

# CA/T Community Classes (CCC)

Creative Writing | Columbia University



Hal Chase, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs  
Columbia College, 1944-45

**COURSEBOOK**  
Spring 2019

# INFORMATION

CA/T Community Classes are **free, noncredit** creative writing seminars and workshops in fiction, poetry, nonfiction and cross-genre. Taught by MFA Writing Program students in 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.

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

Classes meet once weekly for four to six weeks.

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## HOW TO REGISTER:

You may register for up to two (2) CCC Creative Writing courses a semester.

To choose your classes, please visit: [Spring 2019 Registration Form](#).

If you have any further questions, please email CCC coordinator, Nadia Cristina Ismail, at: [writingcats@gmail.com](mailto:writingcats@gmail.com)

# COURSE LIST

## FICTION

**CRAFTING CHARACTER | Dawn Elardo**

Fri. 4:30-6:30pm

**AND THEN THERE WAS A DEAD BODY: THE CASE OF *NOIR* | Alex Dabertin**

Fri. 2:30-4:30pm

**WORLDBUILDING 101 | Colin Johnson**

Sun. 12-2pm

**THE FICTIONAL PHARMACY | Joe Milton**

Fri. 4:45pm-6:45pm

## POETRY

**FINDING INSPIRATION ANYWHERE | Emma Ginader**

Sun. 2-4pm

## CROSS-GENRE

**THE ART OF EKPHRASIS | Emma O' Leary**

Tues. 6:30-8:30pm

**INTRO TO THE LYRIC ESSAY | Bailey Elizabeth Heille**

Thurs. 6-8pm

**THE HEART OF AMERICA: WRITING THE MIDWEST | Sonia Christensen**

Mon. 6:30-8:30pm

**HOW TO CRAFT A KILLER ENDING | Dan Ryan**

Wed. 7-9pm

**INTRO TO DIGITAL FICTIONS: WRITING FOR SCREENS | Pia Struzzieri**

Sun. 12-2pm

## FICTION

### CRAFTING CHARACTER

Dawn Elardo

**Fri. 4:30-6:30pm**

**Dates: Mar 29 - May 3**

**Dodge 407**

As aspiring writers, one of our central goals is to develop three-dimensional characters for our stories. Through complex ways, we strive to make our characters believable, original, and recognizable to our readers. Establishing a character's POV can be tough for a writer at any level. In this class, through challenging yet fun work-play-sessions, students will have the opportunity to create dossiers filled with images, music, and other forms of art that may inspire your characterization, along with a collection of in-depth interviews of your characters.

Students will do in-class prompts as well as optional-take-home assignments to share with the class as part of our discussions. We will examine short excerpts of characterization from the works of Jennifer Egan, Jonathan Franzen, Clarice Lispector, Michael Cunningham, Elfriede Jelinek, Roberto Bolaño, Zadie Smith, and Don DeLillo, among others.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "A person's character is their fate." By the end of this course, your characters will be crafted well enough to free your imagination to the next level of story-building: finding your character's destiny. All excerpts will be distributed by the instructor. Students will not be required to purchase any additional reading materials.

## **AND THEN THERE WAS A DEAD BODY: THE CASE OF *NOIR***

**Alex Dabertin**

**Fri. 2:30-4:30pm**

**Dates: Mar 29 - May 3**

**Dodge 403**

In order to better understand plotting and how stories create meaning, we will lay *Noir* Crime Fiction out on the autopsy table and see how it ticks. Then we'll take what we like to create our own crime stories. The mess that's left is the mortician's problem.

We will work chronologically through some of crime's most illustrious author's tales of depravity beginning with *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, running through *The Big Sleep* then on to *Gone Girl*. Each class we will break down the narrative structure and a bit of the style of a famous crime novel then devise our own trial plots, which we will discuss.

We will look at such crime story structures as "Revenge is Complicated," "The MacGuffin," "Two Crimes are One," "The Serial Killer," "The Paperwork Plot," and "Identity as Crime."

By the end of the course, students will have a few story ideas with which they can work. But more importantly, students will have a new understanding of how to identify a tradition's rules and how to take on and change those rules, so their own writing, whether Crime Fiction or not, can be both easier and more productive.

Plots and in-class excerpts will also come from Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, Dorothy B. Hughes' *In a Lonely Place*, Vera Caspary's *Laura*, and James Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia*.

