

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

**SPRING 2024**



**COURSEBOOK**

**Workshops ■ Seminars ■ Lectures ■ Master Classes**

Updated: February 26, 2024

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## LIST OF COURSES BY DAY AND TIME

WORKSHOPS	1
SEMINARS	3
LECTURES	5
MASTER CLASSES	6

## COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

SEMINARS	8
LITERARY TRANSLATION WORKSHOP	23
LECTURES	24
SPECIAL PROJECTS WORKSHOP	26
MASTER CLASSES	27

## WORKSHOPS

### FICTION – OPEN (6 points)

James Cañón  
Wed., 2pm-5pm  
Frances Cha  
Thu., 10am-1pm  
Dennard Dayle  
Wed., 4:15pm-7:15pm  
Joshua Furst  
Thu., 1:10pm-4:10pm  
Hilary Leichter  
Thu., 1:10pm-4:10pm  
Matthew Salesses\*  
Mon., 4:15pm-7:15pm

### FICTION – THESIS (9 points)\*

Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah  
Tue., 10am-1pm  
Hannah Lillith Assadi  
Fri., 10am-1pm  
Anelise Chen  
Fri., 10am-1pm  
Sam Lipsyte  
Mon., 1:10pm-4:10pm  
Ben Marcus  
Tue., 1:10pm-4:10pm  
Gary Shteyngart  
Wed., 2pm-5pm  
Adam Wilson  
Tue., 1:10pm-4:10pm

\*Note about Salesses workshop structure: "Now that you've workshopped your stories, how do you go about actually revising them? This workshop will be focused on the revision process. Students should enter with a complete draft of one previously workshopped short story (no novel excerpts) that they are committed to heavily reworking every week. Through a series of exercises, we will practice radical revision."

### NONFICTION – OPEN (6 points)

Cris Beam  
Thu., 1:10pm-4:10pm  
Chloé Cooper Jones  
Thu., 1:10pm-4:10pm  
Jaquira Díaz  
Mon., 10am-1pm  
Ruth Franklin  
Thu., 10am-1pm

Lis Harris  
Tue., 1:10pm-4:10pm  
Susan Hartman  
Wed., 2pm-5pm  
Michelle Orange  
Mon., 1:10pm-4:10pm  
Wendy S. Walters  
Tue., 1:10pm-4:10pm

POETRY – OPEN (6 points)

Lynn Melnick

*Wed., 9:30am-12:30pm*

Deborah Paredez

*Wed., 9:30am-12:30pm*

Lynn Xu

*Tue., 10am-1pm*

POETRY – THESIS (9 points)\*

Timothy Donnelly

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

Alan Gilbert

*Tue., 5pm-8pm*

Dorothea Lasky

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

Shane McCrae

*Thu., 10am-1pm*

\*Second-Years only

## SEMINARS

Seminars and translation workshops  
are 3 points.

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

### —MONDAY—

Christine Smallwood (F)

*Siblings*

Mon., 10am-12pm

Kate Zambreno (NF)

*Investigations and Happenings: A  
Seminar on Annie Ernaux*

Mon., 10am-12pm

Lynn Steger Strong (FI)

*Doubles, Doppelgängers, and  
Foins*

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

Alice Quinn (PO)

*Becoming an Editor (and Teacher)  
of Contemporary Poetry*

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

Erroll McDonald (FI)

*The Peripheral Writer*

Mon. 4:15pm-6:15pm

Keri Bertino (CG)

*The Writer as Teacher*

Mon. 4:15pm-7:15pm

### —TUESDAY—

Jaquira Díaz (NF)

*The Age of Pleasure: Writing Queer  
Nonfiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Tue., 10am-12pm

Shane McCrae (PO)

*How to Read and Write (Meter)*

Tue., 10am-12pm

Lis Harris (NF)

*Profiles*

Tue., 10am-12pm

Monica Ferrell (CG)

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

Tue., 10am-12pm

Matthew Salesses (FI)

*Desire: Theory for Writers 2*

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

Margo Jefferson (NF)

*Memoir and Critical Fabulation*

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

Gary Shteyngart (FI)

*So You Wanna Write Funny?*

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

Binnie Kirshenbaum (FI)

*The Excruciating*

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

Joshua Edwards (PO)  
*The End of Solitude*  
Tue., 4:15pm-6:15pm

BK Fischer (CG)  
*The Comma Sutra: Grammar,  
Syntax, and Praxis*  
Tue., 4:15pm-6:15pm

Ira Silverberg (FI)  
*Culture Wars: Transgressive  
Literature of the Late Twentieth  
Century*  
Tue., 6:30pm-8:30pm

—WEDNESDAY—

Nalini Jones (FI)  
*The Child in Fiction*  
Wed., 10am-12pm

Jay Deshpande (PO)  
*The Poet's Novel*  
Wed., 10am-12pm

Lara Vapnyar (FI)  
*Architecture of the Story*  
Wed., 10am-12pm

Susan Bernofsky (CG, TR)  
*Women of the World 2024 Edition:  
Radical Estrangement*  
Wed., 2pm-4pm

Alyson Waters (TR)  
*Literary Translation Workshop*  
Wed., 2pm-4:30pm

Lincoln Michel (FI)  
*Structure and Its Discontents*  
Wed., 2pm-4pm

Benjamin Hale  
*Imagining Nonhuman Consciousness*  
Wed., 5:15pm-7:15pm

—THURSDAY—

Susan Bernofsky (CG, TR)  
*Word for Word Workshop*  
Thu., 10am-12:30pm

Chloé Cooper Jones (NF)  
*The Aesthetic Experience: In Theory  
and In Artistic Practice*  
Thu., 10am-12pm

Benjamin Taylor (NF)  
*Inner Life and How to Reveal It*  
Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm

—FRIDAY—

Katrina Dodson (TR)  
*Impossible Translations*  
Fri., 11am-1pm

Jason Gots (FI)  
*Narrative Podcasting / Audio  
Storytelling*  
Fri., 11am-1pm

Emily Skillings (PO)  
*Go On...Go Off! The Very Long  
Poem*  
Fri., 1:10pm-3:10pm

Nadia Owusu (NF)  
*Home and Exile; Dispossession and  
Reclamation*  
Fri., 1:10pm-3:10pm

## LECTURES

### —MONDAY—

Joshua Cohen  
*Long Century, Short Novels*  
Mon., 10am-12pm

Leslie Jamison  
*The Self*  
Mon., 1:10pm-3:10pm

### —TUESDAY—

Jared Daniel Fagen  
*Contrary Tendencies: Surrealism & Prose Poetry*  
Tue., 11am-1pm

## MASTER CLASSES

### —MONDAY—

**Maisy Card**

*Composing Fiction in Nonstandard English*  
(1.5 points)

Mon., 10am-12pm  
Mar. 18 – Apr. 22

**Darby Minow Smith & Lynnette Widder**

*Excavating Ideas From Your Surroundings* (1.5 points)

Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm  
Jan. 29 – Mar. 4

**Ed Park**

*The First Person and Its Discontents* (1.5 points)

Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm  
Mar. 18 – Apr. 22

**Nathan Heller**

*The Compass of the Large* (1.5 points)

Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm  
Mar. 18 – Apr. 22

**Jesse Sheidlower**

*Defining the Dictionary* (1.5 points)

