

WV Wesleyan Low-Residency MFA Program

Winter 2019 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 book (there is only one assigned book), and download and print the thirteen PDFs shared through Google Drive, or store the PDFs in an organized fashion electronically, for easy access (see note on Grad Seminar PDFs in paragraph below). 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.

Note on the residency schedule that the Graduate Seminars (the seminars taught by graduating students) will run concurrently. You may attend the Graduate Seminar of your choice (regardless of whether a seminar lines up with your genre) during each concurrent session. You are required to complete pre-assigned work, if any, for only the Graduate Seminars you attend, so I suggest you select, prior to residency, the Grad Seminar you'd like to attend for each concurrent session so that you print only the relevant readings.

DISTILLATION, COMPRESSION, & CONDENSATION: GETTING BIG IDEAS INTO SMALL FORMS, Doug Van Gundy, 1-day seminar. This seminar will focus on the challenge (and allure) of short forms: flash fiction, micro-essays, and hyper-condensed poems. Writing in these forms can be liberating – allowing us to work outside of our normal habits while also honing the skills of brevity, precise imagery, specific vocabulary, and editing for the essential that can be applied to both shorter forms and longer works. We will read and discuss examples from several genres and explore some strategies for working shorter and smarter. **No assigned reading.**

VINEGAR-FACED AND VIGOROUS: SOUND TACTICS IN FICTION, Kayla Rae Whitaker, 1-day seminar. The poets among us most frequently discuss the power of sound in their work. However, it also benefits prose writers to consider sound a tremendous contributing element to their narratives. Readers of *Wuthering Heights* may come away with only the memory of the "vinegar-faced" servant Joseph, if only for the satisfaction of those v and f fricatives, the illumination in that initial, bellowing "ahhrgh." From the tongue-aching consonant chain to the drowsily like-beated sentence series, words with sonic weight can bolster plot, character development, and voice. They can also elevate a piece from a static entity to a living, moving creature that can be heard, and thereby felt, by the reader: soothing, buoying, haunting.

This seminar has two objectives. The first is to examine prose samples, ranging from the postmodern techno talk of George Saunders to the elegant, cozy exposition of James Joyce, to identify where, and how, sound-building tactics are at work. The second is to investigate how writers can adopt these sonic strategies for their own uses. In order to reach these goals, students can expect to step outside the usual mouth-closed, eyes-to-screen stance of the writer-at-work to employ vocal and listening exercises. This will be a decidedly chatty class, built on exchange and active investigation.

ASSIGNED READING: Download I Whitaker PDF containing:
The Western Wind chapter excerpt: "Sound"
"Sea Oak" by George Saunders
"The Dead" by James Joyce
Oreo by Fran Ross (excerpt)

NONFICTION FOR POETS, Catherine Venable Moore, 1-day seminar. Remember Rocks for Jocks? Math for Tenors? Welcome to Nonfiction for Poets! (Or Poetry for Journalists, if you prefer.) Where we will partake in an earnest search for Knowable Truth, while also devoting ourselves to Form, Image, and Sensory Experience. The complex ideas and issues we write about deserve not only deep archival research and original reporting, but also a high-fidelity reader experience. In this seminar we'll welcome elements from poetry into our nonfiction, and vice versa, widening our relationship to form as we widen our search for truth. We will read the work of poets who write essays, and journalists who push the craft of nonfiction to the heights of inventiveness and give our imaginations plenty of richness to revel in. We'll look at "reported poems" (Rukeyser), and seek to inhabit the vivid spaces that poets create in their work (Bishop). We'll read essays that take us on immersive journeys (McPhee) and bring reporting into the realm of the orphic (Dillard). We'll peer into the journals of a poet describing ordinary life with extraordinary exactitude (Hopkins). And read a bit of memoir by a poet who's concerned as much with surrealism and absurdity as with telling you exactly what happened (Lockwood).

