

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE **ARTS** | WRITING

SPRING 2022



COURSEBOOK

Workshops ■ Seminars ■ Lectures

Updated: November 23, 2021

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WORKSHOP

FICTION – OPEN (6 points)

Joanna Hershon
Mon., 10am-1pm
James Cañón
Wed., 2pm-5pm
Diksha Basu
Thu., 10am-1pm
Hannah Lillith Assadi
Fri., 1:10pm-4:10pm
Bonnie Chau
Fri., 1:10pm-4:10pm

NONFICTION – OPEN (6 points)

Ruth Franklin
Mon., 10am-1pm
Leslie Jamison
Mon., 1:10pm-4:10pm
Phillip Lopate (online only)
Mon., 1:10pm-4:10pm
Wendy S. Walters
Tue., 10am-1pm
Michelle Orange
Tue., 1:10pm-4:10pm
Margo Jefferson
Wed., 2pm-5pm
Cris Beam
Thu., 1:10pm-4:10pm
Hasanthika Sirisena
Thu., 6:30pm-9:30pm

FICTION – THESIS (9 points)*

Heidi Julavits
Mon., 1:10pm-4:10pm
Sam Lipsyte
Mon., 1:10pm-4:10pm
Victor LaValle
Tue., 10am-1pm
Lynn Steger Strong
Tue., 10am-1pm
Joshua Furst
Tue., 1:10pm-4:10pm
Gary Shteyngart
Wed., 2pm-5pm
Paul Beatty
Thu., 1:10pm-4:10pm

POETRY – OPEN (6 points)

To be announced soon.

POETRY – THESIS (9 points)*

Mark Wunderlich
Mon., 1:10pm-4:10pm
Alan Gilbert
Tue., 4:30pm-7:30pm
Shane McCrae
Thu., 10am-1pm
Timothy Donnelly
Thu., 4:30pm-7:30pm

*Second-Years only

SEMINARS

Seminars and translation workshops
are 3 points.

(FI) = Fiction (NF) = Nonfiction
(PO) = Poetry (CG) = Cross-Genre
(TR) = Translation

—MONDAY—

Shane McCrae (PO)
The Period Style
Mon., 10am-12pm

Briallen Hopper (NF)
*Beyond Belief: Writing about
Religion and Spirituality*
Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm

Erroll McDonald (FI)
The Peripheral Writer
Mon. 4:15pm-6:15pm

Asiya Wadud (PO)
Fourth Grade
Mon. 4:15pm-6:15pm

—TUESDAY—

Monica Ferrell (CG)
*The Art of Lying: A Cross-Genre
Workshop in Fiction*
Tue., 10am-12pm

Phillip Lopate (NF) (online only)
The American Essay
Tue., 10am-12pm

Kate Zambreno (NF)
Compression
Tue., 10am-12pm

Lincoln Michel (FI)
*Architecture of the Unreal:
Constructing Speculative Fiction*
Tue., 12:05pm-2:05pm

Nicole Krauss (FI)
Here and Elsewhere
Tue., 1:10pm-3:10pm

BK Fischer (CG)
*The Comma Sutra: Grammar,
Syntax, and Praxis*
Tue., 2:10pm-4:10pm

Lis Harris (NF)
Family Matters
Tue., 2:10pm-4:10pm

Gary Shteyngart (FI)
So You Wanna Write Funny?
Tue., 4:15pm-6:15pm

Brenda Wineapple (NF)
*Turn Every Page: Adventures in the
Art of Research*
Tue., 4:15pm-6:15pm

Matvei Yankelevich (CG, TR)
Literary Translation Workshop
Tue., 4:15pm-6:45pm

Joshua Edwards (PO)

The End of Solitude

Tue., 6:35pm-8:35pm

—WEDNESDAY—

Yardenne Greenspan (CG, TR)

Literary Translation Workshop

Wed., 10am-12:30pm

Lara Vapnyar (FI)

Architecture of the Story

Wed., 10am-12pm

Wendy S. Walters (NF)

*Climate and Time: Writing in
Catastrophe*

Wed., 10am-12pm

Susan Bernofsky (CG, TR)

Women of the World

Wed., 2pm-4pm

Alan Ziegler (CG)

The Writer as Teacher

Wed., 2pm-5pm

Diksha Basu (FI)

Money, Cash, Woes

Wed., 5:05pm-7:05pm

—THURSDAY—

Susan Bernofsky (CG, TR)

Word for Word Workshop

Thu., 10am-12:30pm

Eli Gottlieb (CG)

*Charting the Disturbance:
Representations of Madness in
Modern Literature*

Thu., 1:10pm-3:10pm

Katrina Dodson (CG, TR)

*The Double Lives of
Writer-Translators*

Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm

Binnie Kirshenbaum (FI)

The Excruciating

Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm

—FRIDAY—

Keri Bertino (FI)

The Art of Practice

Fri., 10am-12pm

Daniel Magariel (FI)

Talk, Talk, Talk

Fri., 1:10pm-3:10pm

Nadia Owusu (NF)

*Home and Exile; Dispossession and
Reclamation*

Fri., 1:10pm-3:10pm

Benjamin Hale (FI)

Imagining Nonhuman Consciousness

Fri., 3:15pm-5:15pm

LECTURES

—MONDAY—

Lee Siegel

The Picaresque Novel, Then and Now

Mon., 1pm-3pm

—TUESDAY—

Jay Deshpande

Turning, Leaping, Digressing: A Poet's Taxonomy of Moves

Tue., 4:30pm-6:30pm

—THURSDAY—

Benjamin Taylor

Reaping the Whirlwind

Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm

SEMINARS

Diksha Basu

Money, Cash, Woes

(FICTION)

Wed., 5:05pm-7:05pm

Money. Who has it? Who needs it? Who wants it? It's a contentious, frequently embarrassing, topic and one that touches every aspect of our lives. Only the rich claim money can't buy happiness. Money can mean security and basic security is crucial for happiness.