Mon., 6:30pm-8:30pm  
Jan. 29 – Mar. 4

**Jessi Jezewska Stevens**

*Radical Readings in Climate Literature* (1 point)

Mon., 6:30pm-8:30pm  
Mar. 4 – Apr. 1

**David Gordon**

*The Art of Murder* (1.5 points)

Mon., 6:30pm-8:30pm  
Mar. 18 – Apr. 22

**Salvatore Scibona**

*Independent People: A Novel by Halldór Laxness* (1.5 points)

Mon., 6:30pm-8:30pm  
Mar. 18 – Apr. 22

### —TUESDAY—

**Jeremy Tiang**

*Translating for the Stage* (1 point)

Tue., 4:15pm-6:15pm  
Jan. 30 – Feb. 20

**Vijay Seshadri**

*Sylvia Plath* (1.5 points)

Tue., 6:15pm-8:15pm  
Mar. 19 – Apr. 23

### —WEDNESDAY—

**Chase Rhys**

*Narrative Resilience: Writing Identity as Resistance in Marginalized Communities* (1.5 points)

Wed., 10am-12pm  
Mar. 20 – Apr. 24

**Michele Filgate**

*Building a Writing Career* (1.5 points)

Wed., 5:15pm-7:15pm  
Jan. 24 – Mar. 6

**Madhu Kaza**

*Kitchen Table Translation* (1.5 points)

Wed., 5:15pm-7:15pm  
Mar. 20 – Apr. 24

**Leonard Schwartz**

*The Language of Philosophy in the Service of Literary Art* (1.5 points)

Wed., 5:15pm-7:15pm  
Mar. 27 – Apr. 12 (Also Fridays)

### —THURSDAY—

**Carina del Valle Schorske**

*First Person & The Politics of Place* (1.5 points)

Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm  
Mar. 7 – Apr. 18



**Tan Lin**

*Feelings, Affective Logics and the Experience  
of the Everyday (1.5 points)*

*Thu., 6:30pm-8:30pm*

*Feb. 29 – Apr. 11*

—FRIDAY—

**Leonard Schwartz**

*The Language of Philosophy in the Service of  
Literary Art (1.5 points)*

*Fri., 11am-1pm*

*Mar. 27 – Apr. 12 (Also Wednesdays)*

**Darcie Dennigan**

*Seven Degrees Unto Absurdity (1 point)*

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

*Apr. 5 – Apr. 26*

# SEMINARS

**Susan Bernofsky**

## **Women of the World 2024 Edition: Radical Estrangement**

(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 2024 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 paying particular attention to the work of three brilliant 21st century writers: Scholastique Mukasonga, Samanta Schweblin, and Yoko Tawada, reading three or more works by each, along with a handful of contemporaries whose works provide contrast and context. Each of these writers deals in different and fascinating ways with themes of alienation and estrangement, with characters forced to come to terms with radically rearranged personal and world circumstances with both emotional and linguistic repercussions. As we study on a craft level how these brilliant artists create their literary universes and the sense of strangeness and estrangement that pervades each of their oeuvres, we will also consider the role the translator has played as mediating subject in the creation and reception of each book in English to gain a better understanding of what happens when works are imported into a new cultural context and set of conversations. Part of the course will also be devoted to the art of reviewing works in translation; we will read a number of reviews, and students will be asked to write one. All readings will be in English (with an option to read works in the original French, Spanish, German, and/or Japanese for students in a position to do so).

**Keri Bertino**

## **The Writer as Teacher**

(CROSS-GENRE)

Mon., 4:15pm-7:15pm

This class, for students with an interest in teaching creative writing in any setting, takes as a starting point two foundational questions of writing pedagogy: “Can writing be taught?” and “Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?” Together, we'll develop more (and more-nuanced) inquiries in response to these questions, and seek to answer them through our exploration of the theories, practices, and contexts of teaching creative writing. Primary topics include fundamentals of both general and writing pedagogy (including process, creativity, and growth mindset), assignment and course design, creating classroom communities, responding to student writing, the workshop, and exploration of varied sites of creative writing both in-person and online. We'll also take up broader questions of the role of the artist and teacher in communities, issues of professionalization, and the ways that practices of teaching and writing inform and fortify one another.

Chloé Cooper Jones

## The Aesthetic Experience: In Theory and In Artistic Practice

(NONFICTION)

Thu., 10am-12pm

What is an aesthetic experience and what does it tell us about art or about ourselves? An aesthetic experience might be best initially defined as a subjective and often profound encounter with an object, artwork, or phenomenon that elicits a heightened sense of beauty, appreciation, or emotional response. It involves a deep engagement with the sensory, emotional, and intellectual aspects of the object of appreciation. Aesthetic experiences typically involve a sense of pleasure, contemplation, or emotional resonance, and they often transcend practical or utilitarian considerations. These experiences can encompass a wide range of phenomena, including visual art, music, literature, natural landscapes, and even everyday objects when perceived with a heightened sense of awareness and appreciation. Aesthetic experiences are highly personal and can vary from person to person based on individual preferences, cultural backgrounds, and emotional responses.

For me, an aesthetic experience is both mysterious and confounding—I'm impacted physically as much as it might mentally or emotionally. In the throes of an aesthetic experience, I might feel the small hairs on my arms or on the back of my neck stand up. I might feel nearly ill from a racing heart or my stomach turning. I might feel energized by new thoughts prompted by the experience or feel my heart swell in appreciation and awe. I might also feel a deep sense of recognition—one that connects me to the art object and its maker in a way that transcends time and place. But why do I feel this? Where does this feeling come from? What is really happening?? In this class, we'll study this question on two levels:

1. A 'theoretical' level. Theorists, critics, and philosophers have long tried to understand what it means to have an aesthetic experience. Plato likened this experience to madness, Kant to the sublime; Tolstoy argued the aesthetic experience was a form of communication only accessible through engagement in art. Historians place aesthetic experience within the context of time and culture. We'll study and discuss theories that have tried to define this mysterious phenomenon.

2. A 'practical' level. We'll also read the work of writers who have puzzled through this question of the aesthetic experience by writing about their connection to a work or body of work by another artist. Often this involves a search to understand the self via the work of another artist. Some examples of this might be Nathalie Léger's *Suite for Barbara Loden* or Sigrid Nunez's *Sempre Susan* or *My Autobiography of Carson McCullers* by Jenn Shapland.

Jay Deshpande

## The Poet's Novel

(POETRY)

Wed., 10am-12pm

No small number of poets have tried their hand at writing fiction, and there are also a select few writers who became known for their novels after beginning their careers in verse. But what is it that makes a novel poetic? Where do we notice the hand of a poet when reading a novel? Is this just about "attention to language" or "lyricism" or some other vague praise? Or is there something essentially poetic in the thinking and crafting of certain works of fiction?

This seminar will wrestle with these questions by making a foray into recent and contemporary novels by poets. After touching on some earlier antecedents (Basho, Dante, Rilke), we will begin a careful study of a range of models: Anne Carson, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Denis Johnson, Ben Lerner, Eileen Myles, and Michael Ondaatje. With these texts as foundations, we'll then begin a student-led exploration of contemporary novels by poets. Throughout, we'll consider a number of themes, including: the relationship(s) between prose and verse; the significance of syntax; fragmentation; the role of narrative in poems; novel architecture; and the relationship between one writer's fiction and their poetry. In addition to presentations and line-level analysis of passages from each text, students will have the opportunity to write stylistic imitations and to explore their own writing across generic borders.

