpenbeck, Julien Gracq, Peter Handke, Elfriede Jelinek, Ursula Le Guin, Javier Marias, Herta Muller, and M. Nourbse Philip.

James Lasdun

**Style, Form, and Meaning**

(FICTION)       
**Thu, 5:15pm-7:15pm**

What is the relationship between style, form, and meaning in a work of fiction? Without attempting a systematic inquiry, this seminar will look at some of the ways in which writers have approached these key aspects of story-telling. It will also look
at related questions of plot, voice, point of view, characterization, metaphor, and interiority. With one exception (Anna Karenin), the focus will be on close readings of short novels or novellas—classics as well as contemporaries—and among the authors we’ll be looking at will be at least some of the following (in no particular order): Henry James, Tolstoy, Jean Rhys, Patricia Highsmith, Joseph Conrad, Melville, Marquez, Kafka, Yukio Mishima, D.H. Lawrence, Teju Cole, Jenny Offil, Adelle Waldman, Ben Lerner, Rachel Cusk, Saul Bellow.

We’ll be reading these two books slowly, across the semester:

Tolstoy: Anna Karenin
Patricia Highsmith: The Talented Mr Ripley

We’ll also be reading (in no particular order) at least these books and possibly some others:

Philip K Dick: Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
Adelle Waldman: The Love Affairs of Nathaniel P
Jennifer Offill: Dept. of Speculation
Kafka: Metamorphosis
Cormac McCarthy: The Road

Gideon Lewis-Kraus

**Reporting Non-News**

**(NONFICTION)**

| Tue., 4:15pm-6:15pm |

This seminar looks at information-gathering for writers, with particular emphasis on non-news—that is, information that cannot reliably or interestingly be gathered inside one’s house, via email, or over the telephone. It examines attitudes about and practices of reporting in light of the assumption that what people say and do explicitly is not necessarily of greater relevance than how they said or did it, what they were wearing while they said or did it, what the weather was like on the day they said or did it, and how the listener happened to feel about what was said or done. The class will dwell on actual information-gathering skills—which approaches tend to yield greater or lesser quantities of the varieties of useful information—but will (for the most part) reject the following ideas: that reporting and writing are distinct enterprises; that reportorial skills are innate, or are trade secrets, or can be dismissed as ‘mere’ practical techniques of no use to the pure of heart; that reporting for memoir or first-person rumination or fiction is somehow different in kind from reporting more traditional magazine stories. Readings will in turn be drawn from journalism, sociology, fiction, and poetry, and may or may not include such writers as Howard Becker, Dianne Vaughan, Nicholson Baker, James Merrill, Elif
Phillip Lopate

**Studies in the Essay**

**(NONFICTION)**

*Tue., 12:05pm-2:05pm*

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

Erroll McDonald

**Introduction to the Bible as Literature**

**(FICTION)**

*Mon., 4:10pm-6:10pm*

This course aims to introduce the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament—the Holy Bible, if you will—not as normative revealed religious truth but as a prodigiously diverse yet arguably unified collection of literature, at once familiar and strange—which is to say that we will be approaching the Bible as we would Homer, Shakespeare or Tolstoy. By casting a critical gaze upon selected readings in the Torah (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*), Deuteronomistic history (*Samuel 1 & 2* and *Kings 1 & 2*), Proto-Apocalyptic Literature (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel*), Wisdom Literature (*Job, Psalms, Proverbs*, and *Ecclesiastes*), Apocalyptic Literature (*Daniel*) and the New Testament (the Synoptic Gospels, *John, Acts of the Apostles*, the Pauline Epistles and *Revelation*), a student will come to appreciate the awe-inspiring richness and complexity of biblical storytelling, informed as it is by a stunning multiplicity of genres, narrative procedures, and literary techniques.

For rising writers the relevance of, and rationale for, this course are simple. As the eminent critic George Steiner puts it: the Bible is “the most widely published, disseminated language-act on the face of the earth....It is the book which, not only in
Western humanity, defines the concept of a text. All our other books, however, different in matter or method, relate, be it indirectly, to this book of books. They relate to the facts of articulate address, text to reader, trust in lexical, grammatical and semantic means, which the Bible originates and deploys at a level and prodigality unsurpassed since. All other books, be they histories, narrations of the imaginary, codes of law, moral treatises, lyric poems, dramatic dialogues, theological-philosophic meditations are like sparks, often, to be sure, distant, tossed by an incessant breath from a central fire.”

Students will need to own and use *The New Jerusalem Bible* (not the Reader’s Edition, which lacks the notes) and the *King James Bible*. The course requirements are these: dedicated class participation and two 8-10 page papers on specific passages chosen in consultation with the instructor.

Deborah Paredez

**Witness, Record, Document: Poetry and Testimony**

(CROSS-GENRE)  
*Wed., 10:10am-12pm*

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

*This is an undergraduate seminar open to graduate MFA students.*
Camille Rankine

**The Poetry of Silence**

(POETRY)  
*Wed., 4:05pm-6:05pm*

“I think I am probably in love with silence, that other world. And that I write, in some way, to negotiate seriously with it.”

