



## 2016 Postgraduate Writers' Conference FACULTY CLASSES

STEVE ALMOND

### **Getting the Reader in the Car: How to Go Big from Page One**

Writing's all fun and games, until the rejections start piling up. In this session, we'll aim to make sure your work draws readers in from the jump, rather than leaving them in the dark. We'll examine the opening pages of works by Plath, Didion, Lorrie Moore, and others, and do a brief writing exercise.

EDUARDO C. CORRAL

### **Muse and Material: Using Books to Generate Material**

In this class, we'll explore ways to mine books. In other words, we'll read as writers. We'll use erasure, sonic chains, and alphabetizing strategies to isolate sensory-rich details and vivid phrases to use in our creative work. We'll also discuss how to use imitation and paraphrase to "steal" interesting language. By delving deeply into books, we'll rediscover that language is both muse and material. Beautiful language triggers more words that we can use to build our poems or stories.

ANDRE DUBUS III

### **Being an Author vs. Being a Writer: Why Am I Really Doing This Anyway?**

Writers' conferences, MFA programs, writers' groups and professional writer gatherings of all kinds should nourish the creative artist inside us, and quite often they do just that. But they also frequently trigger a career consciousness that I would argue can run counter to what is being taught – or should be – in the first place, which is to surrender one true word at a time into the free fall of our, yes, sacred imaginations. This session will be a free-wheeling discussion on the perils and potential rewards of fine art instruction, and we may do a creative writing exercise or two as well.

WILLIAM GIRALDI

### **Tragedy is the New Norm**

The word is with us every day now. In the wake of the recent American massacres in Aurora and Newtown, San Bernadino and Orlando, how do prose writers incorporate calamitous events into their work without resorting to mere reportage, or cliché, or sentimentality, or bloodshed for its own sake? We'll look closely at tragic scenes from world literature (Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, Flannery O'Connor) to understand better how the greats defined, marshaled, and mastered tragedy. We'll also look at the quieter, personal tragedies of everyday living—the death of a loved one, the destruction of a marriage—in stories by Raymond Carver and Richard Ford.

## **KATHLEEN GRABER & JOAN WICKERSHAM**

### **Coming In From Outside**

Some poems and stories begin with the personal: the writer's own experience or feeling. But what happens when the writer uses an object or an outside event as an entry point? In this session we'll look at the rich possibilities of beginning at a point outside ourselves and moving inward. We'll look at examples of poems and prose pieces that introduce a captivating object, fact, or set of facts, and then travel into a more personal interior space. A generative exercise will let us explore the self and the world by beginning with the exterior, a way that may lead in more surprising directions than simply beginning with what we might think we need/want to say.

## **ANN HOOD**

### **Why Write?**

Hemingway famously said that writing is easy. All you have to do is cut open a vein and bleed. And in today's world, poets and essayists and novelists compete with social media, binge watching *THE WIRE*, and playing Candy Crush. So why do we do it? I believe we write, as Joan Didion said, to save our lives. How? This lecture explores writers, the process of writing, and literature.

## **ELLEN LESSER**

### **"You Never Told Me *That* Happened": Plot Provocation and the Real Story**

I spoke a few conferences back about the more personal—emotional and relationship—challenges of drawing fiction from true-life material. Now that I'm nearing the end of my current linked story collection's own life cycle, I'm moved to explore this territory again, this time with a focus on plot choices. I'll mine my experience with this work for what may be some instructive examples of tacking away from the actual truth of events, most often with an eye to making things worse before there's a chance they'll get better. We'll use this discussion as the jumping-off point for a few writing and plotting activities, which I hope will prove provocative across genres.

## **LEE MARTIN & SUE WILLIAM SILVERMAN**

### **Packing and Unpacking: What to Do with Your Stuff**

All writers carry baggage: voices, memories, dreams, fears. How do we, as writers, decide what to include or what to exclude in any given work? How do we figure out whether any given detail might belong in *this* piece of writing, rather than *that* one? Whether we write fiction, creative nonfiction, or poetry, we all have a wealth of material at our disposal, but how to decide what we need now, versus what should be placed into storage for another essay, short story, or poem down the road? In short, how do we make best use of all we have experienced, so we create art as opposed to mere happenstance? In this presentation, Sue and Lee will discuss various challenges they've faced in this packing and unpacking of experience both early in the imaginative process and then in the writing and re-writing itself. This generative session will ask you to participate in writing activities designed to make you more aware of how the emotional baggage you carry can either drag you down or lead you somewhere rich and resonant and artful.

## **RICHARD MCCANN**

### **A Close Reading of Grace Paley's "Mother"**

In this class, we'll learn everything we can about writing through a close reading of Grace Paley's brief story "Mother," paying particular attention to the story's use of repetition and handling of time. Paley's two-page story will be distributed at the session, so we can read it aloud among ourselves a few times before we hear Paley perform it herself in a video from a 1996 reading. Come and learn from a moving story by a writer whom many regard as one of the most important short story practitioners of all time and of whom memoirist and critic Vivian Gornick has written, "All over the world, in languages you never heard of, she is read as a master storyteller in the great tradition: People love life more because of her writing."

**A note on Grace Paley:** Born in 1922 in the Bronx to Russian Jewish parents, Grace Paley was the author of three acclaimed collections of short fiction--*The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959), *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (1974), and *Later the Same Day* (1985)--which were gathered in her 1994 *Collected Stories*, a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. She was also well known for her pacifism and political activism, most especially in the feminist, anti-war, and anti-nuclear movements. She died in Thetford, VT, in 2007, at the age of 84.

## **PATRICIA SMITH**

### **Hiding Music in a Cocked Fist**

In this nightmarish time where black and blue bodies lie bloodied on American streets, the challenge to the creative writer is four-fold: Find beauty in the chalk outline, lyric in the chaos. Rattle the politics. Convince the reader of the urgent need for change by pulling back the curtain and unleashing every ounce of the ugly. Then, somehow get back to the beauty. What's it like to write when the writer is mired in a tragedy that won't end, when each line must do so much different work? What role does craft play in work that's so glaringly vital in ways that transcend craft? This discussion will include a writing prompt suitable for all genres.

## **DAVID WOJAHN**

### **'On Hearing That My Poems Were Being Studied in a Distant Place': Thoughts on Distance, Difficulty, and Secret Addressees**

This lecture is an investigation of one of the essential differences between poetry and other genres: to greatly oversimplify, a poem requires an especially great attentiveness from its readers, and the "bond" which exists between a poem's writer and its reader is very often a profoundly intimate one, no matter how much physical and historical distance separates the two. In fact, it sometimes seems that the more immense the distance a poem must travel to reach its reader, the more compelling that poem is apt to be. In the process of exploring these issues, I plan to discuss poems by a very diverse group of writers, among them Hyam Plutzik, Dorothea Lasky, Yannis Ritsos, and Eleanor Ross Taylor. No preliminary reading suggested, though you might seek out Osip Mandelstam's great essay, "On the Addressee," which is available in several different translations.

## **KEVIN YOUNG**

### **Book Me**

We will discuss the nature of books and archives, learning how to make art from archives while learning about their own artistry. From comic books to commonplace books, we wish to understand the ways putting together your book can help us understand the form, function, and future of our own writing.