

# WV Wesleyan Low-Residency MFA Program

## Winter 2018 Residency Seminars

All students, regardless of genre track, are required to complete the assigned reading and viewing before the residency. Purchase (or check out of the library long-term) the assigned books (there is only one assigned book); watch the assigned three films and read/view the assigned five web links; download and print all PDFs shared through Google Drive (there are a total of nine PDFs, six for faculty seminars, three for graduating student seminars), or store the PDFs in an organized fashion electronically, for easy access. At the residency, you are required to have at the ready all materials relevant to the day's seminars. All reading/viewing listed as "recommended" is optional.

Note on the residency schedule that the seminars offered by Jeremy Jones and Mark DeFoe will run concurrently, and you may attend the seminar of your choice; you need to complete reading for only the seminar you attend that session. Note also that Graduate Seminars (the seminars taught by graduating students) will all run concurrently. You may attend the Graduate Seminar of your choice during each concurrent session; there will be a sign-up sheet at the residency to ensure balance in attendance at Graduate Seminars; as with concurrent faculty seminars, you are required to complete pre-assigned work, if any, for only the Graduate Seminars you attend.

**READING AS A WRITER, Diane Gilliam.** So often, as poets and writers, we wonder what it must have felt like to write those poems and stories we love and aspire to most. During this class we will talk about some reading practices that can help us imagine and recreate the writing of poems as we read them. We'll talk nuts-and-bolts strategies for reading more actively at the level of individual verbal events, poems, and at the level of the book. The assigned reading is mostly connected to the verbal events part of the class, so as you read, be on the lookout for things that happen in the poems at that level.

**ASSIGNED READING:** Download | Gilliam PDF

**WRITING IN THE GAPS, Jessie van Eerden.** Gaps are generative; they invite invention. Often, what interests us about a parable or myth, a news story or a painting, is what goes unsaid or what remains mere suggestion. This seminar will explore possibilities for engaging biblical and other mythic narratives, as well as iconic historical and artistic events, as fresh material. We will explore the idea of *midrash*, a term in rabbinic literature for the interpretive study of the Bible; with the root meaning "to seek out" or "to inquire," *midrash* is what Rabbi Lawrence Kushner calls the "fiction concealed beneath the apparent text of the biblical narrative: what might have happened before and after, above and below the biblical story." Instead of domesticating the sacred text, or packaging it for moralizing message, *midrash* makes the text strange in order to access its truths on another level. We'll combine principles of *midrash* with insights from a craft essay on research by Andrea Barrett, and will examine examples of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction that enter mythic, historic, and artistic moments at the fissure of the what-if, of the maybe-it-was-like-this, of the unheard voice, of the hinted-at life. Ultimately, in the process of writing in the gap that exists between the familiar narrative and the unspoken one, we discover that the gap we're really exploring is the one between our familiar selves and our selves estranged and understood anew.

**ASSIGNED READING:** Download | van Eerden PDF containing:

Excerpt from Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping* alongside select verses from Genesis 6:9-9:17  
Excerpts from Michael Ondaatje's novel *Coming Through Slaughter*  
"Sea of information," craft essay by Andrea Barrett  
Poems from Patricia Smith's collection *Incendiary Art*  
"Fuller," essay by Albert Goldbarth

**WRITING PERSONAL RESPONSES TO PUBLIC VIOLENCE, Katie Fallon.** Tragic events sometimes compel us to write about them—to witness them, to process them, and to communicate our responses as artists. How can we do that in respectful, non-exploitative ways? How close to an event do we need to be for it to be "our" story? What ethical issues may arise? Why write about tragic, horrific events at all?

In this seminar, we will read and discuss poetry and creative nonfiction written in response to public acts of violence, including terrorist attacks, school shootings, and workplace violence. **The readings for this seminar are upsetting.** It may be best not to read them all at one time. I will not require that you share the ways these readings have affected you, but I will leave time during the seminar for folks who wish to discuss this. We may also discuss ways to workshop your classmates' or your students' pieces on similar topics.

