

## WV Wesleyan Low-Residency MFA Program Summer 2018 Residency Seminars

*All students and auditors, regardless of genre track, are required to complete the assigned reading, writing, and listening before the residency. Purchase (or check out of the library long-term) the assigned books (there is only one assigned book); listen to the assigned seven audio files; read the assigned nine web links (all assembled in one Google Spreadsheet for which you have the link); download and print all seven PDFs shared through Google Drive, 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. Any reading listed as "recommended" is optional, but completion of all "assigned" reading is required for passing the residency courses.*

**RINGING THE BELL: CRAFTING ENDINGS THAT RESONATE, Jon Corcoran, 1-day seminar.** Oh, that terrible question: Where should I end this story? In this seminar, we'll examine a number of memorable story endings that continue to haunt us long after we've finished the last line. We'll ask ourselves *how* an ending achieves impact and resonates beyond the page. We'll consider how and where we should end our own stories and essays (and other narrative forms!) by looking at a few works that push beyond what we might think of as their natural stopping points. Central to this mystery is another question: What kind of story do I want to tell? We'll consider how our choices—in particular, those related to structure, plot, POV, and the creation of tracking devices—contribute to the impact of our endings. We'll consider the implications of ending a story "earlier" or "later" and how the choice of where to end a story ultimately determines what a story is "about."

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

"In the Gloaming," Alice Elliott Dark  
"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," Ursula K. Le Guin  
"A Good Man Is Hard to Find," Flannery O'Connor

**AS MUSIC SAYS IT IS, Devon McNamara, 1-day seminar.** Dame Rebecca West, novelist, journalist, travel writer, literary critic, cultural and political historian, still unrivalled for her protean approach to genre and for her blockbuster tome on her experience of what was once Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, perceived the nature of language in terms of melody. One of her biographers, Victoria Glendinning, points out that Rebecca West believed sentences, not words, are the foundation of language, and that this devotion to the shapes of her sentences gives West's writing "at its greatest its incomparable rhythmic fluidity." When concert pianist Claire Aubrey in *The Fountain Overflows*, West's lyrical autobiographical novel, reminds her children to always believe that "life is as extraordinary as music says it is," she declares a basic principle of poetic composition. This seminar examines the power and lyricism of Rebecca West's sentences—their intellectual force in relation to their poetic rhythms—focusing primarily on selections from *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* and *The Fountain Overflows*. **No assigned reading**, but, poets and fiction and creative nonfiction writers alike, put Rebecca West on your life list.

**HISHING IN THE RIFFLE: A SEMINAR ON LANGUAGE, Mesha Maren, 2-session seminar.** Language: it's our medium, the essential building block of everything we do as writers, but how often do we stop to actually consider it, not in terms of pretty metaphors and vivid descriptions, but in terms of these black marks we make on the page, which we all have agreed stand in for sounds that in turn stand in for objects and concepts. We, as English speakers, all know that the marks that form the letters "w i n d" stand for a sound that we all recognize as the word 'wind.' But how does that represent the real current of air, the way it feels, the way it moves? Language is strange and sometimes arbitrary and in this seminar we will ponder the early formation of the written word, the way that literacy affects the human brain, possibilities for decolonizing our writing and breaking all the rules. We will look at and emulate examples of the flexibility of language; the way that writers like Ann Pancake invent words ("The river is still up, *hishing* in the riffle."), or other writers invent constraints to force their brains to see things in a new way (what happens if, like the French experimentalist group Oulipo, you decide to write without the letter 'e' or rewrite the same scene 99 times in 99 different ways?). This seminar is split into two sessions: in the first we will discuss the assigned readings and in the second we will participate in various constrained writing exercises.

