Course Schedule (subject to change)

Wednesday, Sep 5
Course introduction; instructor and student introductions; creation of presentation schedule
Robert Frost: “For Once, Then, Something”

PART I: The First Person
Wednesday, Sep 12
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Preface & Introduction
Ali Smith: “True Short Story”
Etgar Keret: “Suddenly, a Knock on the Door” and “Lieland”
John Gardner: “Basic Skills, Genre and Fiction as Dream” (selected paragraphs)
Assignment due: Two prose paragraphs, one descriptive, one narrative
Heather McHugh: “What he Thought” (in class)
Carolyn Forché: “The Colonel” (in class)
William Carlos Williams: “Nantucket” (in class)
Student Presenter: ALISHA AUSTIN

Wednesday, Sep 19
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 1 – Line and Stress
Bernard Cooper: “Where to Begin”
Damon Galgut: *In a Strange Room*
Ruth Draper: “In a Railway Station on the Western Plains” (spoken word; in class)
Assignment due: Rewrite last week’s paragraphs in lines of ten syllables each
Student Presenter: LEO CLAUSSEN

INTERLUDE: Manifesto
Wednesday, Sep 26
David Shields: *Reality Hunger*
DJ Danger Mouse: “December 4th”
Su Friedrich: *Sink or Swim* (film; in class)
Assignment due: roughly 30 lines of Anglo-Saxon verse
Student Presenter: MICHAEL LITWAK

PART II: Inspiration / Involvement / The World
Wednesday, Oct 3
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 2 – Acccentual-Syllabic Verse
Jim Shepard: “Love and Hydrogen,” “The Zero-Meter Diving Team,” “Gojira, King of the Monsters,” Batting Against Castro,” and other stories
Assignment due: Short narrative inspired by a collection or grouping of any kind
Student Presenter: CHARLIE STEINER

Wednesday, Oct 10
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 3 – Metrical Variation
Alison Bechdel: *Fun Home* (excerpt)
Marjane Satrapi: *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*
Assignment due: ten lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter
Robert Frost: “The Death of the Hired Man” (in class)
Student Presenter: AMANDA MULLER

Wednesday, Oct 17
Ryszard Kapuscinski: *Shah of Shohs*
Assignment due: Short narrative including a public (past historical or political) event or figure
Student Presenter: LEIGH BOND

PART III: Commentary

Wednesday, Oct 24
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 4: Phonic Echo
Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”
Edgar Allen Poe: “The Raven” (in class)
Assignment due: Story told graphically; focus on image and dialogue
Student Presenter: EVI TRIANTAFYLLIDES

Wednesday, Oct 31
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 5: Stanza
Vladimir Nabokov: *Pale Fire* (first half)
Maya Deren: *At Land* (in class)
Assignment due: Three quatrains rhyming ABAB, tetrameter or pentameter AND/OR at least 20 lines in ballad form
Student Presenter: JESSICA STEINDECKER

Wednesday, Nov 7
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 6: Verseforms
Vladimir Nabokov: *Pale Fire* (second half)
Vikram Seth: *Golden Gate* (excerpt)
James Fenton: “God: A Poem” (in class)
Assignment due: a piece of writing in any form specifically involving symbols and/or allegory
Assignment due: response to a public literary event
Student Presenter: TORIE ZALBEN

Wednesday, Nov 14
Nicholson Baker: *The Mezzanine*
Richard Howard: “Like Most Revelations”
Concrete poetry: Carroll, cummings, Herbert and others (in class)
Amanda Muller: “He Said, Pride and Prejudice”
Assignment due: sonnet
Student Presenter: GINA GIORDANO

PART IV: Form

Wednesday, Nov 21
W. G. Sebald: *Austerlitz*
Kenneth Anger: *Fireworks* (in class; film)
Gertrude Stein: “Susie Asado” (in class)
Assignment due: A narrative composed entirely from found texts; or a short piece of concrete poetry
Student Presenter: CANDACE ISHMAEL

Wednesday, Nov 28
Gertrude Stein: Selection from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas; “A Portrait of One;” selections from “Tender Buttons”
Amy Hempel: “Weekend,” “The Uninvited”
Assignment: a text in which two distinct forms and/or attitudes collide. One voice should be an observer or participant with a stake in the proceedings. (If you have not yet played with time in your earlier assignments, you might take this opportunity to do so.)
Faculty evaluation forms
Student Presenter: GEOFF TORTORA

Wednesday, Dec 5
David Foster Wallace: “Octet”
Lorrie Moore: “How to Become a Writer”
THE SHAPE OF THE STORY: CONTENT INTO FORM  Instructor: Dave King

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Course Guidelines
In his ironic novel *The Debt to Pleasure*, John Lanchester writes, “There are only three
questions asked in art: Who am I? And who are you? And what the fuck’s going on?”