—Jorie Graham, “Some Notes on Silence”

In this class we will examine the various ways that poets negotiate silence: through whitespace, erasure, fragment, narrative, the unsaid. Through readings and discussion, we will investigate how silence can operate as an active, enriching presence in poetry, opening up a space of tension and electricity. Students will also explore their own relationship to silence in their work through writing exercises inspired by the various approaches to silence we discuss in class. Readings will include work by Anne Carson, Cynthia Cruz, Emily Dickinson, Kate Greenstreet, Philip Metres, Mary Ruefle, Sappho, Solmaz Sharif, Khadijah Queen, Monica Youn, and more.

Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts

**Essay Films and Filmic Essays**

(NONFICTION)  
*Tue., 10am-12pm*

This seminar will go to the movies in search of tools for our writing practice. We will study the essay film, tracing the arc of its challenge to the broader documentary tradition with particular interest in how certain works comprising this loosely defined “quasi-genre” can inform how we see, how we argue, and how we narrate. Screenings and readings will include Hans Richter, Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Marguerite Duras, the Black Audio Film Collective, Arthur Jafa, Hito Steyerl, and the Otolith Group, among others.

Elissa Schappell

**The Literary Magazine**

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

In this seminar we will be looking at the past, present, and future of literary magazines from the perspective of both the editor and the writer. We’ll examine the finest literary journals and editors of the past—those instrumental in creating the American literary landscape including the *Evergreen Review, The Paris Review* and
Grand Street—as well as the most influential literary magazines publishing today including Zoetrope, Ploughshares, and Noon.

Particular attention will be paid to studying the foundational elements that distinguish a magazine, from point of view, to physical layout and design, to the criteria for selecting work to the editorial process leading to publication. Class assignments will include: researching literary journals, editing exercises, curating artwork, and creating run sheets.

In order to simulate the experience of working at a literary magazine, students will be working in groups. And because the only magazines that endure are those with a clear vision, students will need to develop their own and produce a mission statement. By the end of the semester, students will have invented a literary magazine that reflects their unique sensibilities. Class will include special guests and a field trip. This class will be capped at 12 students.

Christine Schutt

**In So Few Words: The Worlds of Flash Fiction**

(CROSS-GENRE)  
*Tue., 10am-12pm*

Readings of short, short fiction and how it is made large enough to signify. What to seek and what to avoid in the writing of short, short fiction with consideration of many of its best practitioners: Jayne Anne Phillips, Barry Hannah, Amy Hempel, Etgar Keret, Muna Fadhlil, Diane Williams. Reading will include essays by Deb Olin Unferth, Stuart Dybek, Julio Ortega, and others on the form’s history and often asked questions: Is it poetry or prose and how to begin and find feeling and freedom in under a page? Class time will be given over to students’ short, short stories as well.

Lee Siegel

**The Novel of Ideas**

(FICTION)  
*Fri., 1:05pm-3:05pm*

“Words,” wrote James Joyce, “are a poor child’s arsenal.” Ideas are even greater weapons of personal freedom. An idea—a new addition to the available stock of reality—can empower the powerless and put the marginal on an intellectual par—at the very least—with the rest of society.

Ideas are also double-edged swords: abstractions that have no social traction, powerful reinterpretations of reality that remain buried in the mind, sometimes delusional mental constructions that isolate the person who conceives them. Ideas
have changed the course of history, restructured whole societies, and transformed the lives of people who constructed them. Dictators, snobs, and bullies hate ideas because these figures’ power is based on the preservation of a specific set of material conditions. The power of an idea is to shatter the status quo. Or to go nowhere at all. Or to enable an individual to endure an otherwise unendurable environment.

In this seminar we will study and discuss that strange, almost extinct product of the Enlightenment, the novel of ideas. Born in the 18th century, the novel of ideas expressed the dynamic new motion of the European middle class. Aristocratic birthright as unimpeachable entitlement was being replaced by romantic feeling and rigorous, original thinking. Emotions and thoughts became new forms of pedigree. Poets and painters could feel their way to social power. “Intellectuals”—a brand new social type—could think their way to personal and social freedom. The novel of ideas was the quintessential vehicle of this new mobility. In novels like Voltaire’s Candide and Diderot’s Jacques the Fatalist and Rameau’s Nephew, religion was challenged by rationality, questions of free will, good and evil, and the nature and role of the imagination were given strenuously playful—and comic—fictional treatment.

For the next two hundred years, as one social and political revolution followed another, and democracy (what is more democratic than an idea?) and capitalism (what is more ideally transactional than an idea’s conversions of reality?) converged and then collided, the novel of ideas flourished. The various isms of the 19th and 20th centuries may strike us as arid and bloodless now, but the novel of ideas embodied them in the passions of their time. The novel of ideas enacts history’s inner life. Starting with Voltaire and Diderot, we will follow the novel of ideas as it unfolds through time. Authors may include Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Conrad, Mann, Sartre, Camus, Beauvoir, Koestler, Elsa Morante, Ignazio Silone, Iris Murdoch, Doris Lessing, Saul Bellow, Jean Rhys, Naipaul, Mary McCarthy, and many more. We will study the various ways these authors dramatize ideas, make them come to life, wring tangible laughter out of mere abstraction (laughter may well be both the soil and the final resting place of an idea). We will talk about the fine line between fictional constructs and ideas—can a character be an idea and a character at the same time?; about the importance of theatrical techniques in the novel of ideas—dialogue is mother’s milk to the novel of ideas; and ponder the question of what distinguishes the novel of ideas from a novel that has ideas. If there is any difference at all.