## **WORLDBUILDING 101**

**Colin Johnson**

**Sun. 12-2pm**

**Dates: Mar 31 - April 28**

**Dodge 409**

A Handmaid's Tale has Gilead; Harry Potter has Hogwarts; To Kill a Mockingbird has Maycomb, Alabama. Every story has a world that surrounds it. And not just a setting, or a physical place, but the expectations of a broader context. No story exists in a vacuum; some exist in their own secondary worlds, while others find their space in our lived reality. Though this course will primarily explore the secondary worlds of speculative fiction, we will also consider how we might build, or rebuild, the world we actually live in.

And yet, how do stories' worlds accomplish these feats? How do they suspend disbelief? How do they help inform their story's other creative choices and goals? When might they impede those same goals? How do other story elements outside of Setting—such as Character, Plot, and Tone—get addressed in the worldbuilding process?

In the course of addressing those questions, some of the authors whose work we will look at include Margaret Atwood, Ursula K. Le Guin, Terry Pratchett, Deborah Chester, Victor LaValle, Malcolm X and Alex Haley.

## **THE FICTIONAL PHARMACY**

**Joe Milton**

**Fri. 4:45-6:45pm**

**Dates: Mar 29 - Apr 26**

**Dodge 403**

This course will explore the world of fake pharmaceutical drugs in contemporary fiction. Approaching the subject as readers and writers, we will consider the effects and implications of invented prescription medications in a range of illustrative models. Each class will begin with an excerpt from a short story or novel which we will approach via close reading and discussion. We will then turn to our work as writers with exercises and projects geared towards inventing our own medications and developing stories where the new prescription drug is taken or administered.

The writers (and their fictional pharmaceuticals) we will look at include: Don DeLillo (Dylar), Deborah Eisenberg (Vernix), George Saunders (Verbaluce, KnightLyfe), Ottessa Moshfegh (Infermiteral), Ben Marcus (Rally).

## POETRY

### FINDING INSPIRATION ANYWHERE

Emma Ginader

Sun 2-4pm

Dates: Mar 31 - May 5

Dodge 407

A sonnet about a star field, an epistolary to Bessie Smith, an epic inspired by the music of punk rock group The Priests, a free verse built around da Vinci's *Lady with an Ermine*. In the six-week class "Finding Inspiration Anywhere," anyone can learn to use visual art, music & dance, film, history, science and other disciplines as a spark for a poem.

A writing generative course, "Finding Inspiration Anywhere" will focus on a different source discipline each week.

Through reading one or two poems at the beginning of class, we will explore how others have translated these fields into poetic form. Students will then write their own poems inspired by objects, prints, clips, and other media during the second half of class.

Readings include work by Jane Hirshfield, Tracy K. Smith, Natalie Diaz, William Carlos Williams, Sally Wen Mao, and other acclaimed poets.

## CROSS-GENRE

### THE ART OF EKPHRASIS

Emma O' Leary

**Tues. 6:30-8:30pm**

**Dates: Mar. 26 - April 16**

**Dodge 411**

Horace, in his *Epistles*, writes, “poetry is like a painting.” Indeed, artists often liken poetry — and prose — to visual art. In this course, we will examine this connection through ekphrasis.

We will consider ekphrasis as a detailed description and/or story wrought from art: ultimately, art will inspire us to write. We will interpret and confront visual art ranging from Georgia O’Keeffe’s desert landscapes, to René Magritte’s oblique floating men, to Marc Chagall’s stained class, and others. We will read short ekphrastic excerpts from John Keats, Homer, and more.

Students will have the opportunity to create their own ekphrastic pieces for optional workshop discussion. Students will be encouraged to use various artistic media for inspiration — moreover, students just might find that the beauty and vividness of their own prose rivals the artwork that inspired it.

### INTRO TO THE LYRIC ESSAY

Bailey Heille

**Thurs. 6-8pm**

**Dates: Mar. 28 - April 25**

**Dodge 403**

What is a lyric essay? What does a lyric essay do? How is it constructed?