ASSIGNED READING: Download I Moore PDF containing:
 Elizabeth Bishop “At the Fishhouses”
 Annie Dillard, “Total Eclipse”
 Gerard Manley Hopkins, pages from his journal
 Patricia Lockwood, excerpt from *Priestdaddy*
 John McPhee, “The Search for Marvin Gardens”
 Muriel Rukeyser, “Praise of the Committee” from *The Book of the Dead*
 George Saunders, “Braindead Megaphone”

FOR FUN (RECOMMENDED BUT NOT REQUIRED):

George Saunders podcast interview: <https://longform.org/posts/longform-podcast-75-george-saunders>
 Patricia Lockwood podcast interview: <https://longform.org/posts/longform-podcast-250-patricia-lockwood>
 John McPhee, *Draft No. 4*
 Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*

POETRY SURE IS A WASTE OF TIME MY FRIEND SAID, Steve Scafid, 1-day seminar. The first human tool was fashioned nearly two million years ago—a chunk of basalt the length of a human hand and sharpened to cut meat from bones and break into the marrow. Such an invention was crucial to our being here today. Poetry (as song and saying-what-you-mean) has also been crucial to our survival for being plainly useful like a common tool, while also cussedly defiant of any utility whatsoever making the art weird, essential, and un-killable. As delight often comes from sorrow and clarity from the nonsense of music, the resistance of use is helpful in poetry. We will think and talk about the two poles of sense and nonsense and the paradox of utility. We will write three small pieces in class and I will provide some things to read. **No pre-assigned reading.**

THE INNER MURMUR: DEVELOPING THE INNER LIVES OF CHARACTERS AS A FOUNDATION FOR EMOTIONALLY RESONANT NARRATIVES, Jessie van Eerden, 1-day seminar. Psalm 42:8—*Deep calls unto deep.* Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg writes that the Hebrew word translated here as “deep” is *tehom*—“unfathomable, void, dense with watery voices...subterranean waters.” To a writer, this psalm might suggest that, in stories that move us, it is the well-rendered inner life of a character that calls out to the inner depths of a reader. But how do we develop a character’s depths with only black marks on a page, and, relatedly, how do we dramatize strong emotion that is unforced and non-manipulative? With help from Maud Casey’s craft book *The Art of Mystery*, we will study narratives with an eye toward how the characters’ inner lives are manifested and whether the emotional shifts in the stories are earned, and if so, how. Often, our initial attempts at rendering inner life on the page read like psychoanalysis, *explaining* instead of *enlivening* the character, or *deepening* the character’s mystery. Emotional resonance is a subjective matter, but hopefully, by discussing techniques such as the use of flashback, memories, dreams, embedded scenes, the collapse and expansion of time, speculation, contradictions, and fluid movement from the external to the interior, we’ll each grow in our ability to develop in our characters—and thereby in our stories, poems, and essays—an inner murmur that beckons a reader.

ASSIGNED READING: Download I van Eerden PDF containing:
 Casey “Mystery in Character: A Secret Life with a Secret” (craft essay); Daum “What We Lose” (creative nonfiction); Blevins “Swimming Hole” (poetry); Pancake “Fox Hunters” (fiction); Holland “Love’s Thousand Bees” (fiction)

“LIKE A NEW KNOWLEDGE OF REALITY”: IRENE MCKINNEY & WALLACE STEVENS, Devon McNamara, 1-day seminar. How do two American poets meet a vital demand of their art: the rendering of the sacred in everyday life? Irene McKinney and Wallace Stevens, two distinct and powerful voices, decades and mountain ranges apart, disclose in the metaphoric texture of their poems the aesthetic and ethical requirements of the struggle to give shape to spiritual experience. This seminar explores the unique beauties of that struggle and the ways in which each poet’s language makes strenuous metaphysical demands on the audience, demands that evoke the richness of the human ordinary while urging us to behold and to grasp what can’t be called by any name other than the divine.