**Jaquira Díaz**

## **The Age of Pleasure: Writing Queer Nonfiction in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

(NONFICTION)

Tue., 10am-12pm

In “Queering the Essay,” David Lazar writes, “The essay is a queer genre [...] The desire of the essay is to transgress genre.” But what makes the essay—or any work of nonfiction—queer? In this seminar, we'll examine work by writers across various genres, backgrounds, sexualities, and gender identities. We'll explore writing queerness, queer families (both lost and found), and queer communities. We'll discuss the realities of writing queer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when in 2023, more than 340 anti-LGBTQ bills were introduced in state houses across the United States (150 of those specifically targeting transgender people). How do the tensions and friction of this positioning manifest within literary work? In what ways do they block or generate innovative writing? How do we resist the dominant institutional models? We'll explore LGBTQ history and documentary film, queer performance and art, architecture of the queer essay, and various ways of “transgressing genre.”

In addition to our weekly discussions, students will submit two short pieces to workshop. Readings may include Akwaeke Emezi, Meg Day, Natalie Diaz, T Fleischman, Aisha Sabatini Sloan, Robin Coste Lewis, Samuel Delany, Hilton Als, Imani Perry, Justin Torres, Naomi Jackson, Kristin Dombek, David Wojnarowicz, Lars Horn, Raquel Gutiérrez, Maggie Nelson, Che Gossett, Cherrie Moraga, Samuel Delany, Danez Smith, Jeremy Atherton Lin, etc.

**Katrina Dodson**

## **Impossible Translations**

(TRANSLATION, CROSS-GENRE)

Fri., 11am-1pm

Every translation raises the specter of the untranslatable. Yet some texts especially resist being conveyed beyond their original borders. In this course, we will consider how translators—and writers who negotiate between languages and cultures—approach seemingly impossible tasks of translation. Our inquiry will start with statements on the nature of translation, including Walter Benjamin's much-quoted essay, “The Task of the Translator,” and Don Mee Choi's pamphlet, *Translation is a Mode=Translation is an Anti-neocolonial Mode*, followed by Eliot Weinberger's case study

of the myriad ways to translate a four-line Tang Dynasty poem in *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*. We will also think with and against the concept of the “untranslatable,” as taken up in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* and elsewhere: In what situations does a refusal to translate play a critical role in communication? When does an attachment to the untranslatable deny the fundamental aims of translation?

Readings will highlight translingual poetics, cultural hybridity, and strategies for surmounting (or embracing) the impossibility of translating particularities of idiom, form, race, and culture. These include: 1) poetic experiments by Mónica de la Torre, M. NourbeSe Philip, and Uljana Wolf; 2) translations of notoriously “impossible to translate” works, from excerpts of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Finnegans Wake, to Oulipo poet Raymond Queneau’s *Exercises in Style*, and my translation of Mário de Andrade’s Brazilian modernist novel *Macunaíma: The Hero with No Character*, which mixes Portuguese with Indigenous and African languages; and 3) innovative translations of 10<sup>th</sup>-century Arabic lexicographer Ibn Khālawayh’s lists in *Names of the Lion*, Patrick Chamoiseau’s French and Martinican Creole in *Texaco*, and the mix of Russian and Belarusian in Alhierd Bacharevič *Alindarka’s Children* (rendered into English and Scots by its translators). Knowledge of a language other than English not required.

**Joshua Edwards**

## The End of Solitude

(POETRY)

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

"Society is the cave. The way out is solitude."

- Simone Weil

In recent years we have both lost and uncovered forms of security and intimacy, as we have found inspiration and new interests despite waves of hardship. Having experienced the sharp edge of a strange collective solitude, we are perhaps now finding context and new meaning for that time of our lives, and also discovering much of what we didn't know had been hidden. In this class, we will be reading poetry, fiction, and philosophy that ranges from extremely solitary to exhaustingly social, from the closely observed meditations of hermit monks to the gregarious poetics of partygoers. 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.

**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., 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 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.

**Jason Gots**

## **Narrative Podcasting/Audio Storytelling**

(FICTION, CROSS-GENRE)

Fri., 11am-1pm

It's been almost a decade since *Serial's* first season sent everyone scrambling to figure out what exactly a podcast was and how to listen to one. In that time podcasting grew from a fringe basement hobby into the stuff of venture capitalists' dreams, followed, in 2023, by waves of layoffs and deep uncertainty about the industry's future. Somewhere in the middle lies great audio storytelling, from Homer to Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* to Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* on Audible. There are longform, serial narrative podcasts like *S-Town* and *The Bright Sessions* that span multiple episodes and seasons. And there are 7-minute masterpieces from indie producers working entirely on their own.

This seminar will immerse you in the best of all these worlds and teach you how to write and produce compelling audio, translating your writer's voice into a new medium.

The class will give you an overview of the state of podcasting today with special attention to audio storytelling—from scripted, ongoing fiction podcasts like *Welcome to Night Vale* to narrative nonfiction shows like Jonathan Goldstein's *Heavyweight*. You'll learn from the work and insights of some of today's most talented writers and producers what's involved in world, story, and character building for audio. And you'll put this knowledge to work, producing, workshopping, and digitally editing narrative audio pieces of your own—drawing on the writing you're already doing or branching out in an entirely new direction. You will finish the class with a strong, hands-on, foundational understanding of audio storytelling.

**Benjamin Hale**

## Imagining Nonhuman Consciousness

(FICTION)

Wed., 5:15pm-7:15pm

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**

## Profiles

(NONFICTION)

Tue., 10am-12pm

One of the few forms of literary Nonfiction available to serious writers that is still welcome in all sectors of the magazine world, the Profile form provides an opportunity to lavish attention on both the breadth of the Profile subject and on the profession, metier or culture that is always The Profile's second subject. Extensive reporting, attention to the interaction of the factual with the imaginative and novelistic play will be emphasized. We will examine exemplary Profiles by masters of the form, including A.J. Liebling, Joe Mitchell, Kenneth Tynan and Lillian Ross as well as more recent ones, and identify the qualities the pieces have in common.

The authors we study will be used as models for one Profile submission at the end of the semester but we will also focus on the form's complex pitfalls. The course will emphasize selection, interviewing and research techniques and affords a rare opportunity to explore an off-campus reported subject in depth. The problems and progress of each student's work-in-progress will be discussed weekly.

\*This course fulfills the Research Seminar requirement for Nonfiction students.

**Margo Jefferson**

## **Memoir and Critical Fabulation**

(NONFICTION)

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

Memoir's elements include history, reportage, speculation, and analysis. When a memoir also calls on critical fabulation it pairs the literal with the imagined, fact with fragment, the singular with the collective voice. What language does the body speak? How does the psyche speak truths and lies at the same time? Can we give life —complex, vivid life — to experiences that our culture has long dismissed or disdained?

Writers to be studied may include Annie Ernaux, Christina Sharpe, Hanif Abdurraqib, John Keene, Maxine Hong Kingston, Zibigniew Herbert, Darryl Pinckney Carina Del Valle Schorske, and Rachel Eisendrath.