In this seminar, we will explore the complicated place of money and wealth in (relatively) contemporary fiction. We will read about relationships between people across money lines, about characters moving up and down the financial ladder and how they navigate the life changes that come with changes in financial status.

In a world increasingly stratified and defined by money while also being hyper-connected, what does it mean for nation-state borders and cultural identity? Are we now defined more by our bank accounts than our places of birth? How does money move between generations?

We will read books from around the world in order to discuss the class system that is structured around wealth and how that shapes our social and political lives and neighborhoods, both local and global.

Readings may include:

Assembly by Natasha Brown
Ghachar Ghochar by Vivek Shanbhag
Seating Arrangements by Maggie Shipstead
The Invisibility Cloak by Ge Fei
Touring the Land of the Dead by Maki Kashimada
A Palace in The Old Village by Tahar Ben Jelloun
How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia by Mohsin Hamid
Three Rooms by Jo Hamya

...As well as bits and pieces of nonfiction on the side. We may even have Kevin Kwan drop in for a virtual class visit.

Susan Bernofsky

Women of the World 2022 Edition: Points of View

(CROSS-GENRE, TRANSLATION)

Wed., 2pm-4pm

A dozen years ago, the secretary of the Nobel Prize for Literature jury criticized the United States as being “too isolated, too insular,” saying we “don't translate enough and don't really participate in the big dialogue of literature.” This course is designed to investigate what the “big dialogue” of international writing looks like in 2022 by examining some of the most widely discussed and/or prize-winning international fiction by women to come out in English over the past several years. This year, we'll be looking in particular at short-story collections and thinking about the ways writers in different parts of the world stake out a narrative perspective and define a point of view. Ideas about establishing character aren't the same everywhere! We will also consider both the role the translator has played as mediating subject and the reception of each writer in English to get a better understanding of what happens when works are imported into a new cultural context and a new set of conversations. Readings will be variable, to be drawn from writers including Bora Chung, Mariana Enriquez, Ho Sok Fong, Maria Ospina, Aoko Matsuda, Elvira Navarro, Yan Ge, Natalia Borges Polesso, Olga Tokarczuk, Igiaba Scego, Yoko Tawada, Han Kang, Scholastique Mukasonga, Valeria Luiselli, Elena Ferrante, Amanda Michalopoulou, Nathalie Léger, Ludmilla Petrushevskaya, Hanne Ørstavik, Marie NDiaye, Sayaka Murata, Yoko Ogawa, Annie Ernaux, and others.

Keri Bertino

The Art of Practice

(FICTION)

Fri., 10am-12pm

Just as musicians practice scales and études, and dancers work at the barre, fiction writers turn to writing exercises to build strength, technique, flexibility, and fluency.

This course will give students the opportunity to isolate and deliberately practice a range of fiction techniques, spanning the writing process from generation to the minutiae of revision.

In each two-hour meeting, students will work through a series of progressive exercises grounded in short readings and centered around a single theme. Topics may include: identifying driving questions and stories; establishing voice, point-of-view, and character; writing beginnings and endings; playing with form and time; experimenting with genre; attending to sound; and drafting the hard stuff like sex, death, and jokes.

Throughout the course, writers will experience the community, guidance, and encouragement that supports risk-taking. In our final classes, students will develop and facilitate their own writing exercises, addressing questions of technique that arise from their own work over the course of the semester. At semester's end, students will write a reflective essay, drawing

examples from their ongoing fiction projects, to demonstrate how they've applied these techniques to their work.

Katrina Dodson

The Double Lives of Writer-Translators

(CROSS-GENRE, TRANSLATION)

Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm

What is the relationship between translation and writing? This course proceeds from the understanding that translation *is* writing. It also recognizes the order of difference between translation as writing under predetermined constraints, versus writing that cuts a more freewheeling path through possibility. Crossing between the two often requires slipping into distinct personae. We will read translations, fiction, poetry, and essays by writers who also translate, as well as experiments that dwell in the enigmatic kinship between these overlapping—and sometimes conflicting—practices. Lines of inquiry include: How do writers metabolize and transform what they translate, both as influences on their own writing and imprints on their translations? How can we trace a writer's broader aesthetic, cultural, political, or historical project across writings and translations? How does thinking like a translator shape one's approach to writing? Does a taste for total freedom push a writer toward wilder translations, like poet Erin Moure's mischievous transmutations of Fernando Pessoa, or does working on both sides inspire a stricter adherence to boundaries, as in Lydia Davis's commitment to restraint in rendering Proust and Flaubert (or is this merely an extension of her writerly sensibilities)?