ASSIGNED READING: Download I McNamara PDF containing:
 “Sunday Morning, 1950,” “Groundhog,” “Ravi Sings,” “Our Lady of the Iguanas” by Irene McKinney, from *Unthinkable: Selected Poems*. Los Angeles, California: Red Hen Press, 2009.
 “Sunday Morning,” “Evening Without Angels,” “Angel Surrounded by Paysans,” “Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself” by Wallace Stevens, from *Collected Poems*. New York: Random House, 2015.

AS IF THE TOP OF MY HEAD WERE TAKEN OFF: GETTING MORE ENERGY INTO OUR POEMS, Diane Gilliam, 1-day seminar. We will be thinking about how to conjure this kind of energy into our work and looking at ways in which it manifests at the level of language and form. In terms of vision, I will be focused on paradox, especially as it's understood in the Jungian tradition. In terms of text, I'll begin with some considerations of patterns of repetition and variation, suspense, contradiction, juxtaposition and economy and then open the matter for discussion. As you gear up for the residency, give some thought to your own touchstone poems, what it was like when you first found them, and what it is about them that you can't do without.

ASSIGNED READING: Download | Gilliam PDF
And students should obtain and read **Robert Bly's book *Leaping Poetry***
(ISBN: 978-0822960034) (have a look at the poems, focus on the essays)

BIG HAIR DRUM FILLS: THE STRUCTURE OF EMOTIONAL SHIFT, Matthew Ferrence, 1-day seminar. I'll start with a provocative statement: the big hair rock 'n roll stage acts of the 1970s and 80s were masters of essayistic structure. Just listen to the drummers! Especially John Bonham and his rubberfoot driving thumps that provide forceful aural cues to modulate and enrich the over-the-top lyrics wailing at you from the stratospheric voice of Robert Plant. In this seminar, we'll explore how five different sorts of drum lick (disclaimer: I'm neither a drummer nor an ethnomusicologist) can serve as a sound-analogy for five different ways that essayists present emotional shift or contrast in their writing. That's what I'm really interested in, how essayists layer narrative, reflection, and information to move a reader along an emotional arc of discovery. In a fashion similar to the way a rapping snare drum can say, *listen up!*, the sudden introduction of new material can say, *pay attention!*, and open an essay into deeper territory, offering a way toward the resolution of the internal and external conflicts present within the ground story. Hair spray will not be provided.

ASSIGNED READING: Download | Ferrence PDF containing:
Brian Doyle, "Joyas Voladoras"
Jericho Parms, "Still Life With Chair"
Beth Peterson, "Glaciology"
Ryan Van Meter, "To Bear, To Carry..."
Lily Hoang, "On the Rat Race"
Lauren Slater, from *Lying*

RECOMMENDED READING (included in PDF):
Jo Ann Beard, "The Fourth State of Matter"
Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, "The Beautiful City of Tirzah"
Patricia Hampl, "Red Sky in the Morning"
Lily Hoang, *A Bestiary* (not provided on the PDF...worth a purchase!)
Marissa Landgrain, "Diani Mini"

STORYFORCE AS GYROSCOPE: POWERING NARRATIVE SPIN, Jacinda Townsend, 1-day seminar. A gyroscope appears to defy gravity only because it is exploiting the laws of physics to the maximum: opposing motions cancel each other, allowing the gyroscope to rotate, magically, in midair. Similarly, short stories often use opposing forces, such as cognitive dissonance or undermining detail, to keep their thematic concerns spinning and create more emotional resonance at story's end. In this seminar, we will examine contemporary short stories from a wide variety of authors in order to understand how these writers make two opposing motions create a stronger force.

