Novelist Angie Kim on Being Mindful

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Highlights from KB Brookins, Kelly Link & Jinwoo Chong
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ABOUT THE WRITER’S CENTER
Founded in 1976, The Writer’s Center supports writers and everyone who wants to write!

Every year we offer hundreds of creative writing workshops in all genres and for all experience levels, dozens of free events for writers, and countless opportunities to connect with the Washington DC and national literary communities.

THE WRITER’S CENTER
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If you ask me — or anyone on staff at The Writer’s Center — for writing or publishing advice, we will shower you with our thoughts. Really. You’ll be wishing for a literary umbrella to protect you from the word-storm. Today, I’m telling you why I try to share as much of my time and writer-wisdom as I can.

I’ve always written, but I was in my mid-forties before I tried to publish any of my work. (For context’s sake, I suppose I’ll fess up that my mid-forties were around a decade ago.) I didn’t know other writers, and frankly it never occurred to me that anyone might be interested in helping me find my way. I blundered along for years, slashing a solitary path into the world of publishing. I landed some pretty solid bylines and even got paid for some pieces. But I was on my own. I told myself when a piece I’d written was finished, or when my point wasn’t clear. With no one with whom to commiserate, I let rejections weigh me down. And I spent months agonizing over where and how to submit my work, and when or whether to follow up with editors.

Fast-forward to 2018, when I landed at The Writer’s Center. I didn’t know then what I’m telling you now: we at the Center are really, truly here to support you. We are writers, too, and we want you to get your stories out.

Bottom line: If I can spend ten minutes sharing the knowledge it took me years to learn, I’ll consider that time well spent. Then you, too, can help make sure that the writing community is filled with companions, not competitors.

Have some expertise to share? Awesome. Be generous!

Reach out to us. Reach out to each other. Truly, there are enough words out there for all of us to soar.

—Amy Freeman, TWC Development Director

ABOUT THE COVER

Broadie
The Writer, 2023
Mock-up for Mural at The Writer’s Center

This issue’s cover comes from local artist Broadie, and it will become a familiar sight at The Writer’s Center. Broadie is working to install an outdoor mural, featuring "The Writer," on our back wall (generously funded by the Maryland State Arts Council). The mural will be completed by the end of summer, so stop by to see it soon!

Visit bbroadie.com or follow on Instagram @bbrody04 to see more of Broadie’s work.
Angie Kim started off as an actor, practiced law, and passed through a series of other careers before settling in as an author, publishing her acclaimed debut, *Miracle Creek*, at the age of 50. Now she’s back with a brand new novel, *Happiness Falls*. *Happiness Falls* is part mystery, part literary tour de force, and a page-turner in any genre. She joined me for an insightful (and delightful!) conversation via Zoom, covering everything from her writing process to the inner workings of her two outstanding novels. Edited for length and clarity.

**ZP:** I want to start with narrative structure. This novel has outstanding forward motion. It’s hard to stop reading! What do you think it is that makes a reader want to keep turning the pages?

**AK:** One of the things that I think is so important in all novels, regardless of whether they’re suspense or not, literary versus commercial, is having strong novel structure, which is hard for people like me who don’t outline first. This novel has a mystery element. How did something happen? Who did it? What happened? These are very, very strong questions that get posed at the beginning of the book. I think it’s the presence of those questions, and always making sure the reader knows how the scene that you’re telling advances those questions, is a strong part of the narrative drive for me. As long as you keep that in the back of your mind, even if you have no idea how you’re going to answer those questions, as an author, I think that’s what makes it happen for me.

Part two of my structure question is going from the large scale to the chapter scale, because I also think these are really, really well-shaped chapters. Every chapter has a very good shape, and particularly at the end, there’s — What am I trying to say? There’s…

A kind of landing, yes.

**There’s a landing, but there’s also an introduction of a new part of the mystery. The conclusion of many of the chapters is an intensification of the mystery. You’re resolving something, but the resolution always contains within it the seeds of the continued mystery. There’s a daisy-chained kind of structure going on between chapters. Maybe talk about that a little bit. How do you structure chapters individually, and how do chapters relate to each other?**

Yes, that’s such a good question. I think of the mystery element in both of my novels as a Trojan horse of sorts. I bring that element in to make the readers want to keep on turning the pages to find out how the mystery is going to be resolved. Where’s the father in *Happiness Falls*? In *Miracle Creek*, who set the fire? In both, in the middle of most chapters, and possibly in the beginning of most chapters, too, I go off on tangents like crazy.

I almost think of *Miracle Creek* as seven different short stories of seven different people’s lives. It’s almost like linked stories, and the thread that runs throughout all of the stories is this trial that they’re all observing or taking part in. I just make sure that there’s enough of that throughline in each of the scenes and chapters to make people want to turn to the next chapter.

The same thing I think happens in *Happiness*
Falls, too, which is that in the beginning of a lot of chapters, I go off on forays. I go off on tangents. I go off on something that happened to the family years ago in Korea or something like that, that you’re just like, “I don’t really understand what this has to do with why the father’s missing or what could have happened to him.” It does in a tangential kind of way, but I always bring it around to something that’s happening now with the search for the father and tie it back. 90% of the chapter could be something that you think is unrelated, but then you see at the last 10% that it does relate to something, making that throughline of the missing father story really come to the forefront so that people will be like, “Okay, now we’re back in business, and I can turn the page.”

I’m not sure that I did that consciously. I don’t outline beforehand, but I outline as I go along. I definitely outline and look through the structure of the whole thing once I finish my drafts. That’s one thing that I realized that happens in a lot of the chapters, is this element that is just reinforced vis-à-vis the mystery at the end of each chapter.

Shifting now to characters. I love the characters in the book and I’m interested, especially now that you say you don’t outline, how you craft a character. Do you sketch them in advance? Do they emerge as you write? Are they flat in that first draft and you actually tweak them into full humans as you revise? Where do the characters come in the process?

It’s really different for each character. There are a couple different ways that I do it. In Miracle Creek, I had seven different point-of-view characters. Because I wrote each chapter at a time, and each chapter is a different character, I would finish a chapter and then I would think, “Okay, so—and-so is a natural person to come next.” Maybe they were introduced at the end of the previous chapter or something like that. Then I take a good week or so to do what I call — going back to my acting background — “method writing.” I would just be in that character’s head and I did a lot of freewriting by hand, stuff that I knew I wasn’t going to use because it was in first person anyway. I really tried to get into their voice by using the first person. Doing a lot of just walking and — Well, I don’t really walk that much. I don’t really exercise, but just standing up in my room and pacing back and forth and...

That counts as walking!

While we’re talking characters, one of the main characters, Eugene, has the dual diagnosis of autism and Mosaic Angelman syndrome. I think he’s a very important character and an important one to talk about. Just broadly, can you share a little bit about Eugene and the creation of his character?

Yes, absolutely. Eugene is 14. He’s biracial — the family’s biracial — and he is a non-speaker. He can’t speak words. He has fine motor skill issues. Angelman syndrome is a rare genetic disorder that involves lots of different issues, medical issues like seizures and gastrointestinal issues, but also lots of developmental issues, lots of motor issues. A lot of kids with very severe cases of Angelman syndrome can’t walk or jump or anything like that, and they normally can’t speak, either. Some of them can have words, but not to the full conversational degree that you and I might.
He has those issues, and to me, as a Korean immigrant who experienced what it’s like to move from one country where I was verbally and orally fluent and felt confident because of that, and felt smart, and then coming to a country as an 11-year-old and not speak the language, I realized how fundamental oral fluency is to our perceptions of ourselves and of each other as far as our intelligence levels are concerned. In other words, I think there’s a deeply held societal assumption that oral fluency is equivalent to intelligence.

Eugene, who like many kids with autism and Angelman syndrome can’t speak, suffers from that assumption. He is in fact diagnosed as cognitively disabled and has an IQ level of something below 60. Everyone assumes that he can’t understand anything and that he can’t read and that he doesn’t have words inside his head. That’s one of the things that I wanted to interrogate through the book and through the story. Is that necessarily true, and why do we have those assumptions? What does that do to our ability to connect with one another when those types of assumptions are so strong and fundamental to our understanding of each other?

**Did you feel any extra obligation to execute this character accurately and correctly? How did you make sure you got this right?**

Yes, totally. So much pressure. In fact, I actually wondered if I had a right to tell the story. I felt based on my own experience as an immigrant, even though that is so limited and so like nothing compared to the level of frustration and pain somebody like Eugene would feel. I still felt like that gave me a way into the story such that I wanted to try.

When I started writing the story, I did a couple of things both during the process of writing and also once I was done with the first draft. One is I had a ton of beta readers who are in this space. I did a lot of research and interviews before I started writing, with families of kids with Angelman syndrome, met them, did Zooms, all of that sort of stuff. Told them some of the elements of the stories that I was thinking of, although that was hard because again, I don’t outline beforehand. I also have a bunch of friends, very good friends, with kids who are non-verbal autistic. I was able to talk to them as well. I also teach creative writing to autistic non-speakers who communicate by poking out letters on a letter board that’s held in front of them. I teach creative writing to them, some by Zoom and some in person. I talked to all of them about it and basically tried to see what their response would be to my writing a book like this. Overwhelmingly, they said, “We need books like this. We need to see ourselves in fiction and in literature.” They said, “Listen, we know that there are people like us who are writing memoirs and things, and that’s important too, but we also want to see ourselves as characters.” It was really reassuring.

Then once I finished the story, I had a bunch of beta readers. Some professional beta sensitivity readers who are autistic, but some that I reached out to that are teenagers and that are young adults who are non-speaking, who read this for me and told me what they thought. Also, a ton of therapists who do the kinds of therapies that I describe in the book, and Angelman parents. I probably had, I don’t know, 12 to 15 beta readers. I think that’s the kind of thing that you have to do if you want to be mindful, and you don’t want to inadvertently harm people during the process of writing.