Other writer-translators may include: Maria Dahvana Headley revisiting *Beowulf* for the twenty-first century, John Keene connecting Black diasporic figures across hemispheres, Mónica de la Torre deploying translation as poetic constraint, Sawako Nakayasu performing Sagawa Chika two ways, Achy Obejas layering Caribbean queerness through her writing and her channeling of Rita Indiana, Don Mee Choi exploring her deep affinities with Kim Hyesoon, Elizabeth Bishop leaving her mark on Octavio Paz and Clarice Lispector, Charles Baudelaire absorbing Edgar Allan Poe and Thomas De Quincey into his worlds, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o self-translating from Gikuyu.

Requirements include short writing and translation exercises and a final work of translation and/or writing inspired by translation, of 6-10 pages. No prior experience in translation is required, just the desire to experiment with language.

Joshua Edwards

The End of Solitude

(POETRY)

Tue., 6:35pm-8:35pm

“Society is the cave. The way out is solitude.”

—Simone Weil

Over the last couple of years, we have both lost and uncovered numerous forms of security and intimacy. Our daydreams have darkened, as we despaired and leaned heavily on hope. But we have also found inspiration and new interests despite waves of hardship and banality, and some common rituals have revealed themselves to be nearly miraculous. As we arrive again at the periphery of a strange collective solitude, we are perhaps finding context and new meaning for this time of our lives, as we also discover much of what we didn’t know had been hidden.

In this class, we will be reading poetry and prose that ranges from extremely solitary to exhaustingly social, from the closely observed meditations of hermit monks to the gregarious poetics of partygoers. We’ll also be writing and revising poems to share with one another, with a mind to gain perspective on the relationship between thinking and poetry. We’ll ask how writers create space for free thinking, while also mulling over the roles that communities, institutions, and rewards have in shaping individuals’ aesthetics. We’ll share daydreams, ideas, and enthusiasms, as we look to the turbulence of the immediate past to draw up plans for our new worlds. Besides the obvious, we’ll also be thinking about solitudes of exile, language, heartbreak, illness, incarceration, and more, as well as societies of aesthetics, love, spirituality, family, and friendship.

Writers we’ll read include Stonehouse, Montaigne, Sor Juana, Sappho, Ivan Illich, Anne Carson, Luis de Góngora, Bashō, Friedrich Hölderlin, Octavia Butler, Emily Dickinson, Nazim Hikmet, Reginald Dwayne Betts, Jalal Toufic, Emily Brontë, Lorine Niedecker, José Ortega y Gasset, Tu Fu, Eileen Myles, Dorothy Wordsworth, Paul Celan, Sei Shōnagon, Li Bai, Catullus, Miguel Hernández, and Liu Xiaobo.

Monica Ferrell

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

(CROSS-GENRE)

Tue., 10am-12pm

Open to Nonfiction and Poetry students only. This is a workshop-format course in the reading and writing of fiction for poets and nonfiction writers who are interested in developing their skills in a second genre. Every week we will investigate a different aspect of craft, including how to establish authority and credibility, narrative voice, vividness, recurring imagery, character and plot, and structure from a fiction writer’s perspective. We will begin the semester by investigating how authors choose to open novels and stories, how one can get a story to move

forward, and how sonic patterning operates in various prose works. We will read short fiction by Kate Braverman, Denis Johnson, Clarice Lispector, Carmen Maria Machado, Daniyal Mueenuddin, and George Saunders, among others, as well as two novels, the Lydia Davis translation of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Ben Lerner's *Leaving the Atocha Station*. Along the way, we will write three of our own stories—a flash fiction, a shorter story, and a longer story—all of which will come up for workshop.

B.K. Fischer

The Comma Sutra: Grammar, Syntax, and Praxis

(CROSS-GENRE)

Tue., 2:10pm-4:10pm

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 principles 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 practice in poetry and prose, including patterns of syntax, point of view, polysemy, closure, disjunction, the non sequitur, parataxis and hypotaxis, deixis, the subjunctive, vernaculars, and code-switching. Our analysis of grammar will dovetail with theoretical perspectives beyond subject and predicate, drawing insights from linguistics, cultural studies, feminist theory, race theory, ethics, activist politics, aesthetics, and media studies. We will dissect and revel in sentences by Virginia Woolf, Claudia Rankine, Henry James, Nathaniel Mackey, Marilynne Robinson, Emily Dickinson, Teju Cole, Jorie Graham, Taiye Selasi, Layli Long Soldier, and Vampire Weekend, among many other writers, and read essays by Nietzsche, M. NourbeSe Philip, Cecilia Vicuña, Gloria Anzaldúa, 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 (or any non-linguistic) elements, and a final paper of approximately five pages.

Hafizah Geter

On Context

(POETRY)

Wed., 5:05pm-7:05pm

If it's true that we're all products of our time, then how does a culture and its politics influence art? Putting John Donne's famous claim that “no man is an island” to the test, in this course we'll look at poetry and other texts in the context of the world and the environments that produced them. Through class discussions and deep engagements with texts and the world they inhabit, together we'll examine how we might better engage with and

write the world as both writers and readers. Readings will pull, in part or in whole, from the following: Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Athena Farrokhzad's *White Blight*, Kelly Forsythe's *Perennial*, Ross Gay's *Book of Delights*, Aracelis Girmay's *the black maria*, Taylor Johnson's *Inheritance*, Ilya Kaminsky's *Deaf Republic*, Edgar Kunz's *Tap Out*, Terese Marie Mailhot's *Heart Berries*, Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, Jordan Rice's *Constellarium*, Omar Sakr's *The Lost Arabs*, Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake*, Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas*, and Mai Der Vang's *Yellow Rain*.