**Nalini Jones**

## **The Child in Fiction**

(FICTION)

Wed., 10am-12pm

An exploration of children in fiction (though not in children's literature) with particular attention to the ways writers craft their child characters. Through readings, exercises, and discussion, this course explores the ways children can function in the fabric of a story or novel, and the narrative opportunities they create in terms of plot, suspense, point of view, time and memory, emotional and moral stakes, and even setting.

**Binnie Kirshenbaum**

## **The Excruciating**

(FICTION)

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

The worst is not  
so long as we can say, "This is the worst."

-- William Shakespeare, *King Lear*,

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 can rely on familiarity



with our own nerve endings and pain receptors, but how do we even begin to convey 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 excruciation of despair, failure, loneliness, grief, humiliation, shame, regret, and rage? To articulate this 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, to feel what they feel. In this seminar, we will aim to determine the ways and means in which these writers give voice to lives that are lived in an infinite and silent scream, how they create the effects of bleeding when there is no evidence of blood. Along with the flaws, failings, and decency of the characters, the degree of their self-awareness or lack thereof, we will discuss such matters of authorial distance, what is illustrated through scene, and what is relayed through exposition. The words the authors have employed (often simple), the sentences, some of which are complex while others are short and blunt, will be scrutinized to determine how these choices create the effects necessary for the reader to share in the agony of the characters. We will take particular note of which moments the author has chosen to isolate, what is said, what is left unsaid, 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.

**Shane McCrae**

## **How to Read and Write (Meter)**

(POETRY)

Tue., 10am-12pm

Besides wanting to know more about poetry, I started studying meter as an undergraduate for two reasons, and I will now confess to you what those were: 1. If I ever found myself, via time machine, act of God, or witch’s/wizard’s spell, forced to live my life in the 18th century, or the 17th century, etc., in England, I would still like to be a poet, and so I needed to understand meter; 2. I wanted Auden—whose poetry I didn’t much read at the time, and anyway he was dead—I wanted Auden to respect me. And yet, my decision to study meter has been one the best and most important decisions I have ever made for my writing, second only to my decision to read everything I possibly could. Studying meter opened the poems I was writing and reading, and introduced me to a freedom I didn’t know I was missing. And studying meter can do the same for you. In this seminar we will learn how to recognize and write in meter through studying handbooks on meter and poems in meter, and we will write our own rad and fun metrical poems.

**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**

## **Structure and Its Discontents**

(FICTION)

Wed., 2pm-4pm

We often talk about character-driven and plot-driven stories, but what happens when structure takes the wheel? How do we tell a straight story or a bent one? How does form inform (or deform) our work? This course will focus on the shapes of stories, exploring how different structures open different narrative opportunities. We'll look at classic storytelling theories from different cultures alongside postmodern departures, Oulipian constraints, and hybrid forms. (First, we'll climb Freytag's Pyramid and then we'll blow it up.) The course will think of structure not as means of *containing* story, but as means of *generating* new ideas and possibilities.

Readings will range from fragmented realism to surreal science fiction from authors such as Nicholson Baker, Olga Ravn, Carmen Maria Machado, Mary Robison, André Alexis, and Italo Calvino, as well as craft essays by Ursula K. Le Guin, Jane Alison, Garielle Lutz, and others. There will be a workshop component at the end of the semester.

**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 by V. S. Naipaul that White European and North American civilization should be accepted as universal. Achebe argued that attempting to imitate or improve

upon the literature of Empire was to be an 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, exile, dispossession, and reclamation. How have writers countered harmful dominant narratives about the places and people they call home? What role can stories play in undoing dispossession? What role have they played in reclaiming power?

We will consider work by writers such as Achebe, Binyavanga Wainaina, Maaza Mengiste, Yiyun Li, Toni Morrison, Terese Marie Mailhot, Zaina Arafat, Jamaica Kincaid, Ama Ata Aidoo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Christina Sharpe, Tina Campt, Sulaiman Addonia, Jiayang Fan, Akwaeke Emezi, Arundhati Roy, Natalie Diaz, and others.

Participants will experiment with our studied techniques and practices, culminating in a creative work of any genre.

**Alice Quinn**

## **Becoming an Editor (and Teacher) of Contemporary Poetry**

(POETRY)

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

I began my career at Alfred A. Knopf, starting as an assistant to Nina Bourne, the acknowledged genius of 20<sup>th</sup> C. book advertising. After four years of an invaluable apprenticeship in the pleasures and rewards of the business, I wanted to become an editor, starting with creating a poetry list. Knopf had once published Langston Hughes, Wallace Stevens, and James Merrill, a marvelous foundation, but the list had dwindled to just two excellent poets.

For the next ten years—along with editing fiction, works of intellectual history, and books on folk art—I was able to establish that list introducing some twenty new poets. The Knopf roster of poets—furthered after my time by two distinguished editors in succession, Harry Ford and Deborah Garrison—is now arguably one of the strongest in our country. At *The New Yorker*, where I migrated in 1987, I joined the fiction department, edited critics' pieces and profiles, and succeeded the brilliant Howard Moss as poetry editor.

In this class, exploring many of the heralded poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we'll read poems from important debut volumes and explore how significant that moment in a poet's life is. And we'll read poems from *The New Yorker* from my years there (1987-2007) and discuss (and maybe contest—that will be okay!) their merits and appeal, and why we felt our audience would appreciate them.

At the Poetry Society of America, where I was director for eighteen years, I tapped a number of the poets whose work I loved to select and introduce elegant chapbooks, another potential (and crucial) debut moment in a poet's career. When we discuss a poet's work, we'll also read poems from the chapbooks they chose by younger poets who are now among our most accomplished and influential.

Among the hundreds of poets whose work I had the privilege of presenting in book form, at *The New Yorker*, or in major public programs at the Poetry Society of America:

Elizabeth Alexander  
John Ashbery

Seamus Heaney  
Zbigniew Herbert

Carl Phillips  
Marie Ponsot

Eavan Boland  
Joseph Brodsky  
Amy Clampitt  
Lucille Clifton  
Henri Cole  
Jack Gilbert  
Louise Glück  
Jorie Graham  
Eamon Grennan.  
Terrance Hayes

Edward Hirsch  
Major Jackson  
Jane Kenyon  
Galway Kinnell  
Yusef Komunyakaa  
Philip Levine  
James Merrill  
W.S.Merwin  
Czeslaw Milosz  
Sharon Olds

Kay Ryan  
Charles Simic  
Mark Strand  
Wislawa Szymborska  
Jean Valentine  
Rosanna Warren  
Richard Wilbur  
C.D.Wright  
Franz Wright  
Adam Zagajewski

This class is about response, enthusiasm, making consequential decisions, communication of one's ardor, about discovery, discernment, loyalty, and the thrill of the art.

**Matthew Salesses**

## **Desire: Theory for Writers 2**

(FICTION)

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

In this course, a kind of continuation of the Fall though also welcome to new students, we will look at additional theory about desire. Again we will ask, how do we “read” and “write” desire more productively, as we do close readings of theoretical texts that may serve as an introduction to theory as it concerns a life of making art, of making something out of desire. We will read fewer books more slowly, with one final, creative assignment. Possible authors include Jonathan Lear, Lauren Berlant, Adam Phillips, Leo Bersani, Nguyen Tan Hoang, Sianne Ngai, Mari Ruti.