**Lastly, what’s one piece of advice you’d give to a writer just starting out?**

I would say even if your goal is to write a novel or a book, start with the short form. Start with short stories. Start with a personal essay. To me, that’s really, really important because by virtue of doing that, you can learn the value of editing something ten times and workshopping it. Whether it be in a formal workshop like you guys offer at The Writer’s Center, or whether it’s just giving it to your spouse, your family, your kids, your friends, whatever, and getting their input and then seeing which of their comments resonate with you. Completely rewriting based on that, doing that ten times over and comparing the tenth version to the first version and seeing how far you came along. The ability to see that and experience that I think is so important to a writer and to the process of writing. Then submitting it to journals, getting those rejection letters, seeing how that feels, and then trying and trying and trying until you finally, hopefully, get it accepted somewhere and then see it in print and put it on your social media and marketing it. That whole process from end to end, I think, is so hard. I think you need to know what it’s like for the short form before you tackle it for the long form, which is infinitely harder.
In her first novel, Mecca Jamilah Sullivan, PhD, digs into the complicated struggles growing up as a queer black girl. Using a background of hip-hop, food, and Harlem in the 1990s, Mecca creates a web of complex characters whose needs and desires both frustrate and uplift them. We’re delighted that she took us behind the scenes of her tale.

AF: Let’s dive right in! Your novel covers a lot of ground and doesn’t shy away from anything. How did you tackle thorny topics? Did you use sensitivity readers? Were there any truths that readers struggled with, but that you wanted to include?

MJS: It was important to me to explore the story of a big black queer girl’s life in a way that centers and honors her perspective. *Big Girl* is a novel about gender, race, queerness, classism and bodily freedom. But it’s also a novel about a sharp, inquisitive girl who’s coming of age at the intersection of these structures in the 1990s, at a time when terms like “diet culture” and “fatphobia” and “queer identity” haven’t really made it into popular conversation. The main character, Malaya, has to cobble together a sense of belonging from what she finds around her, in her family, her community in Harlem, and especially hip-hop music. For me, telling the truth about the novel’s social themes of race and gender meant telling these full truths about the characters’ lives. Malaya is endlessly curious about her body and what it means in the world around her. I share this curiosity, both as a consumer of American culture, and as a big black queer woman myself. We often see these structures explored one or two at a time — for example, the experience of fat or queer or black girlhood — but of course that’s not the full truth of the world we live in. Malaya experiences all these things at once, and often in complex and unpredictable ways. Her relationship with hip-hop is one example of this: on one hand, she sees how it’s viewed as misogynistic and violent, but at the same time, figures like Lil Kim and the Notorious B.I.G. offer her irreverent ways of seeing womanhood and interacting with her body, which she desperately needs. For her, these are not abstract issues, they’re life. As a writer, I’m really interested in the complex truths of human experience — how pleasure and community can grow within trauma, how they can work as tools against shame and oppression, and how joy can triumph.

A lot of the book is, of course, about the characters’ relationships with food. I couldn’t help but notice that your descriptions were steeped in food imagery (a chair is “the color of a tea spill;” one boy’s hair is “yellow-cake blond;” and a girl’s long hair “curled like lo mein.”). I’m guessing that was quite intentional?

Absolutely! One of my favorite parts of the writing process is experiencing how different characters see the world, and how that allows me to reimagine the seemingly obvious aspects of life from their perspective. I’m very much a voice- and character-driven writer. Voice is usually the first piece of a story that comes to me, and I enjoy following the voice until the character’s peculiar, idiosyncratic sensibility emerges. In *Big Girl*, the narrative voice is closely linked to Malaya’s worldview, so this sensibility centers around food. For her, food is a wondrous world of pleasure and freedom that allows her to escape the strictures of the world around her. Her fantasies about food create a stark contrast to the world of diet products, exercise...
videos, and restrictive femininity that dominate her home environment, as well as American culture. Food becomes a kind of portal to her imagination. It represents forbidden desires that she’s always thinking about, so that comes to shape her view of the everyday world around her. I love the idea of inviting readers into the world of sensory pleasure that sustains Malaya. Readers often tell me that the book leaves them ready to enjoy a good meal, which feels 100% right to me.

The relationships among the women in this book — I’m thinking specifically of the grandmother, mother, and Malaya here — are quite complex. How did you think through those connections? How did they shift, as Malaya grows?

For me, intergenerational ties between women are some of the most fascinating relationships there are. On one hand, the American cultural ideals of motherhood involve warmth, care, and abundant physical and emotional nurturing. And yet, of course, there’s often a huge distance between that ideal and our actual experiences of both mothering and being mothered. Those differences are intensified for Malaya, whose body refuses to fit into the standards of girlhood and womanhood her mother desperately wants her to meet. The inability to fit her mother’s expectations is intensely painful for Malaya as a child, but it also becomes a source of curiosity. She starts to wonder why her mother is so obsessed with dieting, with shrinking and becoming small, especially when she sees something admirable and powerful in her mother’s size. This curiosity leads her to think about her grandmother, whose sharp-tongued critiques of gender Malaya finds mean but also, at times, kind of funny. Investigating those dynamics helps Malaya better understand how body shame has been passed down over generations in her family. And, more importantly, thinking about these complex relationships frees her to embrace the breadth of her own life, and make room for the vast complexities within herself.

I’m interested in the complex truths of human experience.

—Mecca Jamilah Sullivan

What’s your writing process like? Did you start with an idea that morphed as you wrote, or did you have a plot in mind?

I’ve been thinking of this story since my own coming-of-age experience, around the same time I decided I wanted to be a writer. I was fortunate enough to grow up in a home full of readers, and to attend a school that encouraged creativity enthusiastically. In the fifth grade, I read Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*, and Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf*. These books introduced me to the voices that would become my literary heroes, and showed me that a black girl’s life could be something to write about. Reading these authors helped me better understand the social and historical context for my own experiences of girlhood — for example, the intense scrutiny of girls’ bodies, the policing of desire, and the emphasis on performing “correct” forms of femininity, which all had racial and class dimensions as well. Those books showed me the power of writing and helped me feel less alone. At the same time, I felt keenly aware
that the specific contours of fatness and body shame
were an important part of this conversation, and
something I wanted to contribute to this lineage. So
although Big Girl isn’t the first book I’ve published,
it’s the one that’s been with me longest. It’s the book
that made me want to be a writer.

In terms of plot, the first scene came out almost
whole, very early in the writing process. The novel
opens on Malaya as an eight year old in the middle
of a Weight Watchers meeting in Harlem in the late
1980s. That scene was important to me, because it
showed both the vibrancy of Malaya’s Harlem life
and the deep dissonance of her experience in it,
especially in terms of how she’s expected to change
her body at such a young age. I also knew what the
novel’s closing image had to be, and so I spent a long
time writing toward that moment. I knew the flavor
of the last scene, and the feeling I wanted the reader
to carry with them from that latest image. There
were many, many drafts and structural changes over
the years, but the beginning and end were always
there.

What was your path to publication?

I started the first draft of Big Girl many years ago
as a Masters’ student. It was my thesis for an MA
in Creative Writing, although it was a very different
novel at that point. It was a lot longer, and had a
totally different point-of-view structure. After
graduating, I started a PhD program in English
Literature, thinking I’d be able to finish the novel
and complete my graduate coursework in literary
theory at the same time. Turns out that’s not really
how PhD programs work! But it was ultimately the
right path, because it helped me discover how much I
enjoy teaching, and it gave me time to really sit with
the books and ideas that feed me most as a novelist.
Grad school also gave me time and resources to
become active in creative writing communities, and
to attend residencies and conferences like the Bread
Loaf Writers Conference, which is where I met my
agent. She and I worked together on my first book,
a collection of short stories called Blue Talk and
Love, while I was finishing my dissertation and
starting my work as a professor. At that point, I was
sort of sneaking pockets of time to work on Big Girl
between semesters. Finally, the Covid lockdown gave
me a chance to do the last big revision, and we were
fortunate enough to connect with my phenomenal
editor, Gina Iaquinta at W.W. Norton / Liveright.

What’s next for you?

For the first time in a while, I’m at the beginning
stages of something brand new. It’s been very cool
to get to know new characters and settings, and to
stretch myself creatively in new ways. I won’t say
too much about this book yet, but it’s queer and
sort of weird and involves a little magic. I’m really
enjoying it so far!
Poetry of Nature and the Body

EDITOR EMILY HOLLAND REVIEWS NEW BOOKS FROM THE POET LORE FAMILY

BAD ANIMAL
Kathryn Bratt-Pfotenhauer
Riot In Your Throat, 2023

Poet Lore contributor Kathryn Bratt-Pfotenhauer’s debut collection, Bad Animal, opens with a poem titled “Prayer,” a poem that, in some ways, introduces readers to the themes and imagery of the poems to come. In this opening, we see violence and blood as the speaker recounts the memory of finding a dead elk with her father. But we also circle through moments of tenderness and a sense that the speaker, in doing this act of looking-back, is reclaiming what could become part of her origin story. This poem questions more than it answers, with the speaker in the present day admitting “What it meant, I still don’t know.” The poems to come also grasp at deciphering the meaning of certain events, including death and sexual assault.

One of Bratt-Pfotenhauer’s strengths is found in the final lines of these poems, lines which often return to the strong voice of the speaker or slightly twist an image that was seen earlier in the poem. Moments of repetition across poems allow these images and situations to be reframed and re-evaluated in
surprising ways. “Prayer,” for example, is also the name of another poem that comes in the first full section of the book. In the second “Prayer,” the speaker sits in a doctor’s waiting room, hoping for confirmation that she is not pregnant. While the opening poem showed grief and desire through the bloody murder of the elk’s body and the speaker’s relationship to her father, here we see desire and grief in new ways: the blood of a menstrual cycle, escalating heat waves, and a woman in the waiting room who becomes a sort of stand-in mother figure for the speaker.