We will begin with a piece of writing that is, in fact, not a work of fiction at all. The French philosopher Simone Weil wrote a famous essay called “The Iliad, or the Poem of Force,” in which she turns Homer’s epic into something like a modern novel of ideas. The experience of reading an intellectual build ideas out of an imaginative work might give us a window into the way fiction writers build imaginative works out of ideas.

One five-to-ten page paper is required. The paper may be a critical response to some of the works we have read, or it could be an example of the novel of ideas itself—either an excerpt from a future, or imaginary, novel, or a self-contained piece of creative writing in the style of the novel of ideas.
Lynn Steger Strong

**Plotlessness**

(FICTION)  
Thu., 6:20pm-8:20pm

What moves a book beyond what happens next? Plot, defined as the main events devised and presented by the writer as an interrelated sequence, often serves as the scaffolding of a novel. It keeps the reader reading, but it often isn't why we write. Major, clearly consequential concrete action often garners interest and creates mystery, but it often begins to look a lot less like life. Yet, many books that fail to deliver plot and action, major consequence, fall flat.

How do we look away from plot while maintaining intrigue and movement? How do we maintain veracity, and focus, while not being drowned out in stagnancy? What are books about?

In this class, we will look at books that defy the need for Big Important Concrete Action, books sometimes (condescendingly or not) called quiet and domestic, that somehow feel anything but. We will read a good portion of novels in translation and books not quite considered novels, or considered less-than upon their publications, in order to also discuss the ways in which these choices are cultured and gendered: who owns stories, and who defines them, why and how?

We will look at choices that destabilize the reader’s expectations both to engage and to subvert. We will look at the craft choices that stand in for plot but still create movement and structure: voice, contrasts, collisions, structure, tone, an unknown, unnamed dread. We will attempt to identify and explore these tools in order that we might exploit them, to dissect their uses, their strengths and failures, and to deploy them in our work.

The assignment for this class will be one 5-7 page short story in which “nothing happens”, except it does.

Readings include:

- *Good Morning Midnight,* Jean Rhys
- *Pond,* Claire Louise-Bennett
- *Party Going,* Henry Green
- *Kaddish for an Unborn Child,* Imre Kertész
- *The Passion According to GH,* Clarice Lispector
- *Transit,* Rachel Cusk
- *Speedboat,* Renata Adler
- *Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* Harriett Jacobs
- *The Unconsoled,* Kazuo Ishiguro
Lara Vapnyar

**Building a Scene**

(FICTION)  
Wed., 10am-12pm

Individual scenes are important building blocks of any prose narrative, yet the craft of designing a scene is often neglected by aspiring writers. In this class we will study all the aspects of designing a successful scene: setting, inner plot, inner structure, spotlight on the characters, POV, choreography of physical movement, dialogue. We will study how to write sex scenes, death scenes, party scenes, battle scenes, nature scenes. The readings will include Tolstoy, Ferrante, Baldwin, Bolano, Proulx, Munro, Waters, Wallace. (Gigantic novels like *War and Peace* or *Infinite Jest* will be assigned in excerpts.)

Wendy Xu

**Toward Seeing: Writing into the Image**

(POETRY)  
Mon., 3:40pm-5:40pm

Modern life inundates us with visual information—one might argue that our historical moment is characterized by unprecedented access to visual documents and their rapid-fire dissemination across platforms. This course will start at the very beginning of classical ekphrasis as a tradition (the dynamic and vivid description of a work of visual art) with a reading of Homer’s treatment of Achilles’ shield in *The Iliad*, before quickly lifting off into more experimental explorations of what poetry specifically engaged with sight can do. We will broaden our definition of ekphrastic writing to include, perhaps, writing acted upon by a particular *visual stimuli*, while acknowledging the extent to which current events and culture now comes to us in exactly this way—a crystallizing photo, a screenshot, a meme, a newspaper lead-image. With this fertile intersection in mind, how can writing into the images of our day help us understand them, ourselves, and our historical moment? We will focus on the close reading of collections of poetry (and some prose) that engage, in varying ways, the interplay between writer and image as well as produce critical reading responses with an emphasis on technique and effect. Alongside this reading will be opportunities for us to collect, examine, share, and respond creatively to the images of our “contemporary moment” through visually focused writing exercises, in-class activities, and the keeping of an image-journal throughout the semester. We will look at paintings, drawings, screenshots, photographic journalism, internet memes,
portraits, and many other forms of imagery. How can writing with a visually 
influenced eye be a generative force for us as culturally and politically engaged 
poets? How, and with what difficulty, can our own poetry engage the images of 
modern life beyond description—toward evaluation, dissent, subversion? Language 
will be our tool for inquiry, visual artifacts of the culture our subject. How is the 
excavation of ourselves a part of this process? By semester’s end, students will have 
completed a packet of new original writing informed by these and other inquiries.