Eli Gottlieb

Charting the Disturbance: Representations of Madness in Modern Literature

(CROSS-GENRE)

Thu., 1:10pm-3:10pm

This is a seminar designed to shed a light on modern literature that is either explicitly inspired by madness or purports to speak in the voice of madness itself. A subject like this is rich in cultural implications and we will inevitably discuss the ways in which the definition of madness has changed over time. Mainly, however, we will dig into the means by which madness is embodied in literature and we will do so by focusing principally on fiction and poetry and to a lesser extent, plays and memoir. In the process, we will attempt to supply answers to the questions: how can the sober sequence of grammar and word choice summon the wild darkness of extreme mental conditions? And how can narrative represent a state of mind which so often exists out of time and plunged in chaos? Emphasis will always be on the technical means that great authors use to achieve their effects. The seminar will be highly interactive and readings may include excerpts from the works of Toni Morrison, Jeanette Winterson, Yiyun Li, Sylvia Plath, Siri Hustvedt, Roxanne Gay, Jean Rhys, Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell, Esme Weijun Wang, Thomas Clare, Binnie Kirshenbaum, Elena Ferrante, Ocean Vuong, and others. Also included will be supplemental reading about trauma, stress, the biology of addiction, and related topics.

For the writing portion of the seminar, students will have the choice of either a series of short creative exercises or a slightly longer analytic essay.

Benjamin Hale

Imagining Nonhuman Consciousness

(FICTION)

Fri, 3:15pm-5:15pm

Philosopher Thomas Nagel asked, "What is it like to be a bat?" Ultimately, he determined the question unanswerable: A bat's experience of the world is so alien to our own that it is beyond the human understanding of subjective experience. That's arguable. But it is true at least that a bat's experience—or that of any other nonhuman consciousness—is not inaccessible to

human *imagination*. In this course we will read and discuss a wide variety of texts, approaching the subject of nonhuman consciousness through literature, philosophy, and science. We will read works that attempt to understand the experiences of apes, panthers, rats, ticks, elephants, octopuses, lobsters, cows, bats, monsters, puppets, computers, and eventually, zombies. Course reading may include Descartes, Kafka, Rilke, Jakob von Uexküll, Heinrich von Kleist, Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, Patricia Highsmith, John Gardner's *Grendel*, J.A. Baker's *The Peregrine*, Eduardo Kohn's *How Forests Think*, David Foster Wallace, Temple Grandin, Frans de Waal, Jane Goodall, Thomas Nagel, John Searle, Susan Datich, E. O. Wilson, Giorgio Agamben, and Bennett Sims's *A Questionable Shape*, among others, in addition to a viewing of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, and possibly other films. This is also a craft class; a major component of the class will be incorporating these ideas into our creative writing.

Lis Harris

Family Matters

(NONFICTION)

Tue., 2:10pm-4:10pm

This course is 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. We 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*), 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*),

Briallen Hopper

Beyond Belief: Writing about Religion and Spirituality

(NONFICTION)

Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm

Religion writing can be about going on a pilgrimage, or fighting about feminism with your brother, or apprenticing yourself to someone who knows how to cast spells. It can be an awkward but revealing interview with a stranger you want to understand. It can be a searing open letter protesting injustice. It can be a description of the velvet feeling of wading in a pool under the stars after drinking cough syrup and Sprite.

This course uses an expansive definition of religion and spirituality to explore many ways of writing about ritual, belief, tradition, and community. We will read a range of writers who are writing within or in the wake of religious traditions, as well as writers who are investigating

religious experiences and practices as outsiders. We will reckon with some of the persistent practical and philosophical questions involved in writing about religion, such as how, why, and whether to suspend disbelief (or to suspend belief), and the paradoxical practice of writing about the ineffable. We will attend to the bodily aspects of religion, and read spiritual writing grounded in the senses. We will also discuss how to write about religion and spirituality in relation to politics and power.

Coursework will include short writing exercises based on the readings and a final piece in the nonfiction genre(s) of the student's choice (personal essay, reported essay, cultural criticism, literary analysis, profile, sermon, prayer, etc., or some combination of the above).

Sample reading list: James Baldwin, Elisa Gonzalez, Zora Neale Hurston, Laila Lalami, Daniel Lavery, Marie Myung-Ok Lee, Mary McCarthy, Jodi Savage, Jeff Sharlet, Meera Subramanian, John Jeremiah Sullivan, Jia Tolentino, Ellen Willis.