In Bad Animal Bratt-Pfotenhauer showcases the power of an image across poems anchored in memory. These poems bring together the violence of the natural world with the lived reality of the speaker who is surviving sexual assault, grief, and complicated feelings about motherhood.

A SHIVER IN THE LEAVES
Luther Hughes
BOA Editions, 2022

A Shiver in the Leaves, the debut collection from poet Luther Hughes, also juxtaposes imagery of the natural world — moths, crows, flies, deer, other animals, and lush plants — with the experiences of the speaker in the poems. For Hughes, these experiences are those of a Black gay man living in Seattle, where many of the poems take place. From poems that explore generational trauma to others that move through the speaker’s romantic relationships, Hughes anchors images within the plant and animal life (and sometimes death) that surrounds the speaker.

Often, the animals present in the poems are black, opening up the possibility for the speaker to reflect on their own Black identity and also the blackness, or darkness, of their depression, which is an underlying theme of the collection. One poem, “As the Fog Rolls In, Night Finds Its Footing,” perfectly captures this in lines like “What’s that story about the blackbird / visiting a man, or, more accurately, / his depression?” and “If not a blackbird, something that blackened / by blackness, with an animal understanding / was in his room.” Hughes gives us, as readers, an opening through which we can grapple with the layered metaphors of these images.

In “Mercy,” a poem that opens with the image of Mt. Rainier poking through the clouds, we move with the speaker through their anxieties about identity, specifically an American identity, love, and the ever- looming threat of police violence against Black people. The speaker says “I know we should spend this time / spitting on the name of America how we usually do / when another black person has been killed or when / another country perfumes with our war, but there’s beauty / unaccounted for tonight.”

Elements of the natural world reappear across different poems, accumulating meaning and resonance as we move through the narrative of the collection. Hughes deftly directs our attention to these moments and transformations. These poems reach toward beauty and make A Shiver in the Leaves a book that demands readers return to its pages again and again.

Hughes will be the guest editor for the Winter/Spring issue of Poet Lore Volume 118.
INTRODUCTION TO BOOK PUBLISHING: THE APPRENTICE HOUSE PRESS EXPERIENCE  
Wednesday, September 6, 7 PM  
Zoom

NOVELIST ANGIE KIM BOOK RELEASE FOR HAPPINESS FALLS  
Thursday, September 7, 6:30 PM  
In-person @ The Writer’s Center

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT ON FICTION WITH CLEO QIAN  
Thursday, September 14, 7 PM  
Zoom

NOVELIST KIM COLEMAN FOOTE READING & DISCUSSION  
Thursday, September 21, 7 PM  
In-person @ The Writer’s Center

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH MEMOIRIST JENNIFER LANG  
Thursday, September 28, 7 PM  
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH POET SYDNEY LEA  
Thursday, October 12, 7 PM  
Zoom

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT ON FICTION WITH MEGAN KAMAILEI KAKIMOTO  
Thursday, October 19, 7 PM  
Zoom

POETS NANCY NAOMI CARLSON & DAVID KEPLINGER READING & DISCUSSION  
Saturday, October 21, 2 PM  
In-person @ The Writer’s Center

CURATED CONVERSATION(S): POETS ADRIANA DÍAZ ENCISO & ALEXANDRA LYTON REGALADO  
Tuesday, October 24, 7 PM  
YouTube Premiere

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH POET BRIAN TURNER  
Thursday, November 2, 7 PM  
Zoom

THE WRITER’S CENTER LIVE! A VARIETY SHOW FOR LITERATURE LOVERS  
Friday, November 3, 7 PM  
In-person @ The Writer’s Center

VIRTUAL CRAFT CHAT WITH MEMOIRIST ATHENA DIXON  
Tuesday, November 7, 7 PM  
Zoom

CURATED CONVERSATION(S): POETS MONIKA RADOJEVIC & VICKIE VÉRTIZ  
Tuesday, December 26, 7 PM  
YouTube Premiere

OPEN MICS @ THE WRITER’S CENTER  
2nd & 4th Wednesday of every month, 7 PM

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LIVE VIDEO CONFERENCE workshops will be held via Zoom. You can view brief tutorials on using the platform at support.zoom.us.

ASYNCHRONOUS workshops will take place over Wet Ink, an online learning forum and discussion board.

FALL 2023 WORKSHOPS ARE ON SITE & VIRTUAL

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Have you always wanted to write a novel but didn’t know where to start?

CREATING NOVEL CHARACTERS with Tammy Greenwood
9/1/23 – 9/22/23 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous
Wet Ink • All Levels • $215
Bring your characters to life on the page.

BUILDING MOTIFS IN FICTION with DeMisty D. Bellinger
9/13/23 – 10/4/23 • 4 Wednesdays • 6 – 7 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $215
Tie the pieces of your story together with a strong imagistic symbol.

THE EXTREME NOVELIST with Kathryn Johnson
9/13/23 – 11/1/23 • 8 Wednesdays • 7 – 9:30 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $395
Get a draft of your novel written in eight weeks!

SPECULATIVE FICTION with Javed Jahangir
9/13/23 – 11/1/23 • 8 Wednesdays • 7 – 9 PM
The Writer’s Center • Intermediate/Advanced • $395
Explore the intersection of literary fiction and speculative fiction.

INTRODUCTION TO FICTION with Kathryn Johnson
9/16/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • Beginner • $60
Learn the basics of writing stories of any length that readers will love!
THE FAST FURIOUS FLASH FICTION WORKSHOP with Courtney Eldridge
9/16/23 – 12/16/23 • 4 Saturdays • 1 – 3 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $215
This workshop is dedicated to the 100-word short story.

WRITER’S BLOCK PARTIES with Courtney Eldridge
9/17/23 – 12/17/23 • 4 Sundays • 1 – 3:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $215
These monthly get-togethers will turn that no-writing frown upside-down.

THE ATTENTIVE WRITER with Nani Power
9/21/23 – 11/9/23 • 8 Thursdays • 7 – 9 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $395
Immerse yourself in the senses to create astounding stories that resonate.

WRITING COMPELLING HISTORICAL FICTION with Dave Tevelin
9/23/23 – 11/4/23 • 6 Saturdays • 10 AM – 12 PM
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $295
Make your fiction and non-fiction come alive by incorporating gripping facts about what the world was really like when your story takes place.

GENERATING FLASH FICTION with Hildie Block
9/26/23 – 10/24/23 • 5 Tuesdays • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $250
Short and Sweet! Let’s discover and write some flash fiction.

WRITING LATINE MONSTERS with Ofelia Montelongo
9/26/23 – 10/10/23 • 3 Tuesdays • 6 – 8 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $150
A beginning fiction workshop all about Latine monsters.

CRAFTING FICTION: ELEMENT BY ELEMENT with Elizabeth Poliner
9/28/23 – 11/9/23 • 7 Thursdays • 7 – 9 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $350
Let’s demystify the craft of fiction writing!

PLOTTING YOUR NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood
9/29/23 – 10/20/23 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous
Wet Ink • All Levels • $215
Study the architecture of a novel and devise plans for plotting your own.

USING BACKSTORY EFFECTIVELY with Kathryn Johnson
9/30/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Enrich your story with moments from your characters’ past.

WRITING CONTEMPORARY FICTION with Christopher Linforth
10/2/23 – 11/20/23 • 8 Mondays • 7 – 9 PM
Zoom • Intermediate • $395
Write a publishable story for the current literary market!
CREATE YOUR NOVEL REVISION PLAN with Sam Cameron  
10/7/23 – 10/28/23 • 4 Saturdays • 10 AM – 12:30 PM 
The Writer’s Center • Intermediate • $215  
Learn how to approach revision strategically.

INTRO TO FLASH FICTION with Christopher Linforth  
10/9/23 – 10/30/23 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous 
Wet Ink • Beginner • $215  
This workshop will introduce writers to the explosive short form of flash fiction.

COMPELLING SCENES with Kathryn Johnson  
10/14/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $60  
Learn the critical elements you need in every scene you write and gain confidence in your writing.

FINISH THAT FLASH with Tara Campbell  
10/23/23–11/13/23 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous 
Wet Ink • Intermediate/Advanced • $215  
Workshop and edit those flash fiction stories sitting around on your computer!

INTERMEDIATE NOVEL WRITING: THE 8 CS with Tammy Greenwood  
10/27/23 – 12/15/23 • 8 Weeks • Asynchronous 
Wet Ink • Intermediate • $395  
Let’s finish that novel you’ve started!

CREATING NOVEL CHARACTERS with Tammy Greenwood  
10/27/23 – 11/17/23 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous 
Wet Ink • All Levels • $215  
Bring your characters to life on the page.

EXPLORING GOTHIC FICTION with Lacey N. Dunham  
10/28/23 • Saturday • 1 – 3 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $60  
A crash course on the ins and outs of Gothic fiction!

HOW TO PLOT LIKE A PRO with Kathryn Johnson  
10/28/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $60  
Create a winning foundation for any story you write!

FICTION II: REFINE YOUR WRITING VOICE with Nick Rees Gardner  
10/30/23 – 12/18/23 • 8 Mondays • 7 – 9:30 PM  
The Writer’s Center • Intermediate/Advanced • $395  
Hone your stories to make them publication ready.