Readings will include:

- *Boy With Thorn*, by Rickey Laurentiis
- *Voyage of the Sable Venus*, by Robin Coste Lewis
- *One Big Self*, by C.D. Wright
- *Cinema of the Present*, by Lisa Robertson
- *Empty Chairs*, by Liu Xia
- *Partisan of Things*, by Francis Ponge
- *Further Adventures in Monochrome*, by John Yau
- *The Rings of Saturn*, W.G. Sebald

With supplementary texts by Homer, Dante, John Keats, Alexander Von Humboldt, 
Robert Browning, W.H. Auden, Jennifer Tamayo, Henri Michaux, Rebecca Wolff, 
Morgan Parker, Kevin Young, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, and many others.

Matvei Yankelevich

**Revolt of the Word: Anarchy and Innovation in**

**Modern & Contemporary Poetry**

(CROSS-GENRE, TRANSLATION) Wed., 12:05pm-2:05pm

A few years before the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Futurist poet Aleksei 
Kruchenykh proposed that new content may only come about from new forms. 
Taking this proposition as a catalyst, this seminar sets out to trace the connections 
between formal innovation and radical politics of social change in 20th- and 21st-
century poetics. If, as the Russian Futurist poets proclaimed, “to be an artist, is to be 
an aggressor,” this seminar seeks to identify the manner, means, and motivations 
of poetry’s revolt.

Our path begins with Stéphane Mallarmé’s explosion of linear reading in “A Throw of 
the Dice” vis-a-vis the development of trans-sense language (zaum) and blurring of 
visual and textual elements in Russian Futurist books, such as Kruchenykh’s 
“Explodity,” a book conceived as a metaphorical bomb. We will explore how such 
early “verbi-voco-visual” experiments of the historical avant-garde position linguistic 
innovation alongside revolutionary or utopian programs of total political and social
change. After considering some avant-garde theories and theories of the avant-garde, as well as the challenges of translating formally innovative writing, we’ll turn to the explosion of international neo-avant-gardes after the Second World War to discern the disturbance of the status quo in movements such as Lettrism, Situationism, Fluxus, Concrete, and language-centric Conceptual art groupings from Brazil to Moscow. The second half of the course will be largely dedicated to the politics of language in post-colonial experimental writing (with special focus on the Caribbean, from Édouard Glissant to M. NourbeSe Philip) and African-American experimental traditions (from Black Arts to the Black Took Collective). Toward the end of the course we’ll touch upon the manifestation of leftist political agendas in US-based Language School poetry and the challenge to monolingualism and romantic notions of national identity posed by multilingual poetry and contemporary experiments in translation.

The writing requirements for this course will consist of an 8-12 page critical paper and a handful of short creative responses to the readings. Students will also be asked to undertake one public poetic action. Because this seminar is focused on innovative form and the expansion of writing’s traditional bounds, the “texts” we study will necessarily include audio and visual materials as well as performance and artists’ books in addition to traditional readings. Approximately half the reading assignments will be international writing in translation.

Monica Youn

**Race, Identity, and Experimentation**

(POETRY) Thu., 2:10pm-4:10pm

This seminar explores the linkage between racial identity and poetic innovation in work by contemporary poets of color. Practitioners and critics of self-designated experimental or avant-garde poetry in modern and contemporary America have often defined these practices as “impersonal,” “against expression” or “post-identity.” This approach has often tended to exclude or downplay poems that engage issues of racial identity. This course explores works in which poets of color have treated racial identity as a means to destabilize literary ideals of beauty, mastery and the autonomy of the poetic text while at the same time engaging in groundbreaking poetic practices that subvert externally or internally constructed conceptions of identity or authenticity. Text will include books of poems by Bhanu Kapil, Layli Long Soldier, John Yau, and Harryette Mullen as well as excerpts from critical texts. Each student will offer several in-class presentations that will focus on the interface between racial identity and literary craft techniques, as well as a five-page final paper.
LITERARY TRANSLATION WORKSHOPS

SECTION 1: Susan Bernofsky       Thu., 11am-1:30pm
SECTION 2: Natasha Wimmer        Mon., 10am-12:30pm

These workshops are open to students translating from all languages at all levels, from novice to experienced, and in all genres: fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. They are designed to give you or help you refine the tools necessary to be a good translator as well as a good reader of translated literary works, to improve your editing skills in English, and to demonstrate how the art and craft of literary translation can impact your own work as a writer.

Participants may come with a project already in mind, or may work with the instructor to select projects early on that will be workshopped over the course of the term. The focus will be on nuances of style and voice, linguistic play, and methods of representing and producing linguistic and literary innovation in English while remaining “true” to the original. We will have fascinating and heated discussions about what that means!