Binnie Kirshenbaum

The Excruciating

(FICTION)

Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm

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

Our immediate response to physical pain is most often expressed not in language but in sound: a scream, a howl, or a whimper. To comprehend the physical pain of others we might rely on the memory of our own toothaches, food poisoning, on familiarity with our own nerve endings and pain receptors. But how do we even begin to convey pain far from any we might have experienced, particularly pain that has no locus? When the answer to the question, ‘Where does it hurt?’ is, ‘Nowhere and everywhere,’ or, ‘What pain? I feel fine,’ how do we, as writers, communicate the excruciating pains of despair, failure, loneliness, grief, humiliation, shame, regret and rage? To articulate unarticulated pain requires that the reader identify with these fictional characters in the traditional definition of literary identification; that is not to see oneself reflected in the characters, but to transcend the self to get inside of them and experience what it is to be them and feel what they feel. To determine the ways and means in which these writers give voice to the excruciation of lives that are lived in an infinite and silent scream, how they create the effects of bleeding when there is no evidence of blood, we will discuss the flaws, failings, and decency of the characters, the degree of their self-awareness, and the distance required for pain to be realized on the page. The words the authors have used (often simple), the sentences, some of which are complex while others are short and blunt, will be scrutinized to determine how these choices created these effects. We will take particular note of which moments the author has chosen to isolate and which have been left out, what is said and what is unsaid. Close attention will be paid to what happens

when the reader is left to fill in the blanks, and how that can render the pain all the more devastating.

There is a Workshop component to this seminar.

Nicole Krauss

Here and Elsewhere

(FICTION)

Tue., 1:10pm-3:10pm

In this class we will consider the poetics of space and setting, and what it means to imbue a story or novel with a powerful sense of place. How does a landscape, city, house, or even a room become a source of emotional power and meaning in a text? We will investigate the relationship between place and body, place and emotionality, place and the numinous. How are settings used to create a sense of confinement or freedom, of familiarity or foreignness, of harmony or conflict? How do they ground narratives, or transport readers? We will consider the relationship between nature, language, attentiveness, and wonder, and reflect on the idea of novels themselves as houses, and landscapes as repositories of time. We will study the art of projecting our imagination onto space, using place as metaphor and as structure. Last but not least, we will consider the invention of new worlds.

Readings will include works by Robert MacFarlane, Georges Perec, Gaston Bachelard, Franz Kafka, Jenny Erpenbeck, Elizabeth Hardwick, Philip Roth, Tove Jansson, Fleur Jaeggy, Marlen Haushofer, Roberto Bolaño, Joseph Brodsky, and Yehuda Amichai, among others.

Phillip Lopate

The American Essay

(NONFICTION)

Tue., 10am-12pm **(online only)**

This course will survey the American essay in both its historical and contemporary modes. We will be looking at continuities and discontinuities in the form, which is in any case intrinsically experimental (essay = attempt). We will also be examining how essayists have engaged with American history, taking up both the promises of democracy and the stubborn problems that have recurred throughout (racism, sexism, environmental pollution, poverty). The authors expected to be considered include Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Randolph Bourne, John Dewey, H.L. Mencken, James Baldwin, Rachel Carson, Adrienne Rich, Annie Dillard, Nora Ephron, David Sedaris, Rebecca Solnit, Maggie Nelson, Eileen Myles, Nicholson Baker, Ander Monson, Sloane Crosley, Hilton Als, Bernard Cooper, Teju Cole, and Samantha Irby, among others.

Daniel Magariel

Talk, Talk, Talk

(FICTION)

Fri., 1:10pm-3:10pm

Dialogue heightens conflict, present action, subtext, tension, and perspective while typically reflecting the themes, tone, and style of a given work. But talk in writing transcends dialogue. What is a voice-driven narrative or voice-over if not a conversation with the audience? What is an interior monologue or stream of consciousness if not a dialogue with the self? What is a song if not yet another means to communicate vocally? In this course, we'll read plays, stories, and novels, we will watch films and television shows, as well, and we'll discuss how to apply what we've learned to our own practices. This class is intended not as a survey of the evolution/relationship of dialogue and voice, but rather as a chance to read and watch (very closely) a selected number of great works, with an eye to craft. What we really want to accomplish is to improve your writing. Exposure to these masterpieces, and the close analytical work we'll do to try to understand their power, should, we hope, rub off on our own efforts.

Shane McCrae

The Period Style

(POETRY)

Mon., 10am-12pm

What makes us what we are as poets? How much do we choose, and how much is chosen for us? Is self-expression self-determined, or is each of us trammled by the period in which we express ourselves? And does what makes us what we are as poets change over time? If so, to what extent? In this seminar/workshop we will read and discuss our way through 20th century American poetry—primarily American, at least—decade by decade, starting in the 1890s and ending in the 2010s, in an effort to determine the most important aspects of the dominant poetic style of each decade. Students will be required to submit a poem each week in the style of the decade under consideration.

Erroll McDonald

The Peripheral Writer

(FICTION)

Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm

What is literature's global economy of prestige and what are its inequalities? Which is to say, where, how, why, and by whom is universal literary value conferred? If you are a writer from, say, Cape Verde, Romania, New Zealand, Jamaica, Algeria, Ethiopia, or even parts of the American South or Midwest—places whose literary traditions are deemed peripheral by the centers of consecration (Paris, New York, London, Barcelona, Rome, Frankfurt), what are the

singular vicissitudes you must face, what literary norms at home or abroad must you either embrace or breach, to achieve international renown?