**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 20<sup>th</sup> 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*, and Raven Leiliani'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 a piece of fiction or nonfiction.

Ira Silverberg

## Culture Wars: Transgressive Literature of the Late Twentieth Century

(FICTION)

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

Beginning with the premise that the margins of our culture define the mainstream rather than the reverse, this forum surveys mid to late twentieth-century writers who challenged the status quo to catch up. With a particular emphasis on American writers such as Kathy Acker, William Burroughs, Sapphire, and Valerie Solanas, most of the assigned texts are driven by voice-- the voice of the outsider. Many of the books, including novels, memoirs, and stage work; some formally adventurous or "experimental," are written by those who have lived on the edge -- junkies; prostitutes; criminals; victims of abuse; or Queer before it was spelled with a capital Q. While the label "other" is usually based on ethnicity, sexual and/or gender identification; sexual "deviance;" mental health; or politics; those labeled as such evolve as the society does. Many are "mainstreamed" as their once "marginalized" voices are heard, published, and validated. Some springboard to a place of privilege and centrality in a culture that once eschewed and victimized them. So, what does "marginal" or "outsider" mean today? This is the quest here. Students will be required to write one paper and present multimedia biographical portraits of the writers studied to the class.

The syllabus is in formation. It may include some of the following books: *Naked Lunch*, William S. Burroughs; *American Dreams*, Sapphire; *Close to The Knives*, David Wojnarowicz; *Shock Treatment* (Twenty-fifth anniversary edition), Karen Finley; *The Maids*, Jean Genet; *Blood and Guts in High School*, Kathy Acker; *Closer*, Dennis Cooper; *Paul Takes the Form of a Mortal Girl*, Andrea Lawlor; *Negrophobia* (reissue from NYRB Classics), Darius James; *The Scum Manifesto*, Valerie Solanas.

### Emily Skillings

## Go On...Go Off! The Very Long Poem

(POETRY)

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

This class will explore the obsessions, digressions, tactics, movements, and forms of "very long" and book-length poems. We will read widely—moving between contemporary epic, modern and postmodern experiments, novels in verse, hybrid texts, documentary, linked series, and extended works of recorded dailiness / consciousness. Enrolled students will propose and complete their own independent reading outside of class as well as participating in group discussion of shared readings. Central to our discussions will be explorations of practice, attention, and the experience of reading. Writers will keep reading logs and begin their own projects with 15-20 pages of long-form writing.

Poets we may encounter: A.R. Ammons, John Ashbery, Dionne Brand, Aimé Césaire, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Inger Christensen, H.D., T.S. Eliot, Ross Gay, Lyn Hejinian, Nathaniel Mackey, Bernadette Mayer, Maggie Millner, Alice Notley, George Oppen, The Pearl Poet, Tommy Pico, Claudia Rankine, Robyn Schiff, Eleni Sikelianos, Frank Stanford, William Carlos Williams, C.D. Wright, and Lila Zemborain.

**Christine Smallwood**

## **Siblings**

(FICTION)

Mon., 10am-12pm

The sibling relationship—or the fact/fantasy of being an only child—is one of the most determining aspects of a person's life. What does including or excluding sibling relationships do to a work of literature? What comes into view, or is hidden, when we attend to the horizontal (brother/sister) rather than vertical (parent/child) bonds inside a family? In this seminar, we will read fictional texts in which siblings are foregrounded or, in some cases, repressed altogether, alongside psychoanalytic theory, philosophy, memoir, and other genres. We will ask: What are the challenges and pitfalls of writing about siblings? What's at stake in the sibling relationship and its representations? Under what conditions is it possible to write about a sibling? How can a sibling become more than a reflection of a narrator's or protagonist's psyche? What sorts of disruptions ensue when a sibling enters a book—or a family?

**Lynn Steger Strong**

## **Doubles, Doppelgängers, and Foils**

(FICTION)

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

It can be useful to think of fiction-writing in terms of choreography: navigating the movements between characters, the writer and reader engaged in a (hopefully) complicated, thrilling relational give and take. In this class, we'll look at the particular movements, the interplay, the push and pull, of the dyad in fiction, how one character can function as mirror, clarifying companion, and catalyzing force. We'll read about twins, best friends, enemies and opposites, individuals living double lives, and antagonists that may or may not be wholly a construction of the narrator's imagination. We'll consider how the particular space of the other, or finding and embodying other spaces in a single self, can open you up to new layers and textures of storytelling, how the other character complicates and amplifies the fiction and gives you access to new dimensions of the idea of a self.

Selected Readings:

*Despair*, Vladimir Nabokov

*Sula*, Toni Morrison

*The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Patricia Highsmith

*Ladivine*, Marie Ndiaye

*The Notebook*, Àgota Kristóf

*Anagrams*, Lorrie Moore

*Rebecca*, Daphne de Maurier

*Erasure*, Percival Everett

*The Face of Another*, Kōbō Abe

**Benjamin Taylor**

## **Inner Life and How to Reveal It**

(NONFICTION)

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

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

Willa Cather: *A Lost Lady*

Joseph Mitchell: *Up in the Old Hotel*

Hugh Trevor-Roper: *Hermit of Peking*

Toni Morrison: *Song of Solomon*

Flannery O'Connor: *Mystery and Manners* (plus a selection of short stories)

Geoffrey Wolff: *The Duke of Deception*

Tobias Wolff: *This Boy's Life*

James Merrill: *A Different Person* (plus a selection of poems)

Simon Leys: *The Death of Napoleon*

Louise Erdrich: *The Round House*

Roz Chast: *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*

Students are asked to read Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* prior to our first meeting.

**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.

**Kate Zambreno**

## **Investigations and Happenings: A Seminar on Annie Ernaux**

(NONFICTION)

Mon., 10am-12pm

Annie Ernaux has said that she uses language like a knife. But what is being cut through, or cut open? How can the present-tense be a site to stage this performance of writing about the past, memory, its relationship to shame and trauma? How do the Ernaux texts read with the immediacy and intimacy of a diary, and engage with the photograph, while also refusing the bulk of one's archive? The narrative event in the nonfiction of Annie Ernaux is often what she has called a happening, and reads like an investigation. The work becomes a documentation that occurs after (or through) crisis, from the illness or death of a parent, to a love affair, to the suspense and panic of an illicit and undesired pregnancy. This spring, we will immerse ourselves in the work of Annie Ernaux, gaining strategies and clarity about our own nonfiction projects. Every week we will read one of her books in translation (*The Years*, *A Simple Passion*, *A Woman's Story*, *Happening*, *A Man's Story*, *Shame*, *The Possession*, *Exteriors*, *I Remain in Darkness*), as well as texts that are kindred to Ernaux's project (Anne Boyer's *The Undying*, Édouard Levé's *Who Killed My Father*, Marie NDiaye's *Self-Portrait in Green*). Writers will keep a notebook thinking about their relationship to writing and their own projects, guided by their Ernaux immersion. The class will be about reading and thinking—how can Annie Ernaux give us more permission, more directness, more audacity?



## 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.

**DEADLINE EXTENSION:** Applications for the Word for Word Workshop will now be accepted until **5:00 p.m. SHARP on Friday, December 1**. Apply at [http://bit.ly/WFW\\_Application](http://bit.ly/WFW_Application) (you must be signed in to LionMail to access the application).