ASSIGNED READING: Download | Townsend PDF containing:
"The Intruder," Andre Dubus
"The Management of Grief," Bharati Mukherjee
"The Things They Carried," Tim O'Brien
"What Kind of Furniture Would Jesus Pick," E. Anne Proulx

CONTENT AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN MG & YA FICTION, Mindy McGinnis, 1-day seminar. Learn how to write unlikeable (yet sympathetic) characters for the younger set, as well as how to sell empathy for these characters and create rapport with them. Also learn attributes that are immediate sells for both likeable and unlikeable characters for this age range, as well as how to incorporate these elements into your narrative using show v. tell. Also covered: how to write sex, language, and violence for middle grade and young adult readers without ringing the alarm bells of the gatekeepers. **No assigned reading.**

GRADUATE SEMINARS

Concurrent January 3 @ 9 am:

THE STRANGENESS AND SINGULARITY OF THINGS, Julia Kastner (nonfiction). What work can objects accomplish on the page? The real stuff and things of the world—beer cans, bracelets, worn-out shoes or cars—are often the details that capture my attention in a literary work. I suspect that this is a common, if not universal, effect of tangible things on many readers. Physical realities can establish the real world of the poem, essay, or story, and can also open up the work into a subject larger than the subject at hand. By examining the work of five writers that feature tangible things, in this seminar we'll look at several ways objects function in narrative: they can serve as tools for organization, characterization, grounding, and as entry points. We'll also talk about the objects in writing that you've found effective.

ASSIGNED READING: Download I Kastner PDF containing:

Excerpts from Mark Doty's *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon*, Terry Tempest Williams's *Pieces of White Shell*, and Cutter Wood's *Love and Death in the Sunshine State*; Scott Russell Sanders's essay "The Inheritance of Tools"; and Dan Albergotti's poem "Among the Things He Doesn't Deserve"

Bring to class: a few lines (literally, just a few lines! two or three) of prose or poetry that you appreciated for its use of an object or objects, and be thinking about why these lines appeal.

MINDING THE GUTTER: THE POETRY OF COMICS AND THE COMICS-NESS OF POETRY, Phill Provance (poetry). Glyn Maxwell writes that in poetry "line-break is all you've got, and if you don't master line-break—the border between poetry and prose—then you don't know there is a border." What Maxwell's talking about is (one part of) *white space*, that area in (most) poems without words, including not only line-breaks, or *lineation*, but the blank bits between *stanzas* and *strophes*. Similarly, *gutters*—or the gaps between *panels* in comics and graphic novels—can control pacing, timing, transition, form, suspense, and a whole host of other aspects. This seminar will examine how reading poetry and comics comparatively can lead to new approaches to writing both, such as how *compression* and *decompression* can inform stanza structure, how lineation can help make comics dialog pop, and how the differences between *stichic* and *strophic* verse might relate to panel blow-outs and vice versa. **Note: Bring paper for a special prompt.**

ASSIGNED READING: Download I Provance PDF containing:

Note that this PDF is best viewed on screen and not printed because of high-resolution color content.

- Excerpts from Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*
- Mark Strand's "The Delirium Waltz" (parts 1-9) from *Blizzard of One*
- Larry Levis's "Some Ashes Drifting Above Piedra, California" from *The Dollmaker's Ghost*
- The first chapter of Glyn Maxwell's *On Poetry*, titled, "White"
- Chapter 6 of Paul Fussell Jr.'s *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*, "Structural Principles: The Example of the Sonnet"
- Anne Sexton's "The Gold Key" and "Iron Hans" from *Transformations*

RECOMMENDED READING: Anne Sexton's *Transformations* (ISBN-13: 978-0618083435)

TWICE UPON A TIME: BRINGING FAIRYTALES INTO YOUR WORK, Billy Davis (fiction). Fairytales have a long history; they have entertained and educated for centuries, and they continue to inspire modern writers and storytellers. In this seminar we will examine the basic structure of traditional European fairytales and discuss techniques that later authors like Naomi Mitchison, Claude Cahun, and Angela Carter used to craft new stories that reflected or subverted the cultural ideals of their times. We will also discuss the ways fairytales have been analyzed and interpreted through the years, and how modern-day writers can incorporate these interpretations (or generate their own) into their own work to produce stories that feel current and contemporary.

