



## **2018 Postgraduate Writers' Conference FACULTY CLASSES**

**STEVE ALMOND**

### **Your Obsessions Are Your Muse**

Most good writing—whether fiction or nonfiction—arises from a writer's obsessions. In this intensive session, we'll discuss how to explore our obsessions on the page, without falling prey to self-absorption or sentiment. We'll start by looking at the work of folks such as Joan Didion and George Saunders, then generate some work in class by confessing to our own obsessions. Check your inhibitions at the door.

**MATTHEW DICKMAN**

### **coming together/coming apart: a personal journey into finding my writing voice**

**ANDRE DUBUS III**

### **Descending into the Dreamworld**

A generative session for all genres.

**CONNIE MAY FOWLER**

### **Why We Do This**

This session will explore the role of the writer in society, particularly in times of political tumult. What is the importance of the writer? Why does our work matter? Can a democracy survive without us? A generative exercise will be included.

**WILLIAM GIRALDI**

### **I Laughed, I Cried: The Comic and Tragic in Prose**

How do prose writers incorporate calamitous or comedic events into their stories and essays without resorting to cliché or bathos? Is it ever permissible to be comedic while dealing with the tragic? We'll talk about scenes from some masterworks of world literature—Homer, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Flannery O'Connor—to understand how the greats handled the challenge of implementing the comic and the tragic, and perform an exercise in which you compose a page of what you consider either hilarious or heartbreaking.

**KATHLEEN GRABER**

### **Ready Player One**

I readily admit that I hardly understand even the most rudimentary articulations of literary theory, yet, like most of us, I do sense that we are in the midst of tremendous cultural and aesthetic shifts. How has our altered sense of reality manifested itself in the poetry and prose of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries? In this generative workshop, we will look at a handful of model texts that exhibit some of the signature features and compositional strategies of both postmodernism and the current post-postmodern transition (all of this language is wildly

**GRABER, cont.**

disputed by those who know way more than I do. Is postmodern really just some kind of late modern? Is post-postmodern then simply postmodern? Is it really meta-modern? Is it actually neo-liberal? Are postmodern and post-postmodern the worst terms ever?) in order to potentially expand the range of what we think can be included in our work and the modes by which we might actually include it (hopefully without tossing our readers overboard.) Geez, this sounds scary and goopy, but I am really hoping that it is just going to be pretty straightforward while also being weirdly interesting and sort of fun! Let's start over: We will look at some strategies by contemporary writers to see how we might steal them.

**ELLEN LESSER****Prompt Me**

What *is* it about a great writing prompt? As a teacher, I've witnessed some staggering breakthroughs thanks to the power of prompts to open up terrain that the writer might not otherwise access. I'm eager to hear about others' experiences—as students, instructors, practitioners—with these magical portals or launch pads or portals. Through the week, we'll hold a collection of everyone's candidatess for the most effective, surprising, provocative, disturbing, transformative... (fill in the appropriate adjective) writing directive/invitation. We'll sample those offerings and then put them to use for, what else, some writing activities.

**LEE MARTIN & SUE WILLIAM SILVERMAN****#MeToo: Intimate Politics & Confessional Writing as Resistance**

During the week of Oct. 16, 2017, Facebook filled with #MeToo posts—a hashtag used to claim sexual abuse, physical assault, domestic violence, and other forms of discrimination. It's difficult to claim one's truth, scary to reveal personal stories about a host of intimate experiences. Yet, as writers, our job is to get these narratives down on paper, regardless of genre.

While this movement is primarily considered to be gender driven, by women, many men have their own #MeToo narratives. Sue and Lee will each present theirs, focusing on how these stories affected their writing. Their talks will be followed by an open discussion with the audience. As a group, we will offer each other understanding and compassion, and ways to move forward. All our voices are important and powerful. Consider the power of just two words: "me too." **ALL WRITING IS POLITICAL AND PART OF THE RESISTANCE!**

**JAMAAL MAY****Qualia Prima**

Qualia is a term being bandied about a lot these days in both neuroscience and psychology. It is defined as the internal and subjective component of sense perceptions, arising from stimulation of the senses by phenomena. To a degree, writers are tasked with generating a form of qualia that can affect many while feeling intimate and unique. This talk will concern itself with how the individualized sensory experience can paradoxically be an entry point to shared understanding, bridged communities, and a way to snapshot infinity. There will be some cross-pollination with other disciplines as we explore some of the more quirky things we can do with language and sound. Expect an informal lecture format that leaves room for demonstration and discussion.

**KYOKO MORI****The Smaller and the Larger Self: Persona in Nonfiction Narrative**

The persona in our personal essay or memoir is not everything we are or can be but the opposite—a literary construct that serves a specific story. The persona has two roles: to tell the story as its narrator and to be the main character in that story. So, paradoxically, the persona is at once smaller (as character) and larger (as narrator) than our ordinary everyday self. This seminar will investigate how to limit the scope of the persona and at the same time expand the wisdom that the persona delivers. We will discuss how the persona in nonfiction differs from the persona in fiction even though they are both literary constructs. Reading materials will be provided in class. Participants should come prepared to discuss their own personal narrative projects and their own experience of trying to shape the self on the page that is different from the self in everyday life.

**PATRICIA SMITH****Four of the Approximately 6,711 Ways to Live a Life That Is Not Your Own**

What class promises to ask restless questions about cultural exploitation, visit with a lonely pouting white supremacist and perhaps listen in on a convo between Spongebob Squarepants and Malcolm X? This one! After examining the problems and particulars of leaving our bodies for others, we'll invade, inhabit and rearrange. And we'll either hate, love or be strangely disturbed by the stories we find.

**IRA SUKRUNGRUANG****Breaking the Rules**

We've learned "craft." We've been taught "genre" and the rules that govern genre. So many rules. We've been told that writing should be like this and not that. We should read this person and not that person. This is a talk framed not around what we should do, but rather, how we can challenge traditional notions of writing to evolve the art form and create something new...ish.

**DAVID WOJAHN****Ferocious Lullabye: Poetry and Parenting**

The conventional wisdom sees the life of the writer and the life one leads as a parent as distinctly different endeavors, often oppositional ones. Of course, conventional wisdom is always, at best, only partly right. I hope to explore the interstices between the task of raising children and the task of maintaining a writing life—under conditions that can seem to undermine that latter task. I plan to examine the work or careers of an eclectic mix of poets, among them Rilke, Jack Gilbert, Beth Ann Fennelly, Muriel Rukeyser, Adrienne Rich, and Craig Morgan Teicher.