**ASSIGNED READING:** Download I Fallon PDF containing:

“Good Bones” by Maggie Smith  
 “In the Loop” and “So I Know” by Bob Hicok  
 “Leap” by Brian Doyle  
 “Five Years Later” by Alberto Alvaro Rios  
 “NeVer ForgeT” by Matthew Vollmer  
 “All the Dead Boys Look Like Me: For Orlando” by Christopher Soto  
 “The Fourth State of Matter” by Jo Ann Beard (**Note that Beard’s essay is also assigned for David Evans’s Graduate Seminar “Why the Braided Essay?”**)

**THE POEM ON THE PAGE, Doug Van Gundy.** According to poet Robert Wrigley, “The only tool the poet possesses that is not also possessed by the writer of prose is the line...if you’re not writing lines, you’re not writing poetry.” In this seminar we will explore how the line break dictates not only how the poem looks on the page, but also its pacing, tone, and meaning. We will look at examples of poems that use the line break to particularly strong effect, expand our vocabulary around this literary device, and gain in-class experience in breaking poems into lines. **No assigned reading.**

**PLACES LIVED, PLACES REMEMBERED: A SEMINAR ON ENVIRONMENT, Karen Salyer McElmurray.**

This seminar will focus on some elements of “setting” in prose. What makes a place so alive we can walk around in, touch it, claim it as one we know is our own? More specifically, we will discuss the place our program here at WVWC honors—the heart of Appalachia. When does prose portray an Appalachia that is authentic? When does it, instead, recreate a place that is no longer the real one? Does memory sometimes equal sentimentality? Good writing both remembers, vividly recreates, and reflects on experience. We will do some in-seminar writing as well as discuss excerpts from both “the tradition” as well as some contemporary work. **No assigned reading.**

**MAGICAL REALISM, Jacinda Townsend.** Working from the presumption that realism is a default of sorts, we will examine the more unusual realms of our imagination, visiting with the worlds of absurdism, surrealism, magical realism, and fabulism. Why make these forays into the unusual? We will discuss magic in all its various uses—as psychological and political shortcut, as omniscient narration, as sociological critique. Working from the presumption that these various forms of magical realism are used by the author only in order to enhance the narrative at hand, we will discuss works by Italo Calvino, Kelly Link, Helen Oyeyemi, Danzy Senna, and others.

**ASSIGNED READING:** Download I Townsend PDF containing:

“A Stone Woman,” by A.S. Byatt  
 “Admission,” by Danzy Senna  
 “Stone Animals,” by Kelly Link  
 “Who Will Greet You at Home,” by Lesley Nneka Arimah

**PROSE TECHNIQUE: STRUCTURE AND STYLE. Eric Waggoner.** This seminar focuses on the mechanics and structure of clear, stylish prose writing. Inasmuch as expressive prose is a “made thing”—the product of an artist’s conscious, intentional design—it’s useful and instructive to spend time investigating how clarity and style result from attention to grammar and syntax. This seminar provides a short overview/review of the principal elements of English grammar (the conventional “rules” that govern any language system) and syntax (the arrangement of words and phrases in meaningful order and sensible relationship to each other). From there, we discuss “style” as the end result of a writer’s intentional application of the techniques of grammar and syntax. N.B: Though our discussion of grammar and syntax will by its nature be centered on prose writing, poetry is of course bound by every convention of grammar and syntax. The broader focus, then, will be “grammar, syntax, and style” in literary writing, genre irrelevant. Prepare accordingly.

**ASSIGNED READING:**

Students should obtain and read Claire Cook’s *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing* (ISBN: 978-0395393918).