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

Selection from *The Spell of the Sensuous* by David Abram  
Selection from *The Names of Things* by Susan Brind Morrow  
Selection from *Decolonising the Mind* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o  
"Jolo" and "Wappatomaka" by Ann Pancake

Selection from *Plainwater* by Anne Carson  
 Selection from *Exercises in Style* by Raymond Queneau  
 Selection from *A Void* by Georges Perec

**RADIO ESSAY: THE ART OF SOUND AND STORY, Matt Randal O’Wain, 2-day seminar.** The human ear is attuned to emotional nuances within sound which enact a level of intimacy that is as textured as sight and touch. The faceless voices of strangers can trigger emotional responses because the mind is drawn to the oral component of storytelling. As we will see, the radio essay and podcast present a challenging mixture of constraint and freedom concerning both the audio and written essayistic form. In this seminar, we will discuss and listen to modern podcasts such as *This American Life*, as well as foundational radio essayists, like Joe Frank and radio memoirists, such as Scott Carrier and David Sedaris. We will analyze how music, facts, memory, and interviews are all integrated to create moving and informative literature. No prior experience in radio or digital audio is required.

In this two-part seminar you will also get a handle on using readily available editing software such as Audacity (which is free) so that you can take these skills with you as you strive to produce your own investigative journalism, personal essay or short fiction.

**ASSIGNED LISTENING:**

David Sedaris’s “Santaland Diaries” (34 minutes)

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/47/christmas-and-commerce/act-two>

Scott Carrier’s “My First Radio Story” (37 minutes)

<http://homebrave.com/home-of-the-brave//my-first-radio-story>

Joe Frank’s “Memories” (10 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOImgTvLfa4>

Howard Dully’s “My Lobotomy” (23 minutes)

<https://www.npr.org/2005/11/16/5014080/my-lobotomy-howard-dullys-journey>

Nancy “Out at Work” (35 minutes)

<https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/nancy-podcast-out-at-work/>

This American Life “Unconditional Love” (50 minutes)

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/317/unconditional-love>

The Memory Palace “Glowing Orbs” (6 mins)

<http://thememorypalace.us/2014/06/the-glowing-orbs/>

**THIS PRESENT ABSENCE: EXPLORING EPISTOLARY FORM, Jessie van Eerden, 1-day seminar.** Human experience involves a sheaf of documentation, and the umbrella of epistolary literature technically encompasses and engages it all and includes any work written as a series of documents, or one that integrates documents, such as letters, diary entries, newspaper clippings, and, more recently, emails, Facebook posts, and texts. In this seminar, though, we’ll limit our document-focus to the root word of the genre, the *epistle*, the letter. With a few exceptions, we basically write letters to people who are absent from us, often because we long for them in some way; when literature adopts the letter form, longing is on display and absence becomes palpable as a narrative force. In the assigned reading, and in your own experiments, we’ll discuss the wonderful polarities at play in epistolary work: the interrelation of known and unknown, familiarity and strangeness, distance and intimacy, and the veracity inherent in a document with the attending unreliability of letters that can lie. The potential for energy, urgency, and narrative pressure is enormous in this form. Longing, after all, can be highly generative.

**ASSIGNED READING: Download I van Eerden PDF which includes:**

- Jane McCafferty’s “Thank You for the Music”
- Andrea Barrett’s “Theories of Rain”
- Alice Munro’s “A Wilderness Station”
- Jessica Jacobs’s *Pelvis with Distance*, poems & notes
- Amy Hempel’s “Reference #388475848-5”

**RECOMMENDED READING (included in the PDF):**

Alice Munro's "Carried Away" (So that we can focus our 75 minutes, the required reading listed above is made up of all "pure-oxygen" letters, that is, any outside narrator has been banished, and we'll focus our discussion on those. But letters form only a part of "Carried Away," and it provides a beautiful example of how to splice letters w/narration.)

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU READ:**

- Why not simply use straightforward first-person in these stories since letters *are* basically first-person narratives? What would be lost if the story were told in straight first-person instead of in the epistolary frame?
- Linda Kauffman writes in her critical text *Special Delivery*: "The dialogue within the letter novel between letter writer and addressee is doubled by the dialogue between writer and reader" (xix). The reader is involved differently in epistolary fiction than in other modes—what is the reader's pleasure in reading these letters not addressed to her? How does the "eavesdropping" stance affect the reading experience? Does it feel illicit, sleuthy, exclusionary, intimate?
- "What you *can* say shows the shape of what you *can't* say," said Diane Gilliam in her residency seminar on the unsaid in poetry. The unsaid figures hugely in epistolary fiction, whether in intentional omission, in the absence of backstory that must be only *alluded* to because it would not be "realistic" to include in a letter form, or in the subtext between the lines of what a character is able to articulate within the limitations of her written language. How does the unsaid function in these readings?