ASSIGNED READING: Download I Davis PDF containing:

"The Fourth Pig" by Naomi Mitchison (4 pages); "Cinderella, the Humble and Haughty Child" by Claude Cahun (4 pages)

Concurrent January 4 @ 9 am:

EVERY CHICKEN IS THE IDEAL CHICKEN: ELUCIDATING THE UNIVERSAL IN ECSTATIC VERSE, Andrew Raines (poetry). Human experience is intrinsically tied to the body. Physical objects are apprehended through the faculties of the five senses. Because of this, our understanding is reached through an experience of specifics. Well-crafted writing is meant to utilize language to recreate experience for the reader, which necessitates the reconstruction of the experiential. The question arises: how does one attempt to encapsulate mystical or religious phenomenology in writing when the subject matter defies understanding through the conventional instruments of sense? My goal is to provide a lens for the examination of excerpted ecstatic texts to explore what techniques can be used to distill the impulses of the universal into scintillating and accessible language. **No assigned reading; handouts will be made available.**

ASSIGNED READING: Download I Raines PDF containing: Excerpt from *Poetics of Reverie* (Gaston Bachelard), "Howl" (Allen Ginsberg,) and "Mold Music" (Phillip Gross).

THE OTHER-ED STRUCTURE: HOW THE OUTSIDER EMBODIED DE-CONSTRUCTS AND COMPLICATES WHAT WE KNOW, Beasa Dukes (fiction). Language can be stilted by systemic understanding of language, which alters how the body and the landscape surrounding those systems are shaped—systemic language maintains a status quo. The way in which language is internalized and expressed stems from a hegemonic embedment that writing maintains unconsciously and even consciously. The embodiment of the outsider, how the outsider echoes the "othered" perspective, helps decolonize a text, or reworks what is known and not known. The outsider challenges the way in which words present themselves, organize and process through the page. The outsider is a conduit that carries the landscape and tries to understand the world as it is presented through the "othered" filter. Delving into the "outsider" remakes language. This seminar will explore how Larissa Lai and Octavia Butler use people of color as leads, as guides in their stories. The pre-existing "othered" identity of race and gender in their stories, for example, interrogates how language has "othered" the characters' bodies and their understanding of land, and even reimagines "otherness." **No assigned reading; handouts will be made available.**

Concurrent January 5 @ 9 am:

WHITESPACE AND THE CREATION OF MEANING, Semein Washington (poetry). How does whitespace, often thought of as simple absence of words, shape how we read? For instance, in poetry, whitespace has the well-recognized function of giving readers time to breathe or alters the placement of words on the page through enjambment/ line breaks, stanza breaks and segmented words. Furthermore, whitespace in poetry creates new meaning by (1) stopping a line on a specific word or by (2) designating stanzas as units of action and equal weight. By examining how poets use whitespace, and to what effect, writers of all genres can learn to utilize whitespace in their work to set tension and reframe statements. With this topic, I hope to carry us past the idea that whitespace is only unoccupied space and into the action accomplished by whitespace.

ASSIGNED READING: Download I Washington PDF containing: "Alameda Street" by Douglas Kearney; "How to Get Over *for Donyale Luna*" by t'ai freedom ford; "Talking With the Sun" by Joy Harjo; first poem in Section VII of Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*; "There It Is" by Jayne Cortez; and "Blade, Unplugged" by Tim Seibles from *Fast Animal*

ENCHANTING THE OTHER: LGBTQ VOICES IN MAGICAL REALISM, Amber Milstead (fiction). Magical Realism has been a literary mode for exploring a variety of social issues since its inception. From civil unrest and revolution in South America to a world unable to cope with reality after two World Wars to contemporary depictions of mental illness and social injustice, Magical Realism offers a unique lens for artists of all types—visual and literary—to explore what human consciousness cannot quite understand. In this seminar, we will use Wendy Faris' five main elements of Magical Realism to explore the genre as an avenue for LGBTQ voices in literature. We will take a look at a few literary examples and discuss the magical elements explained in Faris' book *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* as they pertain to sexuality and sexual expression through magical elements in literature.

ASSIGNED READING: Download I Milstead PDF containing: Excerpts from Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Wendy Faris's *Ordinary Enchantments*