A good reading knowledge of a second language is desirable, but students with basic second-language skills who are interested in understanding the translation process and the impact it can have on their own writing are also encouraged to register (and to continue improving their second-language skills). Readings in translation theory and methodology will be assigned throughout the term based on the different languages students bring to class and on their previous readings.
Alan Felsenthal

Engraving the Infinite

Mon., 6:40pm-8:40pm

This salon will focus on sacred texts, transcendent poetry, and moral and spiritual impulses in writing. Each week, we will host a visitor who will present a subject related to the sacred and its attendant traditions. These visitors, experts in their fields, will include Farnoosh Fathi, Mary Gossy, Robert M. Place, Ariana Reines, Jerome Rothenberg, and other poets, translators, and scholars whose lives have been dedicated to questions of the soul, beyond the range of merely physical human existence and throughout the history of language. Some topics include: books of the dead, symbolism of the tarot, ethnopoetics, Christian mysticism, Sufi poetry, Kabbalistic verse, and many other efforts and pursuits. Weekly readings will be provided. The objective of this salon is to empty ourselves of preconceived ideas in order to be surprised and inspired by our guests; and then to allow that inspiration into the practice of writing.

David Gates

The Quick and the Dead

Mon., 4:25pm-6:25pm

After a play by Shakespeare, just to set the bar high, we’ll look closely at some major works of fiction from the early 19th century through the recent present. You may have read some or most of them before, but would you listen to your favorite song only once? Here’s the list:

- Shakespeare, The Tempest
- Diaz, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao
- Austen, Mansfield Park
- Morrison, Beloved
- Shelley, Frankenstein
- Beckett, Molloy
- Woolf, To the Lighthouse
- Stories by: Hawthorne, Melville, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Joyce, Mansfield, Kafka, Hemingway, Cheever, O’Connor, Barthelme, Carver
I’ve chosen them to represent a range of genres, from realism to sort-of-kind-of realism to fabulism to metafiction. And I’ve paired them thematically, for reasons that will become obvious if they aren’t already: *The Tempest* with Oscar Wao, *Mansfield Park* with *Beloved*, *Frankenstein* with *Molloy*. (*To the Lighthouse* will just have to stand on its own.)

To allow time for careful reading, we’ll talk about a novel every other week; on the weeks in between, we’ll discuss various short stories. And you’ll write a five-to-ten-page response to one or more of these works. You don’t need to consult critics or other secondary sources, unless you particularly want to. I’ll be more interested in what YOU think of some aspect of a given work, and what exactly in the text made you think it.

Please come to the first class having read *The Tempest*. I recommend the Signet Classic edition, since it’s affordable and has good notes—which you’ll need to decipher Shakespeare; at least I do—and supplementary material.

Richard Locke

**Twentieth-Century Literary Nonfiction**

*Thu., 2:10pm-4:10pm*

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

The reading will be drawn from:

- *The Edmund Wilson Reader*, ed. Lewis M. Dabney (DaCapo)
- *The Common Reader: First Series*, Virginia Woolf (Harcourt)
- *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf (Harcourt)
- *A Collection of Essays by George Orwell* (Harcourt)
- *Homage to Catalonia*, George Orwell (Harcourt)
- *Goodbye to Berlin*, Christopher Isherwood (New Directions)
- *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi (Simon and Schuster)
- *Speak, Memory*, Vladimir Nabokov (Vintage)
- *Essays of E.B. White* (Harper)
- *Up in the Old Hotel*, Joseph Mitchell (Vintage)
- *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live*, Joan Didion (Everyman)
- *The Woman Warrior*, Maxine Hong Kingston (Vintage)
Shane McCrae

**Toward a Theory of (Poetic) Style**

*Thu., 4:30pm-6:30pm*

Style is a closest neighbor to thinking. Style is so close a neighbor to thinking, in fact, that sometimes style seems almost impossible to think about. And yet style is of primary importance to poetry, and is one of the ways people have traditionally distinguished poetry from other literary arts. In this course, we will attempt to figure out what style is and does in poetry. We will ask ourselves what it means to have a readily identifiable poetic style. We will explore the possibility that style is the only remaining avenue for significant poetic innovation. And we will read and discuss poets like Aase Berg, and Victoria Chang, and Hart Crane, and Adam Fitzgerald, and Louise Glück, and Jorie Graham, and Geoffrey Hill, and Cathy Park Hong, and Karin Lesing, and Robert Lowell, and Marianne Moore, and Carl Phillips, and Derek Walcott, and honestly kind of everybody. What was it Oscar Wilde said? Oh, yeah: “In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing.” In no literary art is that more true than in poetry. Discussion topics will include, among others: “American Baroque: Hart Crane’s *White Buildings*, Adam Fitzgerald’s *The Late Parade*, and Others”; “Masterhood and Resisting Masterhood: What Louise Glück’s *Faithful and Virtuous Night*, Jorie Graham’s *Fast*, and Derek Walcott’s *White Egrets* Tell Us About Late Styles”; and “The Mind’s Body: Marianne Moore and the Impossibility of Successfully Copying Another Poet’s Style.” Two brief essays—one at midterm, and one at the end of the semester, each about five pages long—will be assigned.