This course offers close readings of works in English or translation by 20th-century writers from around the world who were once marginalized but are now considered central to literary enterprise. The authors and books considered are likely to be: *The Loser*, Thomas Bernhard (Austria); *Pedro Paramo*, Juan Rulfo (Mexico); *Solibo Magnifique*, Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique); *The Blind Owl*, Sadegh Hedayat (Iran); *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner (New Albany, Mississippi); *Ferdydurke*, Witold Gombrowicz (Poland); *The Passion According to G.H.*, Clarice Lispector (Ukraine, Brazil); *The Box Man*, Kobo Abe (Japan); *A Bend in the River*, V.S. Naipaul (Trinidad and Tobago); *My Name is Red*, Orhan Pamuk (Turkey); *The Ten Thousand Things*, Maria Dermout (Dutch West Indies); and *Broken Glass*, Alain Mabanckou (Republic of the Congo).

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

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

Lincoln Michel

Architecture of the Unreal: Constructing Speculative Fiction

(FICTION)

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

How do we build the impossible? What scaffolding supports the surreal? This seminar will examine the forms, effects, and structures of speculative fiction. We'll look at the shapes of fairy tales with Angela Carter and Donald Barthelme. We'll study how SF worlds are built (and destroyed) with Octavia Butler, Italo Calvino, and Ursula K. Le Guin. We'll examine the psychological effects of terror and the uncanny with Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, and Shirley Jackson. After investigating the forms of the fantastic and the futuristic, we'll use our blueprints to create our own works in class.

A tentative reading list includes:

The Bloody Chamber by Angela Carter
Wild Seed by Octavia Butler
Invisible Cities by Italo Calvino
The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson
The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula K. Le Guin
Revenge by Yokko Ogawa

The Woman in the Dunes by Kobo Abe
The Martian Chronicles by Ray Bradbury
Fever Dream by Samanta Schweblin

...As well as essays or short fiction from Kelly Link, Tzvetan Todorov, Kate Bernheimer, Brian Evenson, Ann Radcliffe, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Samuel Delany, Dino Buzzati, and others.

Nadia Owusu

Home and Exile; Dispossession and Reclamation

(NONFICTION)

Fri., 1:10pm-3:10pm

In a series of three lectures delivered at Harvard in 1998, Nigerian Nobel-prize winning novelist Chinua Achebe rejected a thesis put forth by V. S. Naipaul that European and American civilization should be accepted as universal. Achebe argued that attempting to imitate or improve upon the literature of Empire was to be accomplice in one's own dispossession. Instead, writers must believe in, honor, and insist upon the validity and value of their own histories, traditions, and stories.

In this seminar, we will explore this argument through the lenses of home and exile, and dispossession and reclamation. How have writers countered harmful dominant narratives about the places they call home? What role can stories play in undoing oppressive systems, including those that lead to exile? What role have they played in reclaiming power?

We will consider work by writers such as Achebe, Binyavanga Wainaina, Hisham Matar, Jaquira Díaz, Maaza Mengiste, Yiyun Li, Valeria Luiselli, Toni Morrison, Susan Abulhawa, Terese Marie Mailhot, Zaina Arafat, Gabriel García Márquez, R. K. Narayan, Jamaica Kincaid, Ama Ata Aidoo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Reyna Grande, Kao Kalia Yang, and others. Participants will experiment with the techniques and practices we have studied, culminating in a creative work of any genre.

Gary Shteyngart

So You Wanna Write Funny?

(FICTION)

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

Humor. Writing a funny novel, story, essay or memoir is harder than you think. But humor does a lot of work in getting the reader to pay attention to you, which allows you to deliver the real goods—the tragedy—right past their laugh baskets and into their hearts. We will be reading a wide range of 20th Century as well as hot-off-the-press novels, including Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Renata Adler's *Speedboat*, Taffy Brodesser-Anker's *Fleishman is in Trouble*, and Raven Leilani's *Luster*. We'll be looking at how humor works, when it doesn't work, and exploring what it means to

punch down (as well as up). Students will flex their laugh muscles by writing two humorous pieces of fiction or nonfiction.

Lara Vapnyar

Architecture of a Story

(FICTION)

Wed., 10am-12pm

We will start the class with the analysis of this famous quote by Alice Munro: “A story is not like a road to follow... it’s more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows.”

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

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

Asiya Wadud

Fourth Grade

(POETRY)

Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm

This seminar will look at work from nine- and ten-year-old writers as well as visit the prompts that I routinely offer my younger students. What velvet worlds could exist if we developed a practice that emerges from a place of always-experimentation, a world where we practice arranging words nearby that otherwise wouldn’t meet, and a world where we imagine the poem as an open conversation? We will practice gathering words that meet specific needs (soft words, pointy words, twisted words, roped words); we will work with what we are given; we will arrange and rearrange; and we will try and suspend judgement, fault, and foe more often than we normally do.

Wendy S. Walters

Climate and Time: Writing in Catastrophe

(NONFICTION)

Wed., 10am-12pm

The goal of this research seminar is to support the pursuit of topics related to climate change through readings, research, and writing. We will also confront some of the emotional challenges associated with doing work on the environment, especially in these particularly dynamic times. Over the course of the semester, students will create a research portfolio on a climate-related topic and practice integrating climate-related issues into works that are not explicitly climate focused. One key theme we will explore in concert with climate issues is the concept of *time* and how it should be framed in our narratives. Time factors into how we recognize the present era, and it also informs our sense of urgency where there is crisis. As the climate crisis continues to unfold, we face new conflicts with time: ice is melting faster than expected, sea levels rising faster than expected, fires happening more frequently than expected, marine level die-offs happening faster than expected, etc. The urgency with which the facts are now being revealed keeps changing the timelines we must confront, and yet, if we do not understand time—beyond our biological relationship to it—we may miss the opportunity to engage in meaningful work. By studying texts engaged in observational practice in the fields of geology, botany, geography, climate studies, animal studies, and anthropology alongside literary works, we will forge a creative practice that integrates current research with established arguments and/or new narratives. All genres welcome. Some of the texts we will cover include: *Something New Under the Sun* by Alexandra Kleeman; *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore* by Lauren Rush; *The Order of Time* by Carlo Rovelli; *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert; *The Yellow House* by Sarah Broom; and *In Search of the Canary Tree: The Story of a Scientist, a Cypress, and a Changing World* by Lauren Oakes.