4-WEEK FLASH FICTION with Hananah Zaheer  
11/6/23 – 11/27/23 • 4 Sundays • 6 – 8 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $215  
This workshop will focus on the possibility and liberation created by flash fiction.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!
NEW FICTIONS: HYBRID AND EXPERIMENTAL NARRATIVE FORMS with Cleo Qian and Jenzo DuQue-French
11/11/23 – 11/18/23 • 2 Saturdays • 11 AM – 1:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $115
Break out of traditional narrative norms and experiment with new fiction tools.

YOUR FIRST (OR NEXT) NOVEL with Kathryn Johnson
11/11/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $60
Get inspired and dive right into the novel of your dreams!

CREATING CONFLICT & TENSION with Kathryn Johnson
11/18/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Every great story has conflict – grab yours!

PLOTTING YOUR NOVEL with Tammy Greenwood
11/24/23 – 12/15/23 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous
Wet Ink • All Levels • $215
Study the architecture of a novel and devise plans for plotting your own.

FINISH YOUR NOVEL with Eva Langston
12/2/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12 PM
The Writer's Center • Intermediate/Advanced • $60
Learn how to push through writer roadblocks so you can finally finish that novel.

TROUBLESHOOTING YOUR FICTION with Kathryn Johnson
12/16/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Learn to spot the red flags that may cause your story to be rejected by agents and publishers.

FABLES FOR THE PRESENT DAY with Talia Lakshmi Kolluri
12/17/23 • Sunday • 12 – 3 PM
Zoom • Intermediate • $60
Learn how to incorporate techniques from storytelling traditions to create contemporary work.

FLOW THROUGH WRITER’S BLOCK with Chris Lilly
9/9/23 • Saturday • 1 – 3 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Discover how to defeat writer’s block, conquer impostor syndrome, and write faster without sacrificing quality.

PURPOSEFUL PROSE: MAKING WRITERLY CHOICES with Mathangi Subramanian
9/11/23 – 10/16/23 • 6 Weeks • Asynchronous
Wet Ink • Beginner/Intermediate • $295
Clarify emotional and craft-based intentions for your writing.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!
APPLYING TO WRITING RESIDENCIES with Christopher Linforth
9/16/23 – 10/7/23 • 4 Saturdays • 5 – 7 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $215
Write a winning application for a writing residency!

WRITING SONG LYRICS with Al Basile
9/16/23 – 11/4/23 • 8 Saturdays • 2 – 4 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $395
Build the relationship of words to music to create memorable songs.

CREATIVE WRITING FOR BEGINNERS with Afabwaje Kurian
9/18/23 – 10/9/23 • 4 Weeks • Asynchronous
Wet Ink • Beginner • $215
Try your hand at creative writing!

POP UP!: ADDING HUMOR TO YOUR WRITING with Nikki Frias
9/21/23 • Thursday • 7 – 8 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $30
Add dynamic characters and storylines with comedy elements!

MAPPING STRATEGIES FOR STORY STRUCTURE with Lynn Auld Schwartz
9/23/23 • Saturday • 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $60
Use exploratory mapping exercises, tools, and techniques to discover where your story is going and how to get there.

HIGH-OCTANE GRAMMAR with Kenneth D. Ackerman
9/27/23 • Wednesday • 7 – 8:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
This workshop includes a refresher on grammar essentials, strong verbs, and sharp sentences to make your writing sing.

COMPELLING FIRST PAGES with Lacey N. Dunham
9/30/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Grab your reader’s attention from page one!

BECOMING A MASTER WRITER with John DeDakis
10/3/23 – 11/7/23 • 6 Tuesdays • 7 – 9 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $295
Take your writing to the next level in this workshops designed to drill deeper into the finer points of story.

CHARACTERIZATION IN FICTION AND CREATIVE NON-FICTION with Aaron Hamburger
10/10/23 – 10/17/23 • 2 Tuesdays • 7 – 9 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $115
Let’s make the people you’re writing about feel as real on the page as they do in life!

FREE ASSOCIATION WRITING with Mary Collins
10/12/23 • Thursday • 6:30 – 8:30 PM
The Writer’s Center • Intermediate/Advanced • $60
Bring back the fun, whimsy and joy you once felt when writing!
EVOKEING READER EMPATHY with Lynn Auld Schwartz
10/14/23 • Saturday • 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $60
Learn how to employ the craft of emotion that is essential to every story’s purpose.

MASTERING PRECISION AT THE SENTENCE LEVEL with Sayan Ray
10/21/23 – 12/9/23 • 7 Saturdays • 10 AM – 1 PM
The Writer's Center • All Levels • $350
Writing good sentences is harder than you think!

STRUCTURING YOUR BOOK with Hildie Block
10/31/23 – 11/7/23 • 2 Tuesdays • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $115
Explore different ways to structure your novel or memoir through exercises and examples.

MAKING YOUR CHARACTERS MATTER with Lynn Auld Schwartz
11/4/23 • Saturday • 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $60
Create a character who a reader cares about.

STORYTELLING: APPLYING IT TO YOUR WRITING with Solveig Eggerz
11/11/23 – 11/18/23 • 2 Saturdays • 10 AM – 2 PM
The Writer’s Center • Beginner/Intermediate • $115
Learn how storytelling can enhance your writing.

USING SETTING FOR STRUCTURE AND IMPACT with Laura J. Oliver
11/11/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
This setting intensive will enhance your fiction and memoir.

CREATIVE RECOVERY AND SELF-CARE FOR WRITERS with GG Renee Hill
11/12/23 • Sunday • 1 – 4 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Navigate all phases of the creative process without burning out.

UNCLOGGING YOUR BRAIN with Lisa Jan Sherman
11/14/23 • Tuesday • 7 – 8:30 PM
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $60
Learn to use improvisational techniques as a tool for writing.

HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY with Nikki Frias
11/16/23 • Thursday • 7 – 8 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Join us for an hour as we discuss and learn different effective methods towards building and developing your story.

CREATIVE SPIRIT: INFUSING YOUR WRITING WITH ENERGY with Lindsey Van Wagner
12/2/23 • Saturday • 1 – 3 PM
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $60
Use spirituality to strengthen and freshen your creativity.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!
HOW TO WRITE A LOT with Kathryn Johnson  
12/2/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $60  
Create, track, and maximize your writing time to finish projects sooner and with less stress.

SHOW AND TELL INTENSIVE with Laura J. Oliver  
12/9/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $60  
Learn the single most important skill any writer, of any genre can possess.

WRITING THE TRUTH: A GUIDE TO NON-FICTION WRITING with Eric Lichtblau  
9/11/23 – 10/9/23 • 5 Mondays • 6 – 8:00 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $250  
Hands-on lessons on how to write non-fiction narratives in a clear and compelling way.

RESEARCHING AND WRITING YOUR FAMILY HISTORY with Kenneth Ackerman  
9/13/23 • Wednesday • 7 PM – 8:30 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $60  
The nuts and bolts of investigating our family trees—perfect for memoirists, biographers, or people just interested to learn where they came from.

WRITING FOR ADVOCACY with Tracy Hahn-Burkett  
9/14/23 – 10/5/23 • 4 Thursdays • 7 – 9 PM  
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $215  
Explore the components of different forms of political writing for both writers and everyday citizens looking to change their corners of the world.

VULNERABILITY IN PERSONAL STORYTELLING with GG Renee Hill  
9/17/23 • Sunday • 1 – 4 PM  
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $60  
Find the courage to write about sensitive subjects.

HOW TO WRITE A BRILLIANT BRAIDED ESSAY with Laura J. Oliver  
9/23/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $60  
Learn to weave observations and anecdotes into a story greater than the sum of its parts!

ADVANCED PERSONAL ESSAY with William O’Sullivan  
9/30/23 – 11/18/23 • 8 Saturdays • 10 AM – 12:30 PM  
Zoom • Advanced • $395  
For serious personal essayists who want to take their work to the next level.

EXPLORING IDENTITY: CENTERING CULTURE IN NONFICTION with Sufiya Abdur-Rahman  
10/5/23 – 10/26/23 • 4 Thursdays • 7 – 9 PM  
The Writer’s Center • Beginner/Intermediate • $215  
Learn to write from diverse cultural perspectives in ways that appeal to a variety of readers.

BOOT CAMP FOR WRITERS with Beth Kanter  
10/17/23 – 12/12/23 • 8 Tuesdays • 10:30 AM – 1:30 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $395  
Tone up your writing muscles!
THE LANGUAGE WITHIN  with Judith Harris
9/5/23 – 10/10/23 • 6 Tuesdays • 10:30 AM – 1 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $295
Look at your inner language and life experiences, sometimes joy, sometimes grief, to explore writing from personal and cultural memory.

PREPARING YOUR POETRY PORTFOLIO  with Thibault Raoult
9/13/23 – 10/11/23 • 5 Wednesdays • 6 – 8 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $250
Build out and refine your portfolio.

POETRY WRITING AND REVISION  with Emily Holland
9/13/23 – 10/25/23 • 7 Wednesdays • 7 – 9 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $350
Craft new work and rebuild your relationship to revision.

WRITE THE FREE SONNET  with Indran Amirthanayagam
9/16/23 – 9/30/23 • 3 Saturdays • 11 AM – 1:00 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $150
Write “free” sonnets after studying the traditional sonnet forms known as the Shakespearean and the Petrachan.

WRITING ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS  with GG Renee Hill
10/18/23 – 10/25/23 • 2 Wednesdays • 6 – 8 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $115
Write about your experience with mental illness in a safe space.

HOW TO WRITE MICRO MEMOIR  with Laura J. Oliver
10/21/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Write your life story as you lived it, one moment at a time.

PERSONAL REPORTED ESSAY WORKSHOP  with Liz Tracy
10/24/23 – 11/28/2023 • 6 Tuesdays • 7 – 9 PM
The Writer’s Center • Beginner/Intermediate • $295
Personal reported essays are journalism with a personal twist.