Christopher Sorrentino

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

*Fri., 10am-12pm*

The first person: it can appear honest, straightforward, and guileless, an appearance that 18th-century novelists and 21st-century memoirists alike have exploited in using it to sustain an illusion of authenticity and to lend “truthiness” to their work. But authors and their narrators are devious creatures, as we shall see. This course explores the various uses of first person narration as it has evolved over the last few centuries. Our texts—including work by Akutagawa, Baldwin, Beckett, Bernhard, Bolaño, E. Brontë, Chandler, Everett, Faulkner, Ford, Gornick, James, Lispector, Machado de Assis, Slater, Svevo, Swift, and others—will reveal a voice well-adapted to a variety of purposes: to narrow the reader’s view into the world of the narrative, to mislead the reader, to gain access to the protagonist’s state of mind, to contrast the versions of events related by several different narrators, to bear witness to the
adventures of other characters, to allow the author to disrupt his/her own narratives, and sometimes all of these things at once and more.

A brief end-of-term paper is required.
MASTER CLASSES

Alex Abramovich

Writing Music

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Oct. 27-Dec. 8       Fri., 1:05pm-3:05pm
(no class Nov. 24)

Was it Laurie Andersen who said: “Talking about music is like dancing about architecture?” Was it Thelonious Monk? Elvis Costello? None of the above? It’s a nicely turned phrase, but folks do seem to keep talking and, especially, writing about music. Critics, of course. But also poets, novelists, essayists, and musicians themselves. In this class, we’ll read a wide range of works—by James Baldwin, Willa Cather, Don DeLillo, Joan Didion, Frederick Douglass, Geoff Dyer, Ralph Ellison, Jenny Offill, and Michael Ondaatje, among many others—discuss techniques and strategies, and take a hand-on approach to our own listening and writing.

Joshua Bennett

Black Soundings in Contemporary Poetry

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Oct. 27-Dec. 8       Fri., 3:10pm-5:10pm
(no class Nov. 24)

"I tried to write poems like the songs they sang on Seventh Street..."
—Langston Hughes

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 towards 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.

Matthew Burgess

**Serious Play: Teaching Imaginative Writing to Young People**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Sept. 27-Nov. 1

Wed., 4:05pm-6:05pm

This master class is designed for writers of all genres who are interested in sharing their love of writing with young people. Children understand that writing is a magical power, and they take pleasure in learning how to do it. But by the time they turn up in high school or college-level composition classes, many have decided that writing is a painful, if necessary chore. One of the aims of the writer-teacher is to reverse this trend by creating classroom environments in which students (re)discover the creative, expressive, and intellectual potential of language. The point is not to follow rules, avoid mistakes, and fill pages with sentences that hold little or no personal meaning. On the contrary, writing is an act of the mind and the imagination, and it can draw us out of ourselves in ways that are surprising, challenging, even fun. In addition to exploring pedagogical theories, we will examine concrete strategies for designing and leading imaginative writing workshops with students. Play is a central theme, one we will regard as a “serious” pedagogical tool and guiding principal, and class meetings will involve frequent low-stakes, in-class writing experiments. Readings will include works by Kenneth Koch, Bernadette Mayer, Paulo Freire, Joe Brainard, Corita Kent, Pablo Neruda, Lucille Clifton, Frank O’Hara, Grace Paley, Dorothea Lasky, and others. One of the goals for this six-week course is that all participants will feel equipped—and excited—to adapt what they’ve learned and apply it in a variety of educational contexts.

Garnette Cadogan

**The Way To See The World: Walking as Writing Teacher**

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Oct. 6-Nov. 10

Fri., 3:10pm-5:10pm

“Footsteps are our first prints,” writes sharp-eyed wanderer Robert Macfarlane, “and every walk is a step away from a story.” Walking is signature, and step by step, as our feet inscribe places onto our imaginations and map our imaginations onto places, we
tell stories and enter new ones—or, alas, get shut out of them. No wonder, then, that there is a long tradition of walkers who see the pen as an extension of the feet. Humans are paths-seeking, tracks-leaving beings, forever exploring or shutting down possibilities. We walk to escape, to encounter, to arrive, and ultimately to rest. So, in this class, we’ll meander onto the routes traveled by writers who explore possibilities through legs and language.

We’ll saunter up to Virginia Woolf, Dr. Seuss, Henry David Thoreau, Edward Thomas, Sherwood Anderson, Zora Neale Hurston, W. H. Auden, Wislawa Szymborska, Vivian Gornick, Richard Wilbur, James Baldwin, Rebecca Solnit, Seamus Heaney, Claudia Rankine, Annie Dillard, Teju Cole, Robert Macfarlane, Suketu Mehta, Raja Shehadeh, and John Edgar Wideman. And we’ll welcome to our conversations other storytellers—Werner Herzog, Barry Jenkins, Richard Linklater, Richard Pryor, Dave Chappelle, Jessica Williams, Lana Del Ray, Gil Scott Heron, Sally Mann, Carolyn Drake, Ruddy Roye, Teju Cole (as photographer), Jill Freedman, Jane Jacobs, Sam Messer, Aaron Landsman, Aaron Douglas.

“Walking shares with making and working that crucial element of engagement of the body and the mind with the world, of knowing the world through the body and the body through the world.” Rebecca Solnit’s observation will direct our discussions and assignments—a series of essays, rooted in the experience of walking (and its accompanying obstacles)—as we explore the relationship of walking to writing and try to do both with senses more alive to the wonder of the world.