“The lyric essay has been characterized by fragmentation and interruption; it often blends, braids, or synthesizes narrative elements from various genres: myth, history, science, personal essay, lyric poetry.” - Marcela Sulak

In this 5-week class, we'll read a variety of pieces that fall into this category, looking at how the authors take risks that stretch our understanding of the essay, examining common categories of lyric essays, such as the prose poem, the braided essay, the collage essay, and the "Hermit Crab" essay. In-class writing exercises will help students create their own lyric essays with an opportunity to workshop them on the last week. We'll explore essential tools to gain confidence with this form, such as how to construct images with sensory details; how to weave in excerpts or quotes from historical texts, song lyrics, diary entries, or newspaper headlines; how to subvert prescribed forms; and how to experiment with structure and narrative.

In-class readings may include work by Eula Biss, John D'Agata, Jenny Boully, Anne Carson, Maggie Nelson and more.

## **THE HEART OF AMERICA: WRITING THE MIDWEST**

**Sonia Christensen**

**Mon. 6:30-8:30pm**

**Dates: Mar 25 - April 22**

**Dodge 409**

What do you think of when you think of the American Midwest? What are the stories you would expect to hear? For a lot of us, the Midwest means corn fields, it means boring. But is boring all there is? This course is designed for students to explore questions of setting, place and culture through weekly discussions on short fiction, nonfiction and poetry readings set in the Midwest and through in class exercises. Our aim is to discuss ways to embed place into our characters and stories through exploration of the Midwest, to discuss how setting can have as much a part to play in fiction as any other element.

Though we will be focusing on just one region of The United States, we will be discussing how to evoke place in general and how to write about the places that shape and fascinate us. The writers we will look at may include Louise Erdrich, Tom Drury, Sherwood Anderson, Bonnie Jo Campbell, Stuart Dybek, Toni Morrison, Truman Capote, Carl Sandburg and Marilynne Robinson.

## HOW TO CRAFT A KILLER ENDING

Dan Ryan

Wed. 7-9pm

Dates: Mar 27 - Apr 24

Dodge 409

We've all done it — read that final sentence, closed the book, turned to our partner in bed (or friend in class, or a complete stranger on the subway) and moaned, “*Dear God, you HAVE to read this!*” What is it about great endings? Why do they haunt us for weeks afterwards? Conversely, why does a solid story with a weak ending fade from memory? And why, in our own writing, is it often hard to know when, where or how to end a story?

Endings are the summation of our relationship with a piece. We'll look at how structure, POV, tension, character detail, and theme work together to generate and deliver powerful endings in poems, essays and stories. We'll pay close attention to how such endings are simultaneously inevitable, and a surprise that takes us somewhere new. Our goals: To discover how we can harness craft elements to “earn” that gut punch/grace note/swoon-inducing ending — and become emboldened to write them. You'll workshop one short piece in our final class.

We'll read Gwendolyn Brooks, Seamus Heaney, Russell Banks, Karen Shepard, Ray Bradbury, Lara Vapnyar, Mary Gaitskill, AM Homes, George Saunders, David Sedaris, and more.

## INTRO TO DIGITAL FICTIONS: WRITING FOR SCREENS

Pia Struzzi

Sun. 12-2pm

Dates: Mar 31 - Apr 28

Dodge 411

Is the future of books electronic? What does it mean to publish fiction in a digital space? In 1992, Robert Coover wrote in “The End of Books” that in the new digital “real world” the proliferation of print-based media might be “the last futile gasp of a once vital form before it finally passes away forever, dead as God.” In the Internet's infancy, the pioneers of digital art dreamed of new electronic forms that allowed them to rewrite the conventions of fiction. Decades later, however, the question remains: What *does* the future of books look like?

To attempt to answer this question, we'll spend most of class reading, watching, and playing works of digital fiction together. We'll examine the many difficulties – philosophical, technical, and visual – the digital space presents in the telling of stories. We'll talk about its potentials, focusing primarily on the possibilities that choice, randomization, and the integration of other media present. The course will provide a cursory overview of the history of literary experiments with computers, including early works such as Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, Twitter stories like Jennifer Egan's "Black Box," and iPhone apps like DEVICE 6.

Each of the first four classes will conclude in a brief tutorial to provide students with the technical skills necessary to build their own digital fictions. We will learn to make GIFs, to build a Twitter bot, to code and host a simple HTML website, and to use Twine, the open-source software used to write Netflix's choice-based *Black Mirror* episode, "Bandersnatch." The optional final class will be workshop during which we will discuss student experiments in digital fiction.