### Literary Translation Workshop

**Alyson Waters**

Wed., 2pm-4:30pm

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

Joshua Cohen

## Long Century, Short Novels

(FICTION)

Mon., 10am-12pm

The class will read a number of novels written during the twentieth century and discuss them in terms of, but not limited to, their voice, personhood, point of view, and use of tense and time.

The books are:

*Ethan Frome*, Edith Wharton

*Death in Venice*, Thomas Mann

*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Muriel Spark

*The Fox*, *The Captain's Doll*, *The Ladybird*, D.H. Lawrence

*In a Free State*, V.S. Naipaul

*A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, Peter Handke

*Black Water*, Joyce Carol Oates

*The Blind Owl*, Sadegh Hedayat

Jared Daniel Fagen

## Contrary Tendencies: Surrealism & Prose Poetry

(POETRY)

Tue., 11am-1pm

This famous maxim, which concludes Breton's second book, captures the complex spirit of surrealism and will equally serve as the guiding light for this course. Indifferent to talent, impatient with craft, and dismissive of poetic genius, surrealism calls to those who would delight in the spontaneity of paroxysm and the disturbance of paradox, the rapture of reverie and the "exalting alliance of contraries" (as René Char put it). The light no longer reveals beauty but blinds the beholder; the liberation of night awakened by the lightning storm which passes over us, when there's no shelter in sight, will be our primary concern. To that end, we will consider the fundamental passageways of surrealist experience—quotidian rupture, chance encounters, inexhaustible unconscious desire, irrational juxtapositions—in the playground of its hybrid compositions, specifically the prose poem, lyric essay, dream journal, and aphorism. Our exploration of the radical amalgamation of generic forms will be conducted by close readings of, as well as theoretical approaches to, surrealist texts and the contained tension between opposites that render their emancipatory (and diverse) articulations. Some writers we will read and discuss include: Will Alexander, Gaston Bachelard, Georges Bataille, Walter Benjamin, André Breton, Claude Cahun, Garrett Caples, Leonora Carrington, Aimé Césaire, René Char, Chika Sagawa, Hélène Cixous, Robert Desnos, Paul Éluard, Sigmund Freud, Edmond Jabès, Max Jacob, Andrew Joron, Michel

Leiris, Ghérasim Luca, Karl Marx, María Negroni, Paul Nougé, Meret Oppenheim, Gisèle Prassinos, Pierre Reverdy, Remedios Varo, and Yi Sang.

**Leslie Jamison**

## **The Self**

(NONFICTION)

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

This will be a lecture course focused on the craft of constructing a self on the page. We'll discuss how to create an autobiographical "I" who feels plural (as we all do) and navigates the built worlds of prose in surprising and dynamic ways--through break-ups and bus rides and breastfeeding sessions, through the haunted hallways of memory and desire. We'll talk about the shame that can attach to writing from personal experience, or gets projected onto this task, and the rigorous work of turning this personal experience into art.

For everyone who has ever told me, "I am *just* not that interested in myself," and meant it sincerely, God bless you. (I mean that sincerely.) But I am interested in myself. And I'm interested in people who are interested in themselves. I can already imagine a critic mocking these statements, which is also a form of self-regard: imagining the reactions of others.

This is all to say, I feel the shame of self-interest. But the fact remains—many of my favorite books were written by people who were interested in themselves, too. I'm interested in the idea that being interested in yourself deepens your capacity to be interested in the lives of others.

Over the course of the semester, we'll discuss the constructed self as multiple and simultaneous, hungry and changing, restless and tender, built from scenes and fragments and breakfast preferences and half-smoked cigarettes and curt words papering-over unspoken vulnerabilities. We'll talk about writing ordinary life—the everyday, the unextraordinary, the mundane—and excavating its sharp glimmers of resonance and truth. We'll talk about writing relationships, illness, grief, pleasure, and joy. We'll talk about using personal archives—emails, photographs, text chains, scribbled diaries, cell-phone videos—in the archeological work required to build the self as a complicated and surprising character. We'll also talk about the role of the first-person in writing criticism and reportage, operating from the premise that the self can be an illuminating rather than obstructive presence.

Classes will consist of roughly an hour of lecture and an hour of discussion. We'll be reading and discussing authors including Saint Augustine, Audre Lord, Charles D'Ambrosio, Kristin Dombek, Terese Marie Mailhot, Dodie Bellamy, Claudia Rankine, Chris Kraus, James Baldwin, James Agee, Vauhini Vara, Sei Shonagon, Chloe Cooper Jones, Ross Gay, Nathalie Leger, and Saidiya Hartman. Though the bulk of our readings will consist of creative nonfiction, our discussions will run to fiction and poetry as well. Students from all concentrations welcome.

## SPECIAL PROJECTS WORKSHOP

Edwin Torres

Thu., 4:15pm-7:15pm

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.

# MASTER CLASSES

Maisy Card

## Composing Fiction in Nonstandard English

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Mon., 10am-12pm – Mar. 18 to Apr. 22

This master class is designed for students who write in nonstandard English or who incorporate a creolized form of English in their work. Drawing from different global traditions of vernacular literature, we'll examine works of fiction written in patois, pidgin, slang, AAVE, creole, or what Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite called "nation language." As we read, we'll ask ourselves a series of questions: how does each writer negotiate the task of writing for multiple audiences--one familiar with their language and one wholly unfamiliar? What do we lose or gain when a predominantly oral tradition is transposed into written text? What tricks does each writer deploy to capture the rhythmic expression or musicality of speech? Readings will include works by Earl Lovelace, Peter Carey, Alan Duff, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, R. Zamora Linmark, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Douglas Stuart, Olive Senior, Percival Everett, and Marlon James, among others.

Carina del Valle Schorske

## First Person & The Politics of Place

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Thu., 4:15pm-6:15pm – Mar. 7 to Apr. 18

In this seminar, we will read five slim, rather genre-queer books that attempt to theorize politically complicated places from a first person perspective. These writers are not simply writing as journalists or personal essayists—they're explicitly aiming to expose the structural foundations of political problems, and, in some cases, propose alternatives. They attempt interventions in high stakes debates about apartheid (Catherine Taylor's *Apart*), urban renewal (Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*), class formation (Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*), authoritarianism (Julie Taylor's *Paper Tangos*), and environmental racism (the title essay from Sarah Broom's *The Yellow House*). What led these writers to choose the forms they did? How is the search for literary form related (or not) to the search for political alternatives? How does the intimacy of the first person function, and why is it necessary to the arguments each of these writers ultimately make? What of our own personal experiences in the places we've inhabited seem potentially connected to broader political processes and how can we begin to make these links clear to ourselves and to potential readers?