BEGINNING YOUR MEMOIR  with Diane Zinna
10/30/23 – 11/10/23 • 10 Sessions, Monday – Friday • 10 – 11:30 AM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $415
Learn ten generative lessons to help you imagine your memoir or provide needed structure for your memoir-in-progress.

SHAPING YOUR BOOK OF NARRATIVE NONFICTION  with Diana Parsell
11/4/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
The Writer’s Center  • Beginner/Intermediate • $60
Plan your nonfiction book starting from the big picture!
VILLANELLE CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary
9/17/23 • Sunday • 11 AM – 2 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $60
Guided by an internationally published author of sonnets, villanelles, and other metrical poems, you’ll read time-honored villanelles to see how and why they work.

USE POETIC TECHNIQUE TO IMPROVE YOUR PROSE with Sayan Ray
9/20/23 • Wednesday • 7 – 9:30 PM
The Writer's Center • All Levels • $60
Learn how to break down the structure of poems, how to embed these structures into prose, and how doing so can add vibrancy to your story and its tone.

SURREALIST POETRY with Laura Lannan
9/21/23 – 10/26/23 • 6 Thursdays • 7 – 9 PM
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $295
Free your poetry and embrace the weird!

CHANNELING PERSONA with John-Michael Bloomquist
9/23/23 – 10/14/23 • 4 Saturdays • 1 – 3 PM
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $215
Chanel your inner voices and imagery through persona and visual poetry.

LINE BREAKS IN POETRY with Melanie Figg
9/23/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Enhance your poems’ musicality, tension, and meaning with smarter line breaks.

HOW TO END A POEM with Sue Ellen Thompson
9/24/23 • Sunday • 1 – 4 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
What’s the best way to way to end a poem?

NATURAL METER CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary
9/24/23 • Sunday • 11 AM – 2 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $60
Strengthen your writing by understanding the natural rhythms of speech.

POETRY VS. TRAUMA with Claudia Gary
10/8/23 – 10/22/23 • 3 Sundays • 11 AM – 2 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $150
Learn, and try out, some of the many ways poetry can help to free the writer.

INTRO TO THE HAIKU with Ryland Shengzhi Li
10/12/23 • 11/2/23 • 4 Thursdays • 7:30 – 9 PM
Zoom • Beginner • $215
In this introductory course, we will learn about the Japanese and English language traditions of haiku, write our own haiku, and learn about related short-form poems.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!
READING AND WRITING CONTEMPORARY POETRY with Emily Holland
11/1/23 – 11/29/23 • 4 Wednesdays • 7 – 9 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $215
Write new poems based on exciting new poetic voices!

WHOLE-BRAIN POETRY with Claudia Gary
11/4/23 – 12/9/23 • 5 Saturdays • 10 AM – 1 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $250
Learn how our brains are wired for poetry, and use that knowledge to enrich your writing.

SONNET CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary
11/5/23 • Sunday • 11 AM – 2 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $60
This workshop is for poets who would like to improve their sonnet skills, or write their first sonnet.

PERSONA POEM CRASH COURSE with Claudia Gary
11/12/23 • Sunday • 11 AM – 2 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $60
“I” does not always mean “me.”

SYNTAX AS STRATEGY with Sue Ellen Thompson
11/12/23 • Sunday • 1 – 4 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Take a close look at how sentences are put together and how changing their structure can send a poem off in a new direction

WRITE BETTER POETRY TITLES with Melanie Figg
11/18/23 • Saturday • 10 AM – 12:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Expand your poem’s meaning and grab readers’ attention with stronger titles.

FREEDOM WITH FORMS with Claudia Gary
11/19/23 • Sunday • 11 AM – 2 PM
Zoom • Intermediate/Advanced • $60
Inspired by Richard Moore’s The Rule That Liberates, we will do brief writing exercises that use the enchantment of meter and rhyme to liberate your deeper imagination.

HUMOR IN POETRY with Sue Ellen Thompson
12/10/23 • Sunday • 1 – 4 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Does a good poem have to take itself seriously?

GRATITUDE IN POETRY with Ann Quinn
10/20/23 – 11/10/23 • 4 Fridays • 10:30 AM – 1 PM
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $215
Each class will include discussion of inspiring poems, guided free-writes, and sharing as we explore how we can bring wisdom, joy, and gratitude to our writing.

For details and to register, visit writer.org!
FUNDAMENTALS OF PERSUASIVE WRITING with James Alexander
10/5/23 – 11/9/23 • 6 Thursdays • 7 – 9:30 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $295
Transfer strong, well-crafted opinions from your mind onto the page!

HOW TO BECOME A ROCK STAR FREELANCER
with Elizabeth Chang and Nevin Martell
10/30/23 – 11/13/23 • 3 Mondays • 7 – 9 PM
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $150
Learn the art and business of freelance writing from a veteran freelancer and former Washington Post editor.

WRITE LIKE THE NEWS with Hank Wallace
12/6/23 • Wednesday • 7 – 9 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
Become concise as news, precise as law.

CHOOSE YOUR BEST BOOK-PUBLISHING PATH
with Katherine Pickett
9/19/23 – 9/26/23 • 2 Tuesdays • 6:30 – 8:30 PM
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $115
Choose the publishing path that’s right for you and your book.

GETTING PUBLISHED IN LITERARY JOURNALS
with Nancy Naomi Carlson
9/30/23 – 10/1/23 • Saturday & Sunday • 12 – 3 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $115
Here’s a "how-to" to get your work out into the world of literary journals.

CONTRACTS AND COPYRIGHTS FOR WRITERS
with Kenneth D. Ackerman
10/11/23 • Wednesday • 7 – 8:30 PM
Zoom • All Levels • $60
What every writer needs to know about the legal netherworld of contracts and copyrights.

BOOK MARKETING ON A BUDGET with Rob Jolles
10/26/23 – 11/2/23 • 2 Thursdays • 9:30 – 11 AM
Zoom • All Levels • $115
Your job isn’t over once you’ve published a book; it’s just beginning and we’ll go over countless ideas that are budget friendly!

BOOK PROMOTION THROUGH PODCASTING with Rob Jolles
11/30/23 – 12/7/23 • 2 Thursdays • 9:30 – 11 AM
Zoom • All Levels • $115
We’ll not only be looking at how to find good podcasts and get on them, we’ll even talk about how to start your own podcast!
THE ART OF THE PUBLIC READING with Julia Tagliere  
9/11/2023 – 9/18/2023 • 2 Mondays • 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM  
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $115  
Polish those public speaking skills and dazzle at your next event!

HOW TO WRITE A STAND-UP COMEDY ROUTINE with Sheila Wenz  
9/12/2023 – 10/10/2023 • 5 Tuesdays • 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM  
Zoom • All Levels • $250  
Learn the art of turning your everyday life and thoughts into a funny conversational style of writing.

REVISING YOUR SCRIPT with Richard Washer  
9/13/2023 – 11/1/2023 • 8 Wednesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM  
The Writer’s Center • Intermediate/Advanced • $395  
Develop strategies for revision to tighten and improve your scripts.

THE LIT READING: PERFORMING YOUR VOICE ALOUD with Sam Nelson  
11/1/2023 • Wednesday • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM  
The Writer’s Center • All Levels • $60  
This workshop aims to improve public reading skills.

INTRODUCTION TO WRITING FOR FILM & TV with Khris Baxter  
11/7/2023 – 11/14/2023 • 2 Tuesdays • 7:00 PM – 9:30 PM  
Zoom • Beginner/Intermediate • $115  
Learn the fundamentals of screenwriting from a screenwriter & producer.
ON HUMOR AND JOY
I think that we’re very used to Black writers talking about Black pain, trans people talking about the terribleness in the news. The news is very skewed to trans news that is negative, but I think that in the midst of me talking about these very socially charged, heavy issues, I have a lot of joy in these poems and I have a lot of humor in these poems because that’s just how I live life. Something can be funny, and then I can be really sad about something the next moment. That’s how we live life.

In my book and my poems, I try to be reflective of those things and try to be within a Black tradition of comedy, and having these little jokes embedded in really serious poems and things like that. I like teetering the line between what’s important and what’s serious and also the fun that we can still have in that serious place.

It’s as if people think that Black people are just sad all the time. It’s like, “Well, no, we wouldn’t be alive if we were sad all the time.” People think trans people are just depressed all the time, and it’s like we live in depressing times, but there’s a reason why we have survived those times. I would like people to ask me more about the good things in general.

ON MUSICALITY
Before I knew what poetry was, I definitely knew what music was, and I’ve always prided myself on being — not like an aficionado of music, but I just consume a whole bunch of music. That’s my media. [I listen to] thousands and tens of thousands of hours...every year.

I think music and poetry have a very intertwined history. Before we had the written word, we had poems as songs. We had poems as things to be said out loud. I feel very lucky that I think my poetic practice started with the spoken word. My teacher in high school, who did the after-school poetry society, was pretty active in slam and spoken word, so I didn’t really have any relationship with the line at first. It was about how it sounded out loud.

The ways that I have moved through sound I hope are similar to that of a musician...I see my poems as life emulated through sound.... I’m listening to things like rhyme. I’m listening to things like alliteration. I’m listening to things like, when do I need to pause and take a break? When I went to college and started to think, “Oh, maybe I want to write a book one day, I have to think about how it’s presented in a book.” Then I got a bit more cognizant of the line, and at first I think it was just like, where do I want a natural pause to happen?

Now I think line can have so many different effects and I think it has different effects in [Freedom House] in particular because sometimes it’s like a visual element. It’s me holding your hand and telling you like, “Okay, you need to go here and you
need to think of these two phrases or this sentence as something with some absence in it right here.” The line is visual as well as sound-driven. I want you to read it as a disruption to what it is that I’m saying. I want your expectations to be upended. In those moments where you ain’t got me to tell you how to read it, then okay, I have lines to try to guide your ear and guide your eye.