**TURNING TRAUMA INTO NARRATIVE, Laurie Cannady.** Whether you write poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction, you have memories—some of which are traumatizing—you’d like to integrate into your creative work. In “Turning Trauma into Narrative,” I will share my process of revisiting past traumas and crafting those experiences into personal essays and memoirs. This seminar is designed to address the following craft issues:

- Best practices for writing trauma
- Empowering survivors of trauma to embrace their journeys
- Shaping and sharing past pains so they become a tool of enlightenment for others
- Identifying self-care and general wellness tips that assist memoirists writing trauma. **No assigned reading.**

**WRITING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE, Jeremy Jones.** [*Concurrent with COLLAGE POETRY*] What responsibilities do literary nonfiction writers have when writing about other people? What forms and approaches best bring these people—family, friends, public figures, strangers—to life on the page while also navigating the ethical minefield created in the process? Should you let your “subjects” read your work? Should they be given editorial control? Veto power? Should you even care what they think? This seminar will survey approaches by a handful of writers in order to offer participants a menu of practical techniques and ethical considerations.

**ASSIGNED READING:** Download I Jones PDF containing:

Philip Lopate's "On the Ethics of Writing About Others"

Robin Hemley's "Truths We Could Live With"

Mary Karr's "Dealing with Beloveds (On and Off the Page)"

Laurie Hertzels "But Will They Love Me When It's Done?"

My "Jesus, Pl, and the Case of the Liberating Curse" (I'm going to talk through changes I made and reactions the "subject" had about drafts and the final product.)

**POEM AS COLLAGE, Mark DeFoe.** [*Concurrent with WRITING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE*] College poetry is often defined as a hodge-podge of words stuck to a refrigerator or a version of concrete poetry comprised of clipped-out words, usually in exotic or artistic fonts. However, what I will discuss is poetry that employs a variety of seemingly non-poetic sources and devices to enhance the poem—prose passages, scholarly and historical quotations, scientific and medical observations, newspaper headlines, statistics, scenes from drama, cinema and TV, lines from other poems, instructions from how-to-do-it manuals—written “mixed media” creations. **No assigned reading.**

**THE ART OF LEVERAGE, Richard Schmitt.** Plot shifts in stories often hinge on who has leverage. Seesawing power shifts in scenes may involve multiple characters gaining and losing power over other characters thereby creating tension and a complexity reminiscent of real life. This class will examine how power can shift effectively from one character to another and how that movement creates tension and ultimately resolution.

**ASSIGNED READING:** Download I Schmitt PDF containing:

“Royal Beatings,” Alice Munro. From: *Selected Stories 1968-1994*.

“A View of the Woods,” Flannery O’Connor. From: *The Complete Stories*.

“The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” Ernest Hemingway. From: *The Complete Stories*.

**RECOMMENDED READING:** Jo Ann Beard’s essay “Family Hour” in *Boys of my Youth*. (*not provided as pdf*)

**THE DOCUMENTARY IMAGINARY: ONE WAY IT MEANS TO BE AN APPALACHIAN WRITER, Rebecca Gayle Howell.** From the late 19th century onward, Appalachia has been the seedbed for the documentary imaginary. Local color writers came through here for a few days and wrote book after book about us. The Farm Security Administration sent photographers and writers here to report on the Depression’s crisis of white poverty. Charles Kuralt practically declared the War on Poverty with a T.V. special. And yet, on the other hand, by watching closely and listening deeply to their neighbors, writers like Lucy Furman, James Still, William Demby, Harriette Arnow, and Crystal Wilkinson have written award-winning, game-changing documentary fictions that have helped define who we are and who we want to be. In this seminar, we will begin with the history of the documentary arts in our region, move through issues of representation, and explore how documentary methodologies can inform your creative research as you prepare to write the next major work in our tradition.