**Darcie Dennigan**

## **Seven Degrees Unto Absurdity**

4 Sessions, 1 point – Fri., 1:10pm-3:10pm – Apr. 5 to Apr. 26

This course takes to heart Camus' dictum that realizing life's absurdity "cannot be an end, but only a beginning," and is an invitation to writers of any genre to begin (or continue!) experimenting with the absurd. We'll look to the Theatre of the Absurd and to some brilliantly out-of-tune poets and fiction writers. The reading list will include excerpts from Fran Ross' novel *Oreo*, Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian*, and Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit*, as well as Hiromi Ito's devastating poem "Killing Kanoko"--plus we'll steal some moves from classics like Vasko Popa's poetry sequence "Bone to Bone," Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky's "Quadraturin," Daniil Kharm's short plays, and back to Ionesco and who undertook absurdity as a spiritual quest, insisting that "The comic alone is capable of giving us the strength to bear the tragedy of existence." We will, as Kevin Wilson describes it, "tilt" the houses we live in seven degrees... Expect to play with dialogue, tone, "tragic rhythms," and more, all to create one or more works with your own particular strand of absurdity.

**Michele Filgate**

## **Building a Writing Career**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Wed., 5:15pm-7:15pm – Jan. 24 to Mar. 6

Figuring out how to build a writing career can be daunting. Sometimes it can feel like everything you need to know is a secret that only a select group of people have access to. In this business-oriented class, we'll tear down those imaginary walls and you'll learn how to build a platform and get published, with an emphasis on practical tips and resources. We'll focus on all of the tools you need, including the art of the pitch, best practices for working with editors, finding your individual voice, being brave on the page, and staying organized. Students will have the opportunity to workshop their pitches and get constructive feedback.

**David Gordon**

## **The Art of Murder**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Mon., 6:30pm-8:30pm – Mar. 18 to Apr. 22

Since its beginnings with Edgar Allan Poe, the mystery or crime novel has been endlessly fascinating both to readers and writers, as inexhaustible as the sonnet, as each new author makes it their own. This class will explore crime fiction as a literary form, considering elements such as plotting, setting, the emergence of the detective as hero, the pulp-genre/high-literary divide, and crime fiction's social and cultural relevance, by looking at examples from the classic Golden Age, the emergence of the hardboiled detective, and some more experimental and international twists on this endlessly variable genre, as well as by trying our hand at a mystery ourselves. Authors include Christie, Simenon, Bolaño, Highsmith and others. Group discussion of readings will be combined with workshopping student efforts.

**Nathan Heller**

## **The Compass of the Large**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm – Mar. 18 to Apr. 22

Much of the work of writing is taking the messy bigness of the world and focussing, delimiting, and reducing it into small, expressive frames of narrative and argument. And yet many of the most successful pieces of writing also set their sails to catch large winds—whether they're reporting a moment of broad cultural change, like Didion's work describing the late sixties; engaging multiple views of a complex subject, as in reporting on charged public debates; or crossing arcs of time, in short-form memoir. How is that done? In this masterclass, we will explore techniques used to engage big, amorphous subjects on the small page. Individual seminars will center on pattern-finding, structure, time, subjectivity, and harmony & counterpoint (work with many and opposing voices). Readings center on the nonfiction essay in its literary and magazine forms, and will include nonfiction by Anne Carson, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Joan Didion, Wayne Koestenbaum, and E. B. White, as well as technical examples from fiction and poetry.

**Madhu Kaza**

## **Kitchen Table Translation**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Wed., 5:15pm-7:15pm – Mar. 20 to Apr. 24

Quiet as it's kept, translation is always already with us. Regardless of our identification as multilingual, bilingual, monolingual, or something in between, as writers we access multiple languages whether it be through reading texts in translation, through navigation of the different languages of home, community, public and professional life, or through the different registers of multiple Englishes that surround us. Some writers actively work in literary translation and some experience translation all the time in the cultural difference of their names, bodies, accents, movements and daily lives.

This class invites writers to read and write across languages to think through how we might channel translation through our own particular locations and dislocations in language to serve our stories, poems, essays and our selves. We'll pay particular attention to how immigrant and BIPOC writers have used translation and cross-language experimentation to claim space for new kinds of stories and ideas, and to sharpen their sensitivities to language. We will read translations and original writing by writers including Lina Mounzer, Don Mee Choi, John Keene, Eiko Otake and others. We'll also collaborate on cross-language experiments of our own. Note: Knowledge of a second language is not required for this class.

**Tan Lin**

## **Feelings, Affective Logics and the Experience of the Everyday**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Thu., 6:30pm-8:30pm – Feb. 29 to Apr. 11

This course looks at concepts having to do with the everyday through both writing exercises and readings. The focus will be on the recording of daily life and its various objects, with some thoughts

on the notions of ongoingness, boredom, and repetition. Concurrently, we'll look at the feelings, and the affective logics underlying the felt sense of the everyday-- in relation to issues touching on nonsense, absurdity and the unexpected. Writing assignments and selected short readings will comprise the bulk of the course. Some attention to moods, textures, perfumes, music, and atmospheres more generally associated with the experience of the everyday and everydayness.

A preliminary list of authors we may examine: Gertrude Stein, Sawako Nakayasu, Ted Greenwald, Alice Notley, Bernadette Mayer, Josef Kaplan, Dick Gallup, Stanley Crawford, Chantal Ackerman, and Anna Mendelssohn.

## **Ed Park**

### **The First Person and Its Discontents**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm – Mar. 18 to Apr. 22

What alchemy turns the authorial “I” into that of the character on the page? We will pretend that autofiction never happened, and study some recognizable first-person modes that create the illusion of trust (the true account) or force us to work for it (the amnesiac, the unreliable narrator), as well as rarer forms (the FP plural, multiple FP narration). Texts include absolute bangers by Charles Portis, Ágota Kristóf, Ted Chiang, Russell Hoban, and others. A few fun exercises and assignments might provide fodder for grander projects of your own.

## **Chase Rhys**

### **Narrative Resilience: Writing Identity as Resistance in Marginalized Communities**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Wed., 10am-12pm – Mar. 20 to Apr. 24

South African author Chase Rhys introduces the rich and complex narratives of the people from Cape Town's Cape Flats, a community that embodies resilience in the face of South Africa's profound history of colonization, slavery, and apartheid.

Central to this course is how culture and language can reflect and shape the narratives of marginalized communities.

This Masterclass examines the opportunities and challenges presented by writing in non-standardized languages like Afrikaaps, a formerly oral-only language that interweaves English and Indigenous influences and is predominantly spoken by People of Color in the Cape Flats. It will explore the creative and expressive potential of using culturally specific vocabulary as a potent emblem of cultural resilience and identity.

Participants are encouraged to draw inspiration from their own cultures and histories, understanding how stories rooted in personal and communal experiences can empower and challenge. A key lesson of this course is the paradox that the more specific a narrative is in its cultural and contextual details, the more universal its appeal and impact become. By focusing deeply on the particularities of individual experiences and settings, writers can create work that resonates broadly, connecting with readers across diverse cultures and backgrounds.



Leonard Schwartz

## The Language of Philosophy in the Service of Literary Art

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Wed., 5:15pm-7:15pm, and Fri., 11am-1pm – Mar. 27 to Apr. 12

From Heraclitus to Maurice Blanchot, philosophers have sought to speak as poets, that is, to create a language in order to speak of that which seems to lie beyond the possibilities of expression. From Sappho to Proust poets and fiction writers have engaged in epistemological inquiry and posed metaphysical questions, while delving into questions of narrative, time, image, perception, and the depiction of thought. To what extent can the language of philosophy offer an expressive register for our writing, be it poetry, creative non-fiction or fiction? By locating the central metaphors behind apparently rational arguments, and by asserting that poems and stories have cognitive and epistemic value, this master class seeks to broaden our sense of what is possible in writing. Readings will be drawn from the fragments of Heraclitus and Sappho and the verse forms of Ibn Arabi, from modern and contemporary writers like Ezra Pound, Fanny Howe, and Danish poet Inger Christenson, and from the notebooks of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Always, the question is: how does the language of philosophy, once engaged with, add something to our range as writers?