**ASSIGNED WRITING:** After studying the readings, take a brief stab at one of these prompts drawn from the texts and bring your experiment to discuss at the seminar (write in any genre—poetry, fiction, nonfiction, or hybrid—and feel free to modify as is helpful; the letter form is elastic...if you want to be *presidential*, write it in tweets! And Robin Hemley has a great story set up as a horrific reply-all email chain...).

- After McCafferty, write a narrative using the thank-you note mode.
- If you have a story going with a central event like the murder in "A Wilderness Station," try to begin to break out the narrative as letters written by a few different characters, lending the story a feel of a "found correspondence." Note how a letter's addressee determines tone, gaps, narrative choices, etc.
- Linda Kauffman again, in *Special Delivery*: for epistolary-form production, "writing nurtures the illusion of speaking with the one whose absence is intolerable" (xix). After Barrett, write a piece addressed to a person whose absence is most palpable and intolerable for you (or for your character).
- Many of us love to read compendiums of correspondence, as Jessica Jacobs immersed herself in O'Keeffe's letters while writing *Pelvis with Distance*—maybe you've dipped into the letters of Van Gogh or Flannery O'Connor in *The Habit of Being* or your favorite artist, or family members. If there is a compendium that means a lot to you, try either or both of these prompts: create a poem of "found text" pulled from the letters and arranged according to your purpose, and/or write in persona using the letter-voice you've "heard" within the actual correspondence.
- After Hempel, adopt the formality of a letter to an official and go off the rails; pay attention to how you stretch but perhaps maintain believability as your impersonal addressee morphs into recipient-as-confidant.

**5 BEATS: HOW TO GRAB THEM AND KEEP THEM, Eric Waggoner, 2-day seminar.** Here is a hard truth: Editors tend to make a gut-level decision about an unsolicited piece very quickly—in minutes, sometimes in seconds. They may read a little ways past an unexciting opening gambit, in order to see whether a slow start pays off, but that gut-level response speaks very loudly, because it's a reliable barometric test of a reader's blind-engagement with any new piece of writing. How can you craft an opening sequence of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry that sets a solid hook? How do you get your readers to want to know, to need to know, what happens next? This seminar presents an overview of five "beats" or "moves" a writer can use to set the sort of hooks that keep readers engaged. These beats can occur in an opening line, an opening paragraph, an opening stanza, or an opening chapter. They can arrive in a rush, or they can be paced out over a series of pages. You can use all five, or you can use a select few. These beats take many forms. We'll discuss several multi-generic examples, and we'll also discuss how these five beats don't constitute a formula, but rather a strategy, with endless variations available to us. **No assigned reading.**

**DIALOGUE VERSUS DIALOG, Richard Schmitt, 1-day seminar.** Two accepted spellings, unlimited ways and means of letting characters speak, (and in some cases *think*), no absolute rules or directions about any of it, formulas all contrived, much of it reduced to the vague abstraction we call "ear"—all of it plunging us into a murky stew of struggling to write better dialogue. The class will be an attempt to sieve out some of the roles dialog plays in fiction, essays, and poetry. We will focus on how, and when, dialog is best used in harmony with (and at variance with) various other literary devices such as exposition and description. A handout with excerpts is inevitable. But, as a starting, and probably ending, point, we might all read two short stories, by Mansfield and Shepard.

**ASSIGNED READING: Download I Schmitt PDF which includes:**

“Bliss” by Katherine Mansfield (originally published in *Bliss and Other Stories*, 1918)

“Land of the Living” by Sam Shepard (from his 2009 collection, *Day out of Days*)

**MINING THE SPARK, Remica Bingham-Risher, 1-day seminar.** How do we find inspiration but balance creativity with the facts? One way is by linking history to your own place and time, bringing history into the present (in one poem, a series of poems, or throughout a book). Whether inspiration comes from form, facts, flesh, fancy or convergence, writers can mine what’s in the news, family history, regional history, archives, cultural movements, art, etymology, any number of vehicles to make their way to craft. By examining how contemporary poets mine, cull and salvage historical information, we’ll discuss research, how to do it effectively, how to use it, and what to discard.