**ASSIGNED VIEWING:**

Jennifer Baichwal's *The True Meaning of Pictures: Shelby Lee Adams' Appalachia*

John Boorman's *Deliverance*

Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March*

James Dickey interviewed in 1970: <https://goo.gl/UQtmQN>

Doris Ulmann's Gallery at the Getty: <https://goo.gl/Mb39JA>

Roger May's web project “Looking at Appalachia”: <https://goo.gl/AKqsQt>

**ASSIGNED READING:**

*Mothing on Perilous*. Lucy Furman. First three chapters <https://goo.gl/hUcHJG>  
 “McElwee’s Confessions.” William Giraldi. *Oxford American*: <https://goo.gl/CDvAp9>

**RECOMMENDED VIEWING:**

Charles Kuralt's *Christmas in Appalachia*  
 Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, USA*  
 John Sayles' *Matewan*  
 Elizabeth Barret's *Stranger with a Camera*  
 Diane Sawyer's *A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains*  
 Dave Willis & Jim Fortier's *Squidbillies*, three episodes of your choice

**GRADUATE SEMINARS****Concurrent January 4 @ 9 am:**

**TRANSCRIBING FOR A RESTLESS SLEEP: THE APPALACHIAN POET’S LOVE OF THE DEAD, Larry Thacker (poetry).** We can judge a people by how they treat their dead. We might also know a culture by how it treats itself through poetry. This seminar examines Appalachian necro-poetics, an often neglected major element of mountain poetry. Among the commonest themes in Appalachian poetry are family ties, socio-economic hardship, a beautiful pull toward place and landscape carrying that odd psychological longing for home even when those roots lead back to frustration and pain. Mountain poets often lean uniquely upon the dead as an element in writing as well. Whether literal or metaphoric, coloring environments rich with historical lore or associated with physical places such as cemeteries or haunted places, the dead surface constantly in the mountain poet’s work. We will survey past and contemporary writers (from James Still to Jane Hicks and Ron Rash), examine my own fascination with death and dying, and send attendees off with tools for better exploring these topics. **No assigned reading.**

**WHY THE BRAIDED ESSAY? David Evans (nonfiction).** My seminar will introduce the braided essay as a literary form that captures the disjointed nature of life and weaves a cohesive whole out of seemingly disparate elements. In so doing, it introduces real interruptions into the narrative that eventually come together, mostly by juxtaposition, sometimes not until the very end. Because of its complexity of form, neither static nor fixed, and various opportunities for connections, the braided essay is a good way to provide suspense by approaching a topic on the slant rather than in straight narrative. As a result, it can be especially effective by jolting the reader into a deeper understanding of the emotion the writer is trying to elicit. In addition, braided essays often provoke meditation and provide the reader with the freedom to piece together possible answers and interpretations. Advanced reading will include Brenda Miller’s “A Braided Heart: Shaping the Lyric Essay” and Jo Ann Beard’s “The Fourth State of Matter.” Miller’s essay provides a template of how the braided essay can be constructed. Using braided hair as a metaphor for the braided essay, she says the braid “has an allure so much more exciting than ‘normal’ hair, it has texture and substance and mystery.” Beard uses the form to explore her feelings and develop a firmer grasp on the sense of loss she feels after a horrific shooting takes the lives of several of her colleagues. I will also trace my own use of the braided essay, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages I’ve experienced.

**ASSIGNED READING:**

Download I Evans\_GradSeminar PDF: Brenda Miller’s “A Braided Heart: Shaping the Lyric Essay”  
**[Please also review Jo Ann Beard’s “The Fourth State of Matter” which is included in the PDF of readings for Katie Fallon’s faculty seminar “Personal Responses to Public Violence”]**