PULITZER PRIZE FINALIST KELLY LINK
ON HER NEWEST STORY COLLECTION,
WHITE CAT, BLACK DOG

ON GROWING AS A WRITER
I had a point I think when we were beginning to put together my second collection. I was looking at the second collection and thinking, “I don’t think this is as good as the first book. I’m pretty sure that I have fallen into it. There’s been a decline.” Then I went and I looked at the first collection, and I felt this enormous sense of relief. I thought, “This book is not as good as I remembered it being,” and so I think that any kind of work that you do, you’re going to be suspicious sometimes of what you’re currently working on. In part, that may be that you haven’t revised it enough, but it may also be that you aren’t really correctly remembering the work that you’ve done before.

I’m pretty restless in the sense that I don’t want to repeat myself. Obviously, you’re going to repeat yourself if you write. You’re still interested in the same things. You’re going to hit some of the same notes. I feel as if pieces of a story often follow you into the next story and you have to check them off. If you’re willing to come up with new rules for yourself, if you’re willing to think, “What’s the thing that I haven’t done before? What’s the thing that I haven’t done well? What were some things that really gave me issues the last time that I tried them?” and approach a story with those techniques or that kind of structure in mind, then you’re going to end up doing something that feels at least a little bit different.

I do think that you do need the voice in your head that is the voice of doubt or the critical eye, but you also need the voice in your head that’s willing to recognize when you’ve done something that pleases you. As a writer, maybe as a person, you’re constantly talking to yourself, “You know that thing that I did that’s not working yet,” but you also have to allow the voice to speak that says, “That sentence was good, or this feels like it’s on the right track, or I feel that there’s something useful here.” You need to, when you recognize the good idea, say, that’s right, that is good, or that does seem interesting. I would like more of this good stuff, and then your brain begins to produce more of it.

ON REVISION
I don’t draft. The way that I usually work with a short story is I write a sentence or a couple of sentences at the start until it feels that there’s life to it, and then I work until I hit a point where that liveliness decays or falls away. Then I go back to the beginning and I see if I want to revise. Every time that I’m stuck, I’m going back to the very beginning, revising or adding until I hit the place where I became stuck previously. By the time that I get to the end, the beginning has been revised a lot. As the story loosens up and I have a better hold of it, I revise less and less. Usually the last third of the story, I have not had to revise much at all because by that point with my sense of the story, I’ve just become, I guess, more sure-footed.
I know that not every writer works this way, but I have a hold of the ending before I have anything else usually. Then that ending does not really change in part because as I begin the story, I’m thinking of that ending, and everything that I do is in service of reaching that ending.

**JIN Wooo CHONG SHARES INSIGHTS INTO HIS REMARKABLE DEBUT NOVEL, FLUX**

**ON PLOT**

I would say plot comes first because I don’t think I’m good enough to write a book that is the voice of someone living their life for a day, for a weekend, and [voice is] what sustains it. I go, I guess, the opposite way. One of the first things I thought about [Flux] was the ends of part one and two because those are two of the moments that — I had to figure those out first for everything else to make sense. Yes, I’m very plot-driven. A lot of people hate that and say that that’s wrong, but that’s basically the only way I can write books. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be writing.

**ON REVISION**

I am someone who is genuinely afraid of revising. It’s really stressful to me, especially large-scale things. The most anxiety-inducing pieces of feedback that I can imagine are ones that say, “The direction of the second half of this book is troubled or it’s wrong and you need to focus more on something else,” something like that. Because then, in my mind, I’m playing it out as like — Well, first of all, the whole second half of the book then would need to change, and then the whole first half of the book would have to change to set it up correctly. It snowballs into something that can be a lot of stress to deal with. The way that I start out writing something is programmed to try and eliminate as much need for revision as possible because of [this fear].

I outlined [Flux] over four years. This outline became 50 pages long. It had its own table of contents. It had bits of dialogue that I thought were interesting, character descriptions. It had links to articles that I was reading. It had whole passages written out that I thought I might need to add in or I felt inspired to write at that time. When it came time to write the actual draft, it was actually very straightforward. I wrote it front to back.

Even so, the first person to read it seriously was my agent, who said that there was something missing about the root of this main character Brandon’s obsession with television and this idealized TV figure. I needed to explain why it’s so important to him. It was like my stomach dropped out because I was like, “Oh, my God. Well, that’s the most important part of the book. I have to change literally everything.” I found myself copying something that my first-ever professor at Columbia told me to do. My professor was Sam Lipsyte. He said that you can do just another pass. You can open [another] Word doc and just write the whole thing over again and see what happens. That’s what I did for most of it. I think almost every chapter was rewritten.
From Chet’la Sebree’s Guest Edited Folio on *Home & Hiraeth*

** Untitled **

Adesiyan Oluwapelumi

There is a thin vein between èjé & eje by which I mean even the body betrays its oath of staying alive. In this poem, I am ogún but an age is merely a measure of how much war you must wear. Mother chastises my bravado & calls me an hunter’s tail & I stare watching as the oro slides on her lips like oró, like poison, like taboo. A lioness teaches her sons to be cubs but here, Mother plucks the seeds of our fangs & plants the gum of fear. She says fear is safety. Courage is iku. Even my dialect warns me, okán for courage, also for heart & a lacerated nymph for hoe, yet I chose to sit with the sun confusing its dusk for rest. Home warns us too with its transient epithet; how ilé with a windy alteration of its tonal oath could become îlè; a nomenclature for grave. The truth is this, whether the ram feigns bravery or wears a coat of fear, the slaughter-man will not stop the projectile of his swiveling sabre.

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Kate Sweeney

**Ongoing Conversation**

*It must be nice,* she said, when I show her the screenshot of six giraffes that died of thirst in the Serengeti. *Death*

*is not usually so graceful.* I look at what I’ve shown her, a drone view of six giraffes in a haphazard circle, limbs splayed in elegant ballet. How quiet a picture can be. I think back to the day I noticed her skin starting to loosen, when she stopped caring about cleaning between the folds of her belly. Her dead milk bag breasts spilling over that final threshold of hospital gown, once useful, now expired. Bruised nipple. Elastic skin. What ends up holding us in. We will all die of thirst in some way. A print of The Little Chestnut Tree at Lake Constance decorates the hospital wall.

I mistake Constance for constant. I mistake sturdiness for immortality. The window faces a wall of brick.

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Saba Keramati

Reflections of Heaven

The call of a nighthawk rings out into the night.
Between sky and water, only blue surrounds.
This lake, a reflection of heaven. In Chinese,
heaven is just a house in the sky, and the sky is empty.

Between sky and water, only blue surrounds.
Morning glories, once open, turn inward on themselves.
Heaven is just a house in the sky. Is it empty?
It is turning black. The only blue the moon’s halo.

Morning glories, once open, turn inward on themselves;
their heaven a self-creation, their house their own bodies.
They are turning black. The moon’s blue halo
fading behind a cloud, like the door of a house closing.

I create a heaven, a house outside of my own body.
A home is so hard to find. I am disappearing,
fading behind a cloud, like the door of a house closing.
All that’s left: a perfect moon.

A home is so hard to find. I am disappearing
beneath the waves, swelling to the shore.
In Farsi, when something is perfect, it is the moon.
How long can I search for a place that doesn’t exist?

Waves always swell to the shore. Some things belong,
like the call of a nighthawk ringing out in the night.
How long can I search for a place that doesn’t exist?
This lake, a reflection of heaven.
In her new book, *The Poetry of Loss: Romantic and Contemporary Elegies*, Judith Harris, PhD uses a psychoanalytic lens to explore poetic elegy’s relationship to — and potential use as a therapeutic tool for addressing — grief. A deep, erudite book, it covers poems from history up to the present, studying the long tradition of elegy and revealing insights within the genre — many of which may elude even the poets themselves. Judith was kind enough to go in-depth on the subject with me, via email.

**ZP:** What draws you to grief as both an object of study and a subject to write about?

**JH:** I am drawn to grief because it is the most irreducible of human emotions, and it can’t be reasoned away. You can’t talk a mourner out of pining for a deceased loved one, you have to recognize that mourning is an involuntarily human reaction to the changes that occur when the loss of someone or something vital to them takes place. Why do we mourn, when we know it is futile to bring back the dead? Is it ever possible to move fully beyond mourning? It’s puzzling yet reassuring in some ways that the disappearance of one person in eight billion can cause such exquisite and lasting pain.

In this book, I consider not only the purposes of elegy both for the poet and the reader and how those purposes have changed with the waning of religious customary practices we once relied on to bring us solace, but also to reexamine the ethics of this art form. Although contemporary poets like Plath, de-idealize the dead, and are characteristically embittered, there is room to affirm aspects of mourning as reparative, transformative, and continuous. *Poetry of Loss* invites readers not to turn away from the pain of loss but to embrace the losses as part of the intensity of love that refuses to be diminished. Within this crucible of grief, the dead appear paradoxically within the very words that claim they have vanished.

And I have always thought of grief as innate to our beings, and that even before we have experienced the loss of an important other, the amorphous shape of loss pervades our very beings. Modern psychology is founded on ego development of a bounded, separate identity from one’s parents, but this is a slow process and there is always some resistance to that. In my own life, I’ve had the perception of being lost in lostness, where the specific object of my attachment is diffuse, but the feeling of nostalgia for some lost person or thing is palpable. I wanted to investigate why that is, why some people ruminate over personal loss or abandonment and others have less susceptibility to grief. My prediction was that elegiac poets were inclined to hold onto the deceased, but also hold on to the grief itself. The poet-mourner may move from chronic melancholy to make something of the abyss, whether in love or anger. Increasingly, contemporary critics and clinicians suggest that mourning should be considered never-ending and the connection with the deceased should be encouraged rather than discouraged. This idea of protracting grief contradicts the Freudian notion that bereavement involves the survivor severing ties with the lost loved one, and expressive of elegiac longings, poets in the modern age refuse consolation and cede to the endlessness of grief.