Brenda Wineapple

Turn Every Page: Adventures in the Art of Research

(NONFICTION)

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

This hybrid seminar (seminar/workshop) provides an introduction to the research methods practiced by nonfiction, fiction, and poetry writers who incorporate historical, documentary, or other primary and secondary materials into their work. We discuss public, archival, and electronic sources (where to find them, what to do with them) as well as reportorial and other techniques for imagining, gathering, organizing, synthesizing, and ultimately using such material—and the ethics involved in finding, interviewing, reporting, and inventively applying them in our work. We begin with an overview of method and technique, answering how we imagine what materials or sources we need, how we go about locating them, what we do with the material we discover and how we evaluate it; we do so with readings from such authors as Janet Malcolm, Arlette Farge, John McPhee, and Robert Caro. We'll apply their means and methods directly to our creative work, which we'll be discussing in workshop format, to see how best to integrate our findings and our response to these findings into our stories.

Kate Zambreno

Compression

(NONFICTION)

Tue., 10am-12pm

What is compression? It is both form and technique. To compress is a verb. We will consider standalone smaller forms—the fragment, brief essay, flash, report, note, fait divers, crónicas, journal entry, calamity, feuilleton, short talk, lecture, pillow book, portrait, miniature, novella. A way as well of examining the cellular in a larger work—paragraph, sentence, or page. We will discuss the movement of compression in writing—as speed, tightening, shortening, lightening, quickening, a way of collapsing time. We will also problematize compression when thinking through the contemporary—the tweet, the post, the lyric vs. the can’t be. Writers and thinkers we will read will necessarily cross genres and languages—some possibilities include Fleur Jaeggy, Dionne Brand, Annie Ernaux, Natalie Léger, Bhanu Kapil, Alexander Kluge, César Aira, Renee Gladman, Sarah Manguso, Lydia Davis, Sofia Samatar, Kate Briggs, Mary Ruefle, Gerald Murnane, Danielle Dutton, Lauren Berlant, Kathleen Stewart, Anne Carson, Sophie Calle, Brian Evenson, Thomas Bernhard, Clarice Lispector, Sei Shōnagon, and Moyra Davey. Students will read and write compressed forms weekly.

Alan Ziegler

Writer as Teacher

(CROSS-GENRE)

Wed., 2pm-5pm

Writer as Teacher is a hybrid course: part seminar and part practicum. We will discuss the role 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 and running workshops; 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 one or two visits from exemplary practitioners of the art and craft of teaching. In the third class-hour, we will replicate classroom situations in small groups; on any given Wednesday, we may use none, some, or all of the third hour. A wide variety of reading material will be handed out, much of which will be used as “background” material and not discussed specifically in class. There will be several short, practical written assignments and presentations. Each student will design (with the option to teach) a mini-course (4-6 sessions) as part of the CA/T Community Classes (CCC) offering.

TRANSLATION WORKSHOPS

Word for Word Workshop

Susan Bernofsky

Thu., 10am-12:30pm

Word for Word is an initiative in collaborative translation housed within the Writing Program's joint course of study Literary Translation at Columbia (LTAC). The program pairs School of the Arts students with peer writers in foreign-language MFA programs to translate one another's work. Its purpose is not only to provide emerging translators with experience and a global network, but also to encourage writers to engage with their own language in a new and deeper way through the medium of literary translation and the experience of cross-cultural collaboration. An application is required for acceptance into this workshop.

Literary Translation Workshop

Matvei Yankelevich

Tue., 4:15pm-6:45pm

Yardenne Greenspan

Wed., 10am-12:30pm

These workshops are open to students translating from all languages at all levels, from novice to experienced, and within or across all genres: fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. They are designed to introduce or help refine the tools necessary to be an active and engaged translator as well as a rigorous reader of translated literary works, to hone your editing skills across literary genres, and to demonstrate how the art and craft of literary translation can expand your practice as a writer. We will have lively discussions about the role of the translator today, with special attention to translation practice as it intersects with questions of race, migration, and national scripts of exclusion/belonging.

Participants may come with a project already in mind, or may work with the instructor and the group to select projects early on that will be workshopped over the course of the term. The focus will be on close examinations of nuances of style and voice, linguistic play, and methods of representing linguistic and literary innovation in English while actively considering the nature and sociopolitical context of "the original."

Fluency in a language other than English is not required. A good reading knowledge of a second language is desirable, but students with basic second-language skills who are interested in understanding translation processes and how translation can enhance the craft of writing are also encouraged to register—and to continue improving their second-language skills. Ideally, we will have a group that is committed to examining translation as a tool to dig deeper as a writer, and where notions of expertise and/or mastery are secondary to the

willingness to explore and experiment. Readings in translation theory and methodology will be assigned throughout the term based on the different languages and interests students bring to class and the nature of the projects in the group.

