

MFA Seminars – Summer Residency 2020

Boy Breaking Glass: Political and Protest Poetry – Mary Carroll-Hackett

“Boy breaking glass/Whose broken window is a cry of art”-Gwendolyn Brooks

This seminar will examine several approaches to writing protest and political poetry: the civil, the prophetic, the skeptical, and the poetics of empathy. Ideological, protest, or political poetry in its broad context includes a large range of thematic concerns and approaches, from straightforward political subjects to poems where the “I” itself is a political statement. Work to be discussed will include Walt Whitman, W.B. Yeats, Audre Lord, Adrienne Rich, Minnie Bruce Pratt, June Jordan, Layli Long Soldier, Danez Smith, Patricia Smith, contemporary Hebrew and Palestinian poets, and selected poems from the recent protest anthology *Poetry & Resistance: Voices for Social Justice*. NOTE: *For Day One*: Read the articles and the ten poems in the Google Drive folder “Carroll-Hackett Readings”. *For Day Two*: Read *Incendiary Art*, and read and choose a poem that speaks to you from *Poetry of Resistance*.

Advance Reading:

ANTHOLOGY: *Poetry of Resistance: Voices for Social Justice*

Francisco X. Alarcón, Odilia Galván Rodríguez. University of Arizona Press, Mar 2016.

BOOK: *Incendiary Art*, Patricia Smith

GOOGLE DRIVE FOLDER: “Carroll-Hackett Readings”

ARTICLES: [Adrienne Rich “Someone Is Writing a Poem”](#)

[Dissent Magazine: The Protest Poets](#)

[PBS Newshour: Allison Hedge Coke: America, I Sing You Back](#)

[PBS Newshour: Layli Long Soldier: Native Poet Speaks the Language of Standing Rock](#)

[Protesting Through Poetry: Interview with Nikki Giovanni & Kwame Dawes](#)

Further Recommended (but not required) Reading

[Don Share: Harriet: Poetry Makes Nothing Happen...Or Does It?](#)

[Kwame Dawes: Harriet: Political Poetry](#)

Rethinking the Plot Map for Narrative Nonfiction – Sarah Einstein

Many of you are probably familiar with Freytag's Pyramid, which identifies seven key elements of dramatic architecture and is most often applied to fictional work. How can we reshape (and reshape, and reshape) Freytag's Pyramid to make it a useful tool for the narrative essayist? In this workshop, we will work together to create shaped plot maps—though the shape won't necessarily be a triangle, of two brief narrative essays and begin the conversation about what it means to consider the “shape” of an essay. Please come with a personal anecdote in mind that you think could be crafted into a brief essay, and please have read these two (very brief) essays: **Advance Reading:** See Google Drive: “Einstein Folder”

Narrative Poetry - Jesse Graves

This workshop offers several prompts and examples designed to bring narrative elements into new poems, stories, or personal essays, giving writers the opportunity to explore historical and character-driven topics, as well as their own personal subject matter. The impulse to tell stories through poetry goes back to Homer and the Greek epics, and continues to play an essential, if under-examined, role in contemporary poetry. Participants will read and discuss poems by such poets as Joy Harjo, Philip Levine, Ruth Stone, and Natasha Tretheway. Writers will leave this session with new material, and thoughts and suggestions on how to revise those ideas into finished works.

Advance Reading: See Google Drive: “Graves Folder”

Finding Your Voice on the Page and in the Air — Jacki Lyden

How we ask questions — of ourselves, our loved ones, the past, the future, those we don't know, and those we forgive (or do not forgive), shapes a host of narrative material for every writer. As a former NPR host and correspondent for several decades, and a foreign correspondent (Middle East), podcaster, and memoirist; I am still a student and practitioner of the “Art of the Interview.” I'll talk about what I mean by that, using examples from the readings I've suggested.

We have two 75-minute sessions together. In the first, I'll take your questions, explore memoirs, and review some of these books from the reading list. In the second, we'll do some writing prompts and discuss more ideas for your own work. I'll go over some tips and examples from my published and unpublished manuscripts and look at some struggles and solutions and challenges. We might expand to first-person podcasts if time allows. My own podcast, if you're interested, was called "The Seams" and it explored clothing as anthropology. Find it at NPR.org/TheSeams or iTunes.