**CHILD NARRATORS AND THE GAUNTLET OF TRAUMA, Velicia Darquenne (fiction).** When writing young protagonists, whether in fiction or in memoir, who struggle through trauma, writers must walk a fine line to engage readers without indulging in the shock factor and traumatizing the reader. In his *New York Times* article “The Problem with Memoirs,” Neil Genzlinger says that “no one wants to relive your misery” and if your goal is to make readers feel the pain, “[y]ou’re a sadist, not a memoirist; you merely want to make readers

suffer as you suffered, not entertain or enlighten them.” This seminar will discuss four techniques that help writers heed Genzlinger’s warnings as they guide readers through a child protagonist’s trauma—Sign Posts and Signals, Language and Diction, Point of View and Camera View, and the Hope and Reward. These techniques are used similarly in both fiction and memoir; however, memoir can allow for a more journalistic method when revealing Sign Posts and Signals. My purpose is to provide the class with four different tools that can be used in their own writing when dealing with sensitive topics. Although I will be focusing on child protagonists, I believe these techniques are valuable even with adult protagonists, as well. I will use sections from *Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You* by Sue William Silverman, a first person, present point-of-view memoir; *Room* by Emma Donoghue, a first person, present point-of-view novel inspired by an event the author did not go through; *Bastard out of Carolina* by Dorothy Allison, a first person, retrospective point-of-view that is a fictionalized rendering of the author’s childhood; and *We the Animals* by Justin Torres, a first person plural, retrospective point-of-view that is not based on or inspired by the author’s life or any one person’s life. Each technique I will be discussing will have a book excerpt as an example.

**ASSIGNED READING:**

Download | Darquenne\_GradSeminar PDF: Prologue and first chapter of *Because I Remember Terror, Father, I Remember You* by Sue William Silverman and the vignette “The Night I was Made” from *We the Animals* by Justin Torres

**Concurrent January 5 @ 9 am:**

**THE BEST USES OF PROSE AND LINEATION IN POETRY WITHOUT METER, Aaron Morris (poetry).** It is commonly claimed that the prose poem facilitates freedom in writing, but it is rarely explained on a technical level why some authors find more freedom in prose, particularly when the line has proven flexible in the era of free verse. What particular content is best expressed in prose, and what is best expressed in lines? This seminar, after presenting a theoretical framework (bolstered by quotes from various authors) for understanding the role of rhythm in lines and the echoes of other prose forms in prose poetry, will use examples from many authors to examine how prose’s tendency toward cohesion of the physical text and the line’s tendency toward fragmentation affect readers in different ways. **No assigned reading.**

**“CHLOE LIKED OLIVIA”: THE DRAMATIC POTENTIAL OF WOMEN’S FRIENDSHIP, Vicki Phillips (fiction).** After reading the line “Chloe liked Olivia,” Virginia Woolf was astounded and expressed hope for more stories centered on women’s friendship. To many, though, women’s friendship seems like “a happy topic” with little potential for revealing human nature. What comes to mind are stereotypes about women making nice, being catty, being cliquish, being secretly and fundamentally at odds because of their competition for men. Examined more closely, with insights from feminist ethics, women’s friendship offers numerous compelling plots—what creates the friendship, what tests and strains the friendship, how can the friendship be exploited or its boundaries maintained, what can friendship accomplish that an individual on her own cannot? This seminar will present examples and illustrations of the dramatic potential women’s friendship offers the fiction writer.

**ASSIGNED READING:**

Download | Phillips\_GradSeminar PDF: Jane McCafferty short story, “Thank You for The Music”

**WHAT PUTS THE REAL IN MAGICAL REALISM? HOW LEGEND, FOLKLORE, AND CULTURE GROUND THE MAGIC, Rebecca Elswick (fiction).** How does a writer create both the realistic and magical perspectives of reality on the same level? My purpose is to discuss how writers create believable magical elements from the legends, folklore, and physiognomies of their cultures. First, we will examine the characteristics of magical realism and its origins attributed to South American writers Gabriel García Márquez and Isabel Allende. Then we will look at how the elements of magical realism are found in many cultures, including Appalachia. The discussion will concentrate on four books set in Appalachia that combine legends, folklore, and Appalachian culture with magical realism: *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *Ghost Riders* by Sharyn McCrumb, *Bloodroot* by Amy Greene, and *First Frost* by Sarah Addison Allen (the second book in a trilogy that carries the same magical elements throughout). **No assigned reading.**