Meghan Daum

**What’s Problematic? Reading Fearlessly, Writing Dangerously**

4 sessions (1 point) / Nov. 15-Dec. 6  
*Wed., 10am-12pm*

These days, there’s little in the way of public expression that hasn’t been deemed “problematic,” in some sense, by someone. But anything that is interesting and thought-provoking is also going to push buttons, challenge assumptions and even cause occasional discomfort, particularly around issues pertaining to race, gender, sexuality, and social politics. In this four-week master class, students will test the boundaries of their own writing by reading a variety of 20th- and 21st-century nonfiction texts that represent careful thought on the part of their authors yet might stir debate or even distress among some contemporary audiences. Authors will include Hilton Als, Mary Gaitskill, Christopher Hitchens, David Rakoff, and Sallie Tisdale, among others.
Travel Writing

4 sessions (1 point) / Nov. 10-Dec. 8  Fri., 1:05pm-3:05pm
(no class Nov. 24)

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 four-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, 2016*, edited by Bill Bryson. 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.

Jay Deshpande

“As One Admits the Bayonet”: The Poems of Denis Johnson

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Sept. 28-Nov. 2  Thu., 6:45pm-8:45pm

Before the landmark short-story collection *Jesus’ Son* and novels such *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* and *Tree of Smoke*, Denis Johnson was known primarily as a poet—and one whose fresh, distinctive voice established a rich undercurrent in American poetry. A master stylist, Johnson’s poetic signature echoes through much of his fiction and nonfiction. In the wake of his death this spring, it is especially valuable for both poets and prose writers alike to study Johnson’s poetry, both as a seed and sounding ground for other works and as an oeuvre unto itself. We’ll read through his four books of poetry—*The Man Among the Seals* (1969), *Inner Weather* (1976), *The Incognito Lounge* (1982), and *The Veil* (1985)—with a focus on specific nodes (the prophetic, lyric rupture, confession/recrimination, and above all, the uses of the
sonnet) in order to better appreciate Johnson's achievements and to illuminate our reading of the contemporary lyric.

Ru Freeman

Other Voices, Other Ways

6 sessions (1.5 points) / Sept. 14-Oct. 19  Thu., 12:05pm-2:05pm

Writers do not simply tell a story, they often write to fill a void they see in literature; a lack of representation, or a mis-representation of a culture or a community, particularly with regard to race and class. In doing so they don’t merely impart the missing narrative, they often also challenge mainstream notions of how a story may be told. The use of the vernacular, orality, telling over showing, long exposition, epistolatory writing, mixing genres, are all used to convey the complexity of experiences that don’t fit into neat narratives. We will read selections from a range of writers whose work addresses issues around the politics of race and class, first at the global level, and then within the United States, with two specific goals in mind. First, to interrogate our own preconceptions about what makes for good fiction, and secondly, to expand the possibilities of our own work with regard to both substance and form.

This is a class that is divided into two parts—part one in the fall and part two in the spring. Students may opt to take one or the other, or both.

The Fall Master Class

Let’s ask ourselves some questions: Do certain political events break people into their composite parts and dismantle their ability to be whole? If the impetus for flight is the same everywhere, how do we define immigration as being illegal? Are borders ever not permeable? Do we reconcile ourselves to the bad that has happened because the worse that could be or was can be left behind? What is the worth of labor? Can love be expressed by refusing to use what is known in favor of acquiring a rudimentary knowledge of the unfamiliar? The writers we will visit in this class pose these questions and demand that readers unlearn what they know, that they engage in the delightful work of translation (particularly of context), in order to find the answers.

Texts:

Javier Marias (Thus Bad Begins)
Laila Lalami (Hope & Other Dangerous Pursuits)
Goncalo M Tavares (Jerusalem)
Salman Rushdie (East/West)
Mohsin Hamid (*Exit West*)
Deepak Unnikrishnan (*Temporary People*)
Lesley Arimah (*The Man Who Fell From the Sky*)
Jhumpa Lahiri (*In Other Words*)

Students will write a single 2-3 page piece that is an extension of one of the assigned readings. For example, this could take the form of a sequel to a story that has been read, a response to it from the perspective of a minor character, or an adaptation of a theme to a context with which the student is familiar.

The spring master class will focus on literature from the United States, using a similar lens.

**Richard Howard**

**The Richard Howard Hours**

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<th>6 sessions (1.5 points)</th>
<th>I. Sept. 5-Oct. 10</th>
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<td>II. Oct. 17-Nov. 28</td>
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This master class will be conducted as two six-week sections that can be enrolled in individually for 1.5 credits or consecutively for 3 credits. Each section will focus on readings from mid-19th to 20th-century American and Anglo-American poets including Dickinson, Eliot, Auden, Moore, and Bishop up through more contemporary writers including Clampitt and Strand. Each student will, in addition to the readings and class discussions, undertake with Prof. Howard individualized one-on-one tutorials centered on their own poems. The course is limited to six students per section. Students are welcome to sign up for either of the sections, or for both, if there are seats available.