LECTURES

Jay Deshpande

Turning, Leaping, Digressing: A Poet's Taxonomy of Moves

Tue., 4:30pm-6:30pm

In workshop and in conversation, we often describe a poem by its form (sonnet, terza rima, tetrameter, etc.), but things get murkier when it comes to a poem's rhetorical movement. That's because we lack a shared language for the choices that fall between form and content: the space of poetic structure. This course is for anyone who's ever looked at a poem and had no idea what's going on in it; in short, all of us. As we encounter different varieties of turn, leap, and argumentative structure, we will develop a vocabulary that we can apply to almost any poem.

The semester will begin with broader theories about pattern and organization, followed by a close-up scrutiny of syntax and sentence structure. From there, we will begin a week-by-week exploration of rhetorical tactics that will make you a better reader and a more self-aware editor of your own work. Students will complete exercises and write poems to identify and practice the strategies we've explored; the midterm and the final portfolio will provide opportunities to implement the full spectrum of techniques. Along the way we'll read and analyze a wide range of poems from across the lyric tradition, including work by Rae Armantrout, John Keats, Jorie Graham, Tarfia Faizullah, Jack Gilbert, Louise Glück, Marwa Helal, Stanley Kunitz, Srikanth Reddy, Rainer Maria Rilke, Morgan Parker, Alice Notley, and many, many more.

Lee Siegel

The Picaresque Novel, Then and Now

Mon., 1pm-3pm

Traditional picaresque novels consist of protagonists who pass through a series of episodes, or adventures, that expose the nature of their society, as well as the social and psychological nature of the people they encounter. Originating in Spain in the 16th century, the picaresque style has become a dominant mode of cultural expression—from fiction, to memoir, to our episodic posting on social media. In this class we will study how various writers use the self as a delicate probing instrument to anatomize and expose the encircling world. We will talk about how these writers invented ways to wind action into psychology, and to fuse investigations of human psychology with explorations of how society works. How, in other words, did they tell stories that are, at the same time, intensely individualistic and intensely social? Jean-Paul Sartre once said that the fundamental dilemma facing writers is that you

cannot reflect on an event and live through it at the same time. The picaresque style presents heroes who, with a little help from their creators, attempt to do exactly that.

Benjamin Taylor

Reaping the Whirlwind

Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm

Writers starting out today inherit the world of their grandparents and great-grandparents—the fearsome, bewildering twentieth century. In this course we read some of the most powerful and lasting works of the last hundred years (along with one nineteenth-century book, which will be our introduction and the forecourt to much that follows, Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom*.) Our itinerary runs from the great question of race in America, the nation’s defining crucible; on to the battlefields of World War One and thence to the Spanish Civil War; from there to Stalin’s purges and slave-labor camps; thence to World War Two and its darkest aspect, the industrialized murder of Europe’s Jews; on finally to America’s long war in Vietnam.

Our readings are as follows:

My Bondage and My Freedom (Frederick Douglass)
The Souls of Black Folk (W. E. B. Du Bois)
Goodbye to All That (Robert Graves)
Homage to Catalonia (George Orwell)
Journey into the Whirlwind (Eugenia Semyonovna Ginzburg)
Everything Flows (Vassily Grossman)
Family Lexicon (Natalia Ginzburg)
The Plague (Albert Camus)
Into that Darkness (Gitta Sereny)
The Shawl (Cynthia Ozick)
The Quiet American (Graham Greene)
Dispatches (Michael Herr)
The Things They Carried (Tim O'Brien)

SPECIAL PROJECTS WORKSHOP

Thom Donovan

Tue., 6:30pm-9:30pm

This six-point workshop is designed to provide students with the opportunity and instructional support to develop significant text-based works outside the constraints of genre-specific workshops. While existing Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry workshops offer some flexibility in the kinds of work that students are allowed to submit within their genre, the Special Projects Workshop will accommodate new kinds and categories of work by offering an environment with no predetermined generic boundaries or expectations. These projects might include, but are not limited to, verse essays and other cross-genre projects, prose or verse sequences, conceptual projects, works in hybrid forms, procedural and experimental texts, text-based art objects, or any number of other projects that might be best supported, for whatever reason (including special research or production needs), by a balance of vibrant group critique, intensive one-on-one mentorship, and self-guided research and composition.

Unlike most traditional workshops, the Special Projects Workshop will assist students in developing and refining project proposals for their work; these proposals will include a detailed project description that features a rationale, a production schedule, and a bibliography of related reading, viewing, or listening (if applicable). The workshop will ideally bring together students from all three concentrations and facilitate a level of cross-generic conversation—from conception through execution and reception—traditionally not possible within the context of genre-specific workshops.

Students enrolled in a Special Projects Workshop will meet as a group six times throughout the term (four meetings at the start of the term, two at the end) with three or more conferences with the instructor and/or in smaller, focused groups paced out in between. To be considered for the class, students must submit to the department an application no more than three pages in length consisting of the components mentioned above. The application will also be expected to address why the proposed work would be best achieved in the context of a Special Projects Workshop rather than in that of a traditional genre-specific workshop.