*The reading list is a guide; it is not definitive and there won't be a test! BUT, it's a good list, and you will be better writers if you read these books and get some familiarity with them, so you can create your own list ahead. You should find at least a few you really savor, and I certainly don't expect you to read them all. Here's to July! Stay healthy!

Suggested Reading List: See Google Drive, "Lyden Readings"

Gerald Stern: Rhythms of Big Little Conversations — Devon McNamara

How can we figure out the narrative form of our work, recognize where our poem is going, listen to the direction of our associative talk as our lines and sentences unfold in what becomes the story? Gerald Stern, one of America's most celebrated and beloved poets, can be guide and fierce igniting force in our endeavors to hear and shape what we're writing. Readings focus on four poems from *In Beauty Bright*, and Part III, "The Preacher," in *Save the Last Dance*, enhanced by the guest appearance of "The Poem in Chalk," from *The Simple Truth*, by Stern's longtime friend & fellow poet Philip Levine.

Advance Reading: See Google Drive: "McNamara Folder"

Rethinking Revision — Randon Billings Noble

Form, character, metaphor, scene. When we revise, we (re)consider these things *in* our drafts. But what happens when we use these things to think *about* our drafts? In this workshop we'll apply a mix of revision ideas to a work in progress. A few of these exercises will be somewhat standard. Some will be weird. But sometimes you need to shift your way of thinking about revision in order to better "re-see."

Please have ready a complete draft of a work in progress, one you still have problems with or questions about. It could be an essay, a memoir piece, a short story, part of a novel, or a group of poems. Be sure to reread your draft just before our meeting time (especially if it's a longer work) so that you're familiar with it as a whole. Then we'll dig in!

No Advance Reading

Some Emotional Concerns — Richard Schmitt

This class hopes to explore a few ways in which writers convey emotion. At funerals, at weddings, people cry—out of grief or hope. It is easy to relate, for instance, to *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion's account of her seriously ill daughter and the sudden death of a long-time husband. Or, Edward Hirsch's seventy-five-page elegy for his dead son, *Gabriel*. We all share similar periods of concern and mourning in our lives. But, I am more interested in the type of emotion that is unknown, difficult to express, emotion rooted in helplessness for instance. Or when our characters are at a loss for even the nature of their despair. Or when they know the cause of effusive feelings but they don't know what to do about them. The majority of the class will be focused on how emotions climax in William Maxwell's novel, *So Long, See You Tomorrow*, a story with plenty of obvious reasons for anguish. We will also consider the essay "What We Lose" from Ann Daum's memoir, *The Prairie In Her Eyes*, and two poems: *Refrigerator 1957*, by Tom Lux, and *Dinosaur*, by Bruce Holland Rogers. I'll also mention, briefly, Joyce's "Araby", a story most of you probably know and is online in many places.

Advance Reading: See Google Drive: "Schmitt Folder" and

NOVEL: *So Long, See You Tomorrow*, William Maxwell, Vintage, 1996

MEMOIR: *The Prairie in Her Eyes*, Milkweed Editions, 2003

Writing in the Time of Alteration — Jacinda Townsend

D.H. Lawrence once wrote, “Tragedy is like strong acid—it dissolves away all but the very gold of truth.” Having traveled through the COVID-19 pandemic, we have all had the kind of intense collective experience that has changed our sense of time, our sense of the past, our sense of the future, our sense of ourselves. Accordingly, in this fiction seminar, we will focus on the theme of “alteration,” and examine the ways in which two authors—Chris Cleave and Kevin Brockmeier—marry that theme to narrative as their characters reshape their senses of selves and their senses of others. We will talk about our own creative process, and the ways in which we are digesting and/or healing the COVID-19 experience through our own writing.

Advance Reading: See Google Drive: “Townsend Folder”

Writing the Sestina: Obsession, Repetition & Revelation - Doug Van Gundy

The Sestina is old French form that repeats the same six end words (in shifting order) over six sestets and a tercet. The form is challenging to write, but when successful can be particularly rewarding and revelatory for both poet and reader. Participants in this two-day workshop will read and discuss a number of sestinas (both contemporary and classic), participate in an idea-generating exercise, and write and workshop their own poems in the form.

No Advance Reading