I’m not entirely willing to limit art’s inquiries to three, but Lanchester’s questions offer a
pretty good outline of how we’ll approach this term’s work. We’ll look at questions of
authorial position and authorial involvement, and as we do so we’ll refrain from losing
ourselves in fiction’s vivid continuous dream. We’ll investigate writers’ strategies to
figure out what—in tactical, practical, procedural terms—is going on.

1. WRITING
This is not a conventional workshop course, heavy on independent work and group
critique. ¹ Rather, it’s more of a craft course, a literary exploration aimed at
expanding the palette of the working writer or artist. The emphasis will be on
exercises, and as with all exercises, the point is to play and experiment, to stretch
new muscles rather than flex those that are already strong. Only you can know if
you are truly taking chances or simply playing to your own abilities, but you
should understand that our class discussions will privilege invention and
ingenuity, even to the point of permitting some raggedness. If your work over the

¹ Regarding the non-workshop aspect of this course: some of you undoubtedly have
longstanding writing projects you’d like feedback on, so any student who wishes
may meet with me privately to discuss personal work. This will be at the student’s
discretion and will not count toward your final course evaluation, but you should
know that my door is open, and I do take your work seriously: I’m happy to look
at any student’s stories, poems, essays or other creative projects.
course of the term hits the same notes over and over again, you may be missing the point.

Each week a simple exercise will be assigned. Many of these will be short, and I doubt any will run beyond two pages. But because the exercises are apparently undemanding, I’d like you to take them seriously. Write a draft, then examine your methods. You may want to look at the assignment again. Revise; clarify. Make the language stronger, the images more cogent, the emotional life more daring. Despite the apparent simplicity, please don’t dash this work off.

A further clarification: a fair number of assignments will involve poetry. You will begin with simple syllable counting and will move through accentual-syllabic verse to composing a fully rhymed and metered sonnet late in the term.

I believe that all prose writers benefit from some practice of poetry; I’ll go over my reasons for this at our first class. That said, I know that some students find poetry forbidding, so every effort will be made to pace ourselves and to keep the poetic discourse fun. I do expect each of you to attempt the assignments, and I hope you’ll enjoy them and find the challenge intriguing. I do not expect you to become overnight Audens or Donnes. Do the best you can, and we’ll both be satisfied; if you’re having trouble, please see me.

At the end of the term you’ll submit a longer piece as a final project. Most of you will likely write complete prose narratives (though the assignment is open), and I’d like you to employ strategies like those we’ll look at this term. Please make every effort to avoid the conventional and to break out of your comfort zones, and take this final piece to your highest level of polish (for this reason, you should not leave the assignment until the last minute). A statement of purpose will accompany your submission; you may also revise for credit any exercises you’re not happy with.

One last written assignment will be due in mid-November. Attend a public literary event and create a one-page reaction, using the term reaction extremely loosely. Your page may be a response in kind, a dramatic monologue, biting satire, tragic screenplay, lavish Broadway musical, power point presentation or anything else you can dream up, but it should not be a straight review or critique.

Please note:
It goes without saying that all writing you submit for this course must be your own. (An exception will be made for creative work that is metafictional or pointedly collaged out of found texts—as one of your assignments explicitly demands—but even in these cases the writer’s intention should be clear and the attributions made available to the reader.) Speak to me if you have questions about this policy; suspected plagiarism will be handled in accordance with Gallatin’s student discipline rules and the following statement, reprinted by departmental request:

“As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction in accordance with the Student Discipline Rules of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or website—
http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/
Please also note:

It’s essential that you do the courtesy of proofreading your work before offering it to me or your fellow students. I recommend printing out a hard copy, rather than attempting to proof onscreen. Sloppy manuscripts arouse everyone’s ire.