**Greg Jackson**

**Prose and Cons: On the Challenges of Political Fiction**

| 6 sessions (1.5 points) | Oct. 6-Nov. 10 | Fri., 10:30am-12:30pm |

This class looks at stories, essays, and novel excerpts from the last few decades that take up political themes. Over six weeks we will read a variety of authors, who develop formal and narrative strategies to explore political questions without falling prey to tendentiousness, preaching, tedium, or any of the other pitfalls that dog political art. In so doing we'll ask what political fiction is, and what differentiates it from other sorts of literature; what role politics plays in the work and sensibility of writers, and what role literature plays in the life of politics; how irony and
contingency advance the goals political authors set for themselves; and what other common strategies define such authors’ work. From a craft perspective we will explore how to write about ideas, beliefs, and ideology, and how to engage with the urgency of the cultural moment, without being tiresome or seeming to advance a strictly personal point of view.

The class will include readings by Grace Paley, James Baldwin, Saul Bellow, Roberto Bolaño, Deborah Eisenberg, George Saunders, Don DeLillo, and others.

John Keene

**The Contemporary Novella in Translation**

4 sessions (1 point) / Oct. 18-Nov. 8

Wed., 10am-12pm

Some of the most noteworthy and influential prose fictional works of the last several centuries have been novellas, but even a reader familiar with fiction as a genre might ask: what exactly is a novella? Moreover, are they still being written today? This master class will explore this literary form that is often described as falling primarily in terms of page length or word count between the short story and the novel. One aim of the class will be to understand how novellas differ from shorter and longer forms, and how literary fundamentals such as characterization, temporality, scope, plot, and perspective are crucial to identifying and understanding how novellas operate and succeed as literary works in themselves.

The course will look at four different and distinctive novellas from the Hispanophone (Bolaño), Francophone (Nothomb, Waberi), and Japanese (Ogawa) literary traditions, and discuss why this form remains a vital option for contemporary writers. In exploring these specific authors, the course will also touch upon other authors across the globe writing novellas, and translators’ key role in making these works available to English-language readers. Other components of the course will include complementary readings about the novella’s difficult place in contemporary American literature, with discussions about the challenges writers in the U.S. face when they write and aim to publish novella-length texts.

Assignments will involve short writing exercises prompted by the readings, and will include all participants submitting potential ideas for novellas they would like to write by the end of the course.

Required Texts:

- Amélie Nothomb, *Loving Sabotage* (New Directions, 2000)
- Abdourahman A. Waberi, *Passage of Tears* (Seagull, 2012)
Leonard Schwartz

Eco-Poetics: The Black of the Page

4 sessions (1 point) / Sept. 6-Sept. 15  Wed., 10am-12pm & Fri., 10am-12pm

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

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

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

Susan Shapiro

How to Write and Publish a Personal Essay

4 sessions (1 point) / Oct. 3-Oct. 24  Tue., 6:30pm-8:30pm

Three pages can lead to a first major byline and internet fame, or launch a book and career, changing your life. But how do you know what to write about, where to aim it,
how much to “show” versus “tell,” what to edit out and where submit it to, and to which editor? This practical four-week master class, taught by a seasoned professor who has published thousands of essays and four acclaimed memoirs, will answer all these questions. The goal is to have a great essay and cover letter ready to submit by the last class.

Jesse Sheidlower

**Defining the Dictionary**

*4 sessions (1 point) / Nov. 14-Dec. 5  Tue, 6:30pm-8:30pm*

While people know that you use “the dictionary” to find out what words mean, rather few know how dictionaries make their decisions. Indeed, the very idea of “the dictionary”—as if there is a single one, which perfectly reflects the reality of language—exemplifies this problem.

In this class, we will explore the history of English dictionaries, from the short glossaries of the early seventeenth century, through Samuel Johnson’s magisterial 1755 work, which established the idea of literary excellence as the main criterion of language use, to the Oxford English Dictionary’s scholarly and historical approach, to current dictionaries, which use computational analyses of hundreds of billions of words to determine how the language is actually used.

We will also explore how and why the meanings of words change over time, and how dictionaries monitor these changes: why do some words become obsolete, while others suddenly become popular? How are decisions made about the treatment of “problematic” words, e.g. obscenity or racial terms?

While actual jobs in lexicography are now few and far between, the skills required to analyze the evidence of real language are beneficial for all writers. We will engage in various practical exercises for studying the meaning of words—comparing definitions in existing dictionaries, writing our own definitions for new words, using basic computational techniques to inform our suspicions about language use. In the end we will not only have a better idea of how we ourselves understand the language, but also how to make our own intended meanings clear to different audiences.
What makes fiction about adolescents continually attract adult readers? Why are the most emotionally and psychologically volatile years of our lives so inspiring? What is it about adolescence that makes for such good prose, and why is the built-in narrative of puberty itself one that is so inspiring, used to express both change and disillusion in short fiction?

In this class, we will look at the parent/adolescent relationship, adolescent relationships with their peers, and the journey taken through adolescence itself in contemporary literature. We will attempt to find patterns in short stories to explore the similarities and differences in various takes on the subject, and come to conclusions about the authors’ intentions and subsequent output through analysis of the literature and writing exercises.

We will look at a number of short stories by authors including Anne Enright, Stuart Dybek and ZZ Packer. This class will require writing short fiction assignments.