**How do your poetic and psychiatric selves interact? How does one inform the other?**

What a good question! My thinking process as a poet is associative and fluid; I have the emotion first and the experience later. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy uses language through talking, but
poetry uses language in a much more crafted way. It may be that being a poet affords me the negative capability to enter other poet’s identities, and in my poems, natural forms. It seems to me that all writing makes use of the unconscious. In my first book, Signifying Pain, I did a great deal of research into the therapeutic effects of writing through grief and trauma and how poetry processes otherwise inscrutable feelings and events. Understanding that liminal experiencing involves engaging a psychic space outside of the boundaries of ego opens up the possibilities of formulating a paradigm that deepens personal and therapeutic experience.

Also, I’ve published some articles, including one in College English, on the porous boundaries between critical writing and creative writing, so that the goals of composition should include the writer’s emotions. More and more, I’m reading critical books by scholars that incorporate psychoanalytic theory and the author’s own life in an evocative way. Kristeva writes movingly in Black Sun about her own melancholia and the paradoxes of loving and hating at once. Peter Sacks, Edward Hirsch, Sandra Gilbert, Gregory Orr, Ann Carson, are just a few of the poets who write eloquent literary criticism. Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva write poetic theoretical criticism. I do pay attention to the nuances and texture of my criticism. Obviously, critics are overshadowed by the poets they are interpreting — and that is how it should be. But there is more room for intersubjectivity.

Your book is a work of psychoanalytic literary criticism. What kinds of things do you learn from paying extra careful attention to texts?

Psychoanalytic criticism is often deconstructive, it emerges from what a text does not say as much as what it does; it teases out implications, slippages, and gaps. According to Freud, art sublimates essentially forbidden urges within the psyche and redirects and locates them into a socially acceptable activity. And while he obviously admired artists, (witness his writings on Leonardo Da Vinci), and studied them scientifically, art was to him a substitute form of gratification. He saw artists as neurotic, and highly narcissistic (no surprise, there!), and harboring secret mental impulses that are hidden from conscious understanding, and concealing issues they are trying to confront. He thought the artist had the power to create art but not to interpret what they created.

What do you think the difference might be between how we as readers interpret an image in a piece of writing versus the conscious thoughts the writer had during the act of writing?

Yes, that is exactly the point! I once had a student in a workshop years ago who wrote erudite poetry referencing esoteric or non-referential texts and deliberately tried to spoof the reader. He cited postmodernist claims that there is nothing outside of language, only random and competing narratives of non-meaning and its efflorescence. I respect this point of view, but in a workshop setting, people tend to want to interpret and construct their own meanings, i.e. indicative of reader response theory, which privileges the reader's subjectivity over the text. Does the text have an intentional neutrality? Sometimes we find ourselves analyzing the poetry because that is human nature. But you can find yourself in a guessing game: “Is it bigger than a breadbox?” In the old days, there was an unspoken rule that the poet could not speak until interpretations were offered. And, yes, I have seen some crazy psychoanalytic fabulations of canonized texts — like all things, it should be taken in moderation.

As a poet, I have actually cultivated accessibility, something that some might think sentimental, but I found great satisfaction in publishing work in public venues like The Atlantic, The Nation, The New Republic, Slate, American Life in Poetry and JAMA. I wasn’t writing for non-literary audiences, I felt privileged speaking to the things that happen in everyday life to everyday people. My poem about gathering autumnal leaves in grade school, and doing the crayon rubbings of them, is often brought out by the Poetry Foundation around Thanksgiving,
as is the one about my mother voting on Election Day. I’m always surprised by that because they are uncomplicated, recapturing moments with attempts at fullness and clarity.

**Your book’s final chapter deals with bringing elegy into the writing workshop. Can you share a little bit about what you’ve found is helpful or meaningful for your students?**

I try to meet my poetry students where they “live” most intensely and emotionally. That is not to say by any stretch of the imagination that I’m trying to psychoanalyze them, or dredging up their traumas, only that there is a reservoir of memories within us, and that poetic language is often a labor of unburying what is buried within us. Elegies, paradoxically, are of an art that will never die. Loss creates a vacuum within, and we cannot remain the same identity after someone close to us dies.

In my workshops, elegiac writing evolves organically; it is not unlike other poetry, where a kind of inner transference is possible. Once the poet-mourner can step back from the poem and consider it as an aesthetic object, he or she can gain greater distance or a meta position on the life of the loved one being restored through memory. Poetry begins as disconnected fragments or signifiers, but it ends as a tapestry of powerfully connected meanings. I began this research on elegy with an intuitive sense that people are unique and variously equipped to process loss and express strong feelings about the deceased. I believe that the “open wound” of grief can be sutured and healed, not only with time but with the understanding that the dead are always present in the imagination. I offer case studies of students I’ve worked with writing about loss and demonstrate that some of the same patterns occur in august progenitors like Milton or Wordsworth.

**In writing Poetry of Loss, what was your greatest takeaway?**

I think it is that there is no such thing as letting go of an attachment. Even Freud — who had distinguished “successful mourning” from “melancholic mourning” and argued that mourning comes to an end when we can accept a substitute for the dead and reenter the world — later talked about his own grief over losing his daughter as insurmountable. In moments of grief and anguish, it seems we cannot say a single word, but the triumph of the human spirit is that we do, and we can.

My debut novel, *Bad Questions*, is the story of Billy Blumberg, a 12-year-old boy living in 1971 Montgomery County, Maryland. Billy is coming to terms with his misplaced guilt over the recent death of his father, a Hebrew school principal, while at the same time navigating the challenges of moving from Silver Spring to Rockville in the middle of the seventh grade. *Bad Questions* is narrated by the adult Billy recalling his younger self.

Writing *Bad Questions* was very different from the writing I did in my day job as a researcher and analyst at the Library of Congress’ Congressional Research Service. At CRS, I churned out a variety of written products. Look up the report: *Internet Governance and the Domain Name System: Issues for Congress*. Yeah, that was me! CRS reports are written in a style both bloodless and impersonal. Think heavy use of passive tense, lots of “on the other hands,” and caveats galore — all so that the reader has no notion of what the author really thinks about anything.

In *Bad Questions*, I wanted the reader to know exactly what the narrator thinks about everything. To render Billy’s character, I channeled my 12-year-old self and drew upon some of my pop culture obsessions growing up in the late 60s and early 70s. These included: the *Mad Magazine* satire of the movie *Love Story*, an endless buffet of Agatha Christie mysteries (*Cat Among...*
the Pigeons, Murder on the Links, Sparkling Cyanide, etc., etc.), the heart-breaking move of the Washington Senators baseball team to some place called “Irving, Texas,” and the metaphor-rich “Cone of Silence” in the TV spy spoof, Get Smart. Billy uses all of these memes as frames of reference to make sense of the world and reckon with the many challenges he must face.

In crafting the novel, I relied heavily on my childhood memories of those cultural touchstones. For example, in Chapter 10, Billy discovers that his mother has had a radiology appointment. He doesn’t know what “radiology” means, but assumes it has something to do with radioactivity. He remembers an episode of the 1960s TV show Gilligan’s Island in which a crate of radioactive seeds washes ashore. Shortly after being planted, the radioactive seeds yield grapes the size of watermelons. Billy tells himself that maybe radiology is therefore a good thing, because it could end world hunger.

The memory was vivid: I could see those dark purple Concord grapes, kissed by the morning dew, glistening in the tropical sun of that uncharted desert isle. “Grapes the size of watermelons” had a nice ring to it. But then the CRS researcher in me surfaced. Why not check? Would it kill me to google “Gilligan’s Island radioactive seeds?”

Oof. The Gilligan’s Island episode bears the title, “Pass the Vegetables, Please.” There are no grapes. It’s all carrots and cucumbers and a bunch of other giant, deformed vegetables. I had a decision to make. Should I do the correction, despite the fact that I liked the phrase: “grapes the size of watermelons?” When you’re researching for Congressional offices, you have to get everything 100% accurate. At CRS, my nightmare fantasy was screwing up and providing bad information to a member of Congress, who would then humiliate themselves on the House or Senate floor. My mistake would be enshrined in the Congressional Record forever.

But now I was writing a work of fiction. How much artistic license was I allowed if it was a question of giant grapes versus giant carrots and cucumbers? In Bad Questions, the adult Billy is looking back 50 years. Couldn’t the adult Billy’s memory be as faulty as mine? And what about Hollywood movies, where critical facts are altered all the time for artistic and commercial reasons? Besides, what were the odds that a Gilligan’s Island scholar would read my book?

On the other hand, I remained bothered by the nagging fact that there were no giant grapes the size of watermelons in that episode of Gilligan’s Island. I had a new nightmare fantasy. I’m doing a reading and somebody — with immense pleasure, I’m sure — approaches and shames me with the hard truth. “Season 3, episode 3. Look it up. Vegetables only. No grapes.”

In the end, I went with the giant carrots and cucumbers. My CRS researcher-self would not be denied. The facts are the facts. Pass the vegetables, please.

Len Kruger’s debut novel, Bad Questions, was the winner of the 2023 Washington Writers’ Publishing House Fiction Prize. His short fiction has appeared in Zoetrope: All-Story, The Barcelona Review, The Potomac Review, Gargoyle, Splonk, and the anthology, This is What America Looks Like: Fiction and Poetry from DC, Maryland, and Virginia. He is a graduate of the MFA Program at the University of Maryland.
Technology is nothing new for society. But AI is in a category by itself. It’s not about a shift in delivery models. It’s a paradigm shift. Meaning we can’t go back to the world before AI, any more than we can go back to the world before the Internet.