Salvatore Scibona

## Independent People: A Novel by Halldór Laxness

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Mon., 6:30pm-8:30pm – Mar. 18 to Apr. 22

“There are good books and there are great books and there may be a book that is something still more: it is the book of your life,” wrote Brad Leithauser in the *New York Review of Books* about thirty years ago. He was referring to novels that inspire “so close a kinship that questions of evaluation (Is this book better than merely good? Is it some sort of classic?) become a niggling irrelevance.” For him that novel was *Independent People*, the masterwork of Halldór Laxness, the only Icelander ever to win the Nobel Prize. The book had sold nearly half a million copies in the United States when it was first translated here in the 1940s, but at the time of Leithauser’s proselytizing essay, it had been out of print here, along with nearly all Laxness’s more than sixty other books, for decades.

Since then, Laxness’s work has experienced an extraordinary renaissance in translation. Novelists have pushed his books on each other and on unsuspecting readers with no special interest in snow, sheep farming, or outer Scandinavia. As of last year, the Vintage edition of *Independent People* published in the late nineties was in its thirty-sixth printing.

The novel is the story of one Bjartur of Summerhouses, who has lately worked his way out of a form of near serfdom in the 1910s and managed to buy a cursed little farm in the Icelandic highlands. His lust for independence and his willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve and maintain it make him either a strange hero or an unforgivable villain depending whom you ask. Along the way one learns the best method of worming sheep (feed them tobacco) and some of the worst ways to raise a family.

The class will be a close reading of the text intended for fiction writers curious to learn how a big humane, sometimes inhumane, political, social, poetic family drama unfolds on the page. Laxness was heir to probably the grandest literary tradition of the smallest nation, the medieval Icelandic

sagas. Their influence allows him a freedom of point-of-view and a visionary authority that contemporary writers seldom dare. We'll try to figure out how he does it.

Students will write one brief critical or creative piece in response.

## **Vijay Seshadri**

### **Sylvia Plath**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Tue., 4:15pm-6:15pm – Mar. 19 to Apr. 23

Maybe in spite, maybe because, of all the attention lavished on her, Sylvia Plath is still understood, sixty years after her death, as a case, a cause, a cult, a martyr or a monster, rather than what she actually is—an ordinarily great poet, like Rimbaud or Keats. Why is this? An interesting question, and one of the many we'll try to answer in this class, as we undertake to rescue Plath from biographical and cultural distortion. We will read most of her entire body of work, poetry, fiction, letters and journals, and place her in her literary context by approaching her through both her significant antecedents (the Symbolists, Dylan Thomas, Robert Lowell) and her descendants.

## **Jesse Sheidlower**

### **Defining the Dictionary**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Mon., 6:30pm-8:30pm – Jan. 29 to Mar. 4

While people know that you use the dictionary to find out what words mean, rather few know how dictionaries actually 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 acceptability; to the Oxford English Dictionary's scholarly and historical approach; to current dictionaries and online language resources, which use computational analyses of billions of words to determine how the language is actually used.

We will also explore how and why the meanings and usages of words change over time, and how dictionaries monitor and explain 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? Why are some words or meanings regarded as “ungrammatical,” and how does this vary across different styles of writing?

The skills required to analyze and describe real language are beneficial for all writers, not just for the would-be dictionary editor (a job that is increasingly rare, as the availability of good dictionaries online forces cutbacks or closures at traditional reference publishers). 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—and appropriate—to different audiences.

**Darby Minow Smith & Lynnette Widder**

## **Excavating Ideas From Your Surroundings**

6 Sessions, 1.5 points – Mon., 4:15pm-6:15pm – Jan. 29 to Mar. 4

In this co-taught multidisciplinary master class, we'll use Columbia's rich history and resources to find story ideas across campus. Architect Lynnette Widder will teach students how to read technical documents; writer Darby Minow Smith will provide story-generating prompts based off documents, and guidance on further research. We'll make stops at the Avery Rare Book collection, imagine Morningside's ghost arboretum, and read architecture drawings. By discussing, debating, and exploring our campus, we'll build up research skills and fill notebooks with story ideas.

Note: this class will take regular field trips around campus.

**Jessi Jezewska Stevens**

## **Radical Readings in Climate Literature**

4 Sessions, 1 point – Mon., 6:30pm-8:30pm – Mar. 4 to Apr. 1

Over the past decade (and in the wake of Amitav Ghosh's 2016 call-to-arms *The Great Derangement*), global literature has made exciting shifts toward a new environmental consciousness. This course seeks to expand on recent progress by continuing to push the boundaries of what might be considered "climate literature." Picking up the thread from Ghosh, we'll embark on fresh investigations of the literature's capacity to embody and engender climate consciousness.

A fundamental assumption of this course will be that climate change is the product of social, economic, and political paradigms—dramatic contexts that have long belonged to the literary domain. Breaking free from familiar blueprints of dystopia/utopia and anxiety/alarm, we'll seek to radically redefine "cli-fi" by applying this assumption to works that haven't historically been read through an environmental lens. A tentative reading list includes *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by DH Lawrence, *The Years* by Annie Ernaux, and *The Leopard* by Tomasi di Lampedusa. The selected novels, memoirs, and essays will spark conversations about the representation of energy, capitalism, consumerism, inequality, revolution, gendered conceptions of nature, and more, as well as the formal strategies writers use to incorporate these themes. Additional excerpts from economists, environmental historians, activists, and critics (e.g. Wangari Maathai, Rachel Carson, Joachim Radkau, Sianne Ngai) will bolster our discussions.

Our approach will be inquisitive, open to discovery and experimentation: How might a broader awareness of gender, post-colonial history, market theory, and economics influence the ways in which we contextualize environmental distress in the novel and the essay? How might learning to *read* existing literature - and through it, the world - as environmental history illuminate the political and economic patterns that underpin climate catastrophe—and/or enable new environmental and literary paradigms? What if we've been writing "climate literature" all along...?

At the end of this course, students should be equipped to define what "climate literature" means to them within their own sociopolitical contexts and writing practices. In addition, students will gain experience in drawing cross-disciplinary inspiration from philosophy, history, and economics.

**Jeremy Tiang**

## **Translating for the Stage**

4 Sessions, 1 point – Tue., 4:15pm-6:15pm – Jan. 30 to Feb. 20

Despite the growing conversation about diversity in the US theatre ecosystem, this diversity has tended to stop at the borders of the English-speaking world. What does it mean to reach beyond that through translation? This master class will investigate the various aspects of theatrical translation: dialogue, setting, cultural context, collaboration. We will work together on translating excerpts of a play, using a crib from the original language, then contrast previous productions of the script in both languages. In addition, participants may bring in their own translation of a play excerpt for workshopping. Jointly run by LTAC and the Theatre Program, this class will draw from the strengths of both departments, exploring play translation both on the page and on the stage, at the intersection of text and performance.