**ASSIGNED READING: Access links for each reading via this Google Spreadsheet:**

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1FbN0x0pLYCMrM6jywB0OPYgZEFQzwHZ90C1V4yOx3QM/edit#gid=0>

Author	Poem Title
Ocean Vuong	Aubade with Burning City
MARTÍN ESPADA	Alabanza
Natasha Trethewey	Miscegenation
A. Van Jordan	From
Nathan McClain	Fire Destroys Beloved Chicago Bakery
Patricia Smith	34
Remica Bingham-Risher	Delicious, New Edition, 1986
Remica Bingham-Risher	Kuperberg, South Side Street Photo
Remica Bingham-Risher	(Two poems and a micro-essay)

**“STAY GOLD, PONY BOY”: MARGINALIZED CHARACTERS AND THEIR CORRELATIVES, Nathan Poole, 1-day seminar.** One could argue that the modern short story was born as an outside form in the same moment it embraced outsiders as its subject. If that’s true, it might also be true that “the marginal” is an encoded, ancestral force in the imagery of short stories. With this in mind, it might do us good to study a few fiction writers, both historical and contemporary, who make compelling use of imagery and characters on the fringe and to see what techniques are at play in the combination of these elements. We’ll look at the assigned reading as well as Peter Orner’s “Thumbs” (handout in lecture).

**ASSIGNED READING: Download I Poole PDF which includes:**

Chekhov’s “Gooseberries”

James Baldwin’s “Sonny’s Blues”

Gogol’s “The Overcoat”

Lydia Peele’s “Kidding Season”

**THE LINE IN THE LANDSCAPE: WRITING ABOUT PLACE, Doug Van Gundy, 1-day seminar.** A tomato grown in the sandy soil of Florida doesn’t taste anything like a tomato grown in a West Virginia creek bottom. And the identical variety of grapes grown in France and Australia are required by law to be called by different names, so important is the influence of place. In this workshop we will read and discuss a number of works that focus on place: as setting, as emotional locus, as character. Then we will respond to a number of writing prompts that explore how place figures in memory, shapes our sense of ourselves, and even influences the words we use in our writing.

**ASSIGNED READING: Download I Van Gundy PDF which includes:**

Richard Hugo essays (for background): “The Triggering Town” and “Assumptions” from *The Triggering Town*

James Wright poem (for a close-read) “Lonesome Pine Special”

**ART AND ARTIFACTS: WHAT WE USE WHEN WE WRITE NONFICTION, Delaney McLemore (graduating student seminar, nonfiction).** What do we use to remind ourselves of the past? Photographs, journals, videos, letters, diaries, to name a few. When we take to writing nonfiction, particularly memoir and personal essay, we don't just write our memories as they happened; we consult artifacts of our subject in order to make our writing vivid and believable. In this class, we'll take a look at both critical and creative examinations of artifacts, including Dorothy Allison's use of photography in *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* and Carolyn Kraus's craft essay examining her process of discovering her father. The goal here is to explore why we use the tools we do to render our narrators more (or less) believable. **Please bring a photograph with you, hard copy preferred, for a writing exercise.** If you don't bring one, you'll have to use a photograph of infant Delaney. Students beware.

**ASSIGNED READING:**

Students should obtain and read Dorothy Allison's *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* (ISBN: 978-0452273405).

**Download I McLemore PDF containing:** Carolyn Kraus, "Proof of Life: Memoir, Truth, and Documentary Evidence"

**RECOMMENDED READING** (*included in PDF*): Timothy Dow Adams, "Telling Stories in Dorothy Allison's *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*"

**TEACHING COMPOSITION, Ashley Lawson, 1-day seminar [optional].** Whether you are an about-to-graduate adjunct teaching at the college level for the first time who needs to produce a teaching portfolio or a more experienced already-faculty-member who would like to assess your current teaching practices, this session will help you to develop and refine your approach to teaching college-level Composition. Among the subjects we will cover will include textbook selection, syllabi planning, week-to-week teaching methods, assignment examples, grading/assessment techniques, and how to make the Composition classroom a rewarding experience both for you and your students.