—Marie Pallante, President, American Association of Publishers, publishingperspectives.com, May 2023

If chatbots can largely remove living people from the writing equation, what does that portend for the future of writing as we know it? That is the pressing question. Before we turn there, however, let us consider a more basic question: What does it mean to be a writer?

The answer to that question would vary if asked before or after the fifth century. The same holds true if asked in 1823, 1923, or 2023. That is because the relationship between writers and the technologies of writing has always affected the creative process. More fundamentally, the very idea of writing, as Socrates argued in Plato’s Phaedrus, forever upset the apple cart of the oral tradition — it made static what was once a living dialogue between real people in real time.

WRITING TECHNOLOGIES FROM MESOPOTAMIA TO MODERNITY

As the ancient Greek word techne reveals, human knowledge has long been linked to technology. Though the earliest uses of writing trace back to Mesopotamia, crude symbolic forms of proto-writing existed as early as 35,000 BCE. Moving from the use of symbols to the advent of alphabets, what was a constant was a writing instrument and something on which to write (e.g., a stone slab). The history of writing from papyrus to wood-pulp paper and then from quill-penned inked scripts to Gutenberg’s press has long redefined both what it means to be a writer and what it means to write. The process of writing has thus been inextricably linked to technology, some form by which to express oneself and to be understood by others.

Beginning in 1868, the availability of commercially sold typewriters made writing more mechanical. With each new advancement, writers became more beholden to technology. Bertolt Brecht used an Erika, Truman Capote first selected a Royal HH and then a Smith-Corona Electra 110 to write his chilling true-crime novel. Sylvia Plath was more eclectic; she moved from Royal HH to an Olivetti Lettera 22, to a Hermes 2000, and then to Hermes 3000 models. As for Patricia Highsmith, she hit the keys of an Olympia Report de Luxe when she wrote her psychological thrillers. From basic manuals to sophisticated electric machines, the typewriter thus altered the meaning of writing.

Then there was the magic of personal computers (e.g., Radio Shack’s TRS-80 and IBM’s PC) and the research wonders of the Internet. As Katie Robertson recently noted in a New York Times article: “The publishing industry has spent the past two decades struggling to adjust to the internet, as print circulation has plummeted . . . .” After that
there was Wikipedia, which drove the final nail into Encyclopedia Britannica’s book business.

Everything from word-processing software to Grammarly AI assistance has resulted in writing becoming less personal and more mechanical. Now with Google’s ChatGPT, Bing’s AI chatbot, OpenAI’s latest GBT, Azure’s OpenAI Service, and Sudowrite, writers can have AI do the writing for them for everything from college papers to book blurbs. One can even use Storykube to write something about the history of writing.

Whether one is a writer or publisher, AI is upending the world of writing in the newspaper and book publishing worlds and elsewhere. Then there is the publisher’s paradox: On the one hand, AI could reduce publishing costs in significant ways. On the other hand, it poses major threats to traditional models of publishing.

Writ large, what we are witnessing in the evolution of the writing process is a move from technology as an assistant to the writer to a paradigm of technology as a replacement for the writer — the means became the end. Though we are not there yet, we seem to be heading there.

THE FRANKENSTEIN POSSIBILITY

“Nothing endures but change.” —Heraclitus

So how different might things get? Well, consider the following hypothetical scenario, which with the ever-increasing advances in AI becomes less conjectural. Imagine that a company launched a platform that allowed you to create a book. All you do is type in an author’s name, some descriptive lines, and the book’s length. Let us say you wanted a modern-day Sci-Fi version of Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel, Frankenstein. You click the applicable boxes and voila! You’ll have your e-book within no time and (maybe?) at a price lower than existing ones created by real people.

That may be where AI is tending, even though we still are in the work-the-bugs-out stages. Consider, nonetheless, what this could mean as AI capabilities become more sophisticated:

• Artificial writers could replace real ones,
• Literary agents could become a thing of the past,
• Bookstores and libraries would also bear the brunt of AI,
• And what about book reviews, writers’ workshops, and book festivals sans any actual human input?

And thanks to Apple and its “digital narration technology,” human-sounding narrators can now replace voice actors for audio-book audiences.

Before the advent of generative AI, direct and significant human involvement was essential to the writing and publishing process. With accelerating innovations in AI technology, however, that process stands to be radically transformed as never before. The days of the AI Frankenstein monster might be upon us sooner than we think, especially when one considers what Stephen Marche has observed: “The world of generative AI is progressing furiously.”

WRITERS’ WORRIES & PUBLISHERS’ PREDICAMENTS

“What we are witnessing is the unprecedented theft of private and copyrighted information belonging to real people.” —2023 class action lawsuit

Protecting writers’ intellectual property was first anticipated by the Copyright Clause of the Constitution and then guaranteed by the Copyright Act of 1790. Of course, certain exceptions were allowed; for example, there is a “fair use” exception, which was a 19th-century judicially created doctrine later codified in the 1976 Copyright Act. But when it comes to the work and work product of chatbots, such laws and exceptions are quite antiquated. In so many ways, the existing law appears to allow AI companies to pilfer untold fragments of data without crossing a copyright line.

Not surprisingly, and according to Robertson, the “impact of ‘generative’ AI, which can generate text, images, and other media from prompts, has become a top priority in discussions among publishers,” including online publishers. To that end, News Corp’s chief executive, Robert Thomson, counsels that “[t]ech companies should pay to use publishers’
content to produce results from AI chatbots.” Accordingly, our fair use laws need to be revised to reflect the realities of the AI world.

Notably, according to the US Copyright Office, any content generated entirely by an algorithm is not entitled to copyright protection. That, of course, could produce a “wild west” sort of business calamity in the publishing world. Then again, AI publishers could get around this by having a click-on condition of use not to republish any chatbot content or by coding content to prevent such use.

CONTROLLING AI — A DAUNTING CHALLENGE

The challenge of regulating AI seems almost Sisyphean. Writing in Politico, Pieter Haeck has pointed out that “[g]enerative artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT have upended European policymakers’ planned roadmap to regulate AI through the Artificial Intelligence Act, resulting in a call for voluntary, nonbinding guidelines to preempt the upcoming rules.”

In examining the who, where, and how of regulating AI, Eliza Strickland has also noted that some of the calls for regulations are coming from the very companies that are developing the technology and have the most to gain from unbridled commercial deployment. OpenAI’s CEO, Sam Altman, recently told the US Congress in written testimony that “OpenAI believes that regulation of AI is essential.” He further urged lawmakers to consider licensing requirements and safety tests for large AI models. Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google and its parent company, Alphabet, said recently that there will need to be “global frameworks” governing the use of AI.

Meanwhile, the following avenues, among others, are currently being explored to meet the challenges posed by AI:

- A “Protect the Creative Economy Coalition” has been formed by authors, journalists, artists, musicians, filmmakers, publishers, and booksellers.
- Large publishers are considering forming a coalition to address the impacts of AI on journalism.
- A 157-page class-action suit was filed in late June against OpenAI and Microsoft alleging the use of “stolen and misappropriated” information from millions of Internet users without their knowledge or permission to unlawfully develop their artificial intelligence programs.”
- “As labor contract negotiations heat up in Hollywood, unions representing writers and actors seek limits on artificial intelligence” by way of contract negotiations. (NYT, 4-29-23), and
- A nationally syndicated radio host has sued OpenAI for defamation.

A TIME OF TRANSITION

“We are in a period of transition; but a transition towards what?

—Simone Weil

We live in a time of momentous transition. What it means to be a writer is thus a definition in flux. And what it means to publish a written work is likewise being redefined. Will bots replace human writers? Will the human imagination be replaced by an artificial one? How wide might the gap between human input and the generative AI process become? While this seems to be the stuff of which Sci-Fi is made, the fact is that AI is quickly becoming the reality of our times.

It is an admirable sentiment: “Writers are human beings.” So said Mike Schur who is on the Writers Guild of America’s bargaining committee. Even so, one wonders how, or if, yesterday’s truth will survive in a technological world that even Mary Shelley could not have imagined.

© R. Collins, 2023. Ronald Collins is a retired law professor and co-author with David Skover of Robotica: Speech Rights and Artificial Intelligence (Cambridge University Press, 2018) and “Paratexts as Praxis,” Neohelicon, 2010). This fall he will moderate a panel discussion at New York University’s Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute titled “Publishing: Major Trends Then, Now, and to Come.”
At the Center of the Circle: 
Harriet de Boinville (1773–1847) 
and the Writers She Influenced 
During Europe’s Revolutionary Era

By Barbara de Boinville
newacademia.com

This first-ever biography of Harriet de Boinville explores her close relationships with Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and other leading writers of the Romantic era, but also tells the gripping story of Harriet’s early years as the wife of an aristocratic military officer during the French-English Wars, when she experienced a naval attack in the Caribbean, a shipwreck off the coast of France, and detention as a suspected spy in Dunkirk.

Magda, Standing

By Christine Fallert Kessides
magda-standing.com

Pittsburgh, 1916: When her father pulls her out of high school to care for her invalid mother and little brother, Magda is devastated — but the greater challenge is saving her family in the face of a war and pandemic. Resisting traditions and expectations, Magda undertakes a journey of self-discovery and resilience that leads back to caring for both family and a wider community.

Once Upon a Time in Baltimore

By Sally DiPaula
sallydipaula.com

Once Upon a Time in Baltimore begins in 1918, when Baltimore is coping with the Spanish Influenza epidemic, and follows the relationship of an Irish-American girl and the son of Sicilian immigrants through the Depression, World War II and into the latter half of the 20th century. It is both a family saga and an historical novel.