II. READING

As a graduate level course, this one is heavy on reading. At times you will be reading a book a week, and it may be necessary for some of you to pace yourselves and work ahead. Please think seriously about the readings, and come to class prepared to thoroughly discuss. Here are some starting points:

Because this is a course in narrative strategies, think strategically. What choices has the author made, whether in the imagining of scenes and introduction of characters or in questions of style and diction? How are these choices serving the story or theme? What are the liabilities of such decisions, and how are they resolved?

What is the author doing formally? (Can you describe it?) How is basic necessary information limned in? What about more flexible elements, like theme?

What is the relationship between author and reader? How is that relationship achieved?

Work considered will be primarily fiction, nonfiction and poetry, but will include a graphic novel, three films, a dramatic monologue and perhaps other media. Some readings will be available as handouts or downloads from the course blackboard site; books to be purchased, in the order that we’ll read them, are as follows. (You may use other editions.)

- Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat* (Copper Canyon Press)
- Damon Galgut: *In a Strange Room* (Europa Editions)
- David Shields: *Reality Hunger* (Vintage)
- Marjane Satrapi: *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (Pantheon; note: only the first volume (red) is required)
- Ryszard Kapuscinski: *Shah of Shabs* (Penguin Books)
- Vladimir Nabokov: *Pale Fire* (Random House)
- W. G. Sebald: *Austerlitz* (Modern Library)

III. CLASS PARTICIPATION

You are expected to join in classroom discussions. Whether we’re discussing the course reading or student exercises or something presented in class, please take the opportunity to join the discourse at all stages.

Occasionally I’ll ask that exercises be shared. If for some reason you’re uncomfortable reading your work aloud, just let me know. I do expect you to turn in all assignments.

At least once during the term, you will bring the week’s exercise in and present it as a lesson to the class. A separate handout offers guidelines for individual presentations.

When commenting on fellow students’ work, please be aware that there’s a human being beyond the page. Even easy exercises may have taken significant emotional investment, and none of us pulls off every attempt. That’s especially true in a class where experiment is encouraged. If you find it necessary to tell someone a hard truth (a particular tactic isn’t working, the payoff is
unsurprising, or a certain character strains credulity), remember that it behooves us to be precise, and clear in our criticism and to avoid undue wounding.

No matter what you say, think before you speak, and please be clear and concise. Our time together is short, and a moment’s reflection will benefit both you and your listeners.

IV. ATTENDANCE
Absences are strongly discouraged. If you miss a class, you remain responsible for all reading and writing assignments. If you miss your date to present an exercise, let me know in advance (if possible), and make arrangements to reschedule. If you **miss more than three classes, you will not pass the course**.

Emergencies, of course, are a different matter. If you are unable to fulfill your responsibilities due to a personal or family emergency, please contact me at your earliest convenience so we can accommodate everyone’s needs.

V. CLASSROOM DECORUM
I expect you to arrive on time and to pay attention during our sessions. Don’t carry on private conversations while others are speaking. You may leave the classroom for personal reasons, but please minimize these interruptions. Cell phones and other devices should be turned off during class. Do not step out of the room to make phone calls or conduct personal business. I also prefer that you leave your laptops closed during class. Each class session will include a short break midway through.

VI. OFFICE HOURS
Feel free to schedule private conferences with me as needed. As noted above, I’m happy to discuss your work, the mystery of writing, the progress of the course and a variety of other topics. I will be in my office at 5pm on class days, and as early as 4pm for appointments scheduled in advance. If those times are impossible for you, let me know, and we'll work something else out. I do my best to be available to students, though I am generally not around on weekends.

VI. GRADES
I do not expect this to be a difficult course,.. The exercises require mostly care and engagement and will be marked somewhat casually with a $\sqrt{}$, $\sqrt{+}$ or $\sqrt{-}$. Other evaluations will key to my sense of the student’s involvement.

Final grades are based on the following factors:
- Completion of all exercises
- Final project, assignment to be described later
- Class participation

Grading one’s fellow human beings is never agreeable, and in the past, students have sometimes said they were mystified about their class standing. That’s not my intention, so if you’d like to know this kind of information, feel free to ask.
Remember: Interest generates interest.