## Session A: Friday, November 7, 3:30-4:45 pm

**A-Z1 Cracks in the Concrete: Documentary Poetics in the Face of Injustice with Teresa Dzieglewicz (ZOOM)**

In this generative workshop, we'll explore the ways that documentary poetics can be used to crack open, broaden, or crumble official narratives--especially in situations of injustice. When systems and institutions tell one type of story--what power can poetry claim? What unique roles can poetry play? Guided by the work of poets such as Solmaz Sharif, Layli Long Soldier, and Jenny Molberg, we will experiment with different approaches to documentary poetics and write our own poems of fuller and richer truth.

**A1 You Killed My Father...Prepare to Die: Writing the Revenge Story with Liz Barnett**

The revenge story has been a prevalent genre throughout history. Why? Why do we find a story of revenge fascinating and where do we find satisfaction in it? Is it important the revenge actually happens? Do we want a happily ever after? We'll take a look at revenge stories through time and place from Electra in Greece to I Saw the Devil in South Korea. At the end of the session we will have an activity where we write a revenge story of our own.

**A2 Digital Pastoral: Writing the Internet as Landscape with Pella Felton**

This workshop explores the concept of the digital pastoral as a genre of poem and a mode of inquiry. Whereas traditional pastoral poems focus on a natural and material temporality, writing about the internet often invites a more paradoxical approach to landscape. combining Gertrude Stein's landscape theatricality with more rhyzomatic approaches to time and space, this workshop asks us to consider how to find temporal beauty within the prosaic and quotidian interactions with modern digital phenomenon

**A3 New Perspective: An Exploration in the Effect of Writing in Strange Points of View with Emilea Justice**

Are you the kind of person who leans into unique choices to tell a story, whether that be thinking of how a house might grieve the loss of its owners or putting your hands on the wheel of the reader's life for a bit to convey an experience? Maybe you feel the need to speak on behalf of a kindergarten class's box of crayons? Perfect, because in this workshop we will look across genres to examine the effect of writing in the second person, first person plural, and omniscient.

**A4 Making Magic with Alexander Wagner**

From Tolkien to Sanderson, Star Wars to Earthsea, Hogwarts to Ankh-Morpork and beyond, the worlds of fantasy and sci-fi are often steeped in some kind of magic. But what exactly makes magic "magical?" Does it even need to be magical? In this workshop, we'll talk about the different kinds of magic that appear in media and how they work. Additionally, we'll explore the creation of these magic systems and what they do to support the narratives in which they appear.

**A5 How to Build a Gothic House with Annie Williams**

When it comes to structure and form in poems we often think of stanzas, sonnets, haikus, meter, etc. But with all of them there is one particular tool that makes or breaks a poem, which is the line. Each line in a poem should be treated like a brick, and all those bricks together builds a sturdy house which is the poem. In this workshop we will delve into more about how lines are bricks and the poem is a house, and we will focus on how to build a gothic house by discussing what gothic even means and each of us will build our own gothic house in this generative and explorative workshop.

## Session B: Friday, November 7, 5:00-6:15 pm

**B-Z2 Marketing Jumpstart for Authors with Rod Martinez (ZOOM)**

The dream is to write the novel, wait for the publishers and agents to clamor for it and decide who is worthy of your masterpiece. The reality is that even after you sign that contract, you are given the added responsibility of marketing and helping the publisher share with the world this new creation of yours. In the class we will cover many ways I have broken through and was able to get my books in the hands of readers. Whether you are a self-published, hybrid, small press of Big Five author, you will share the job of PR person. Bring a pad and be ready for be entertained and educated.

**B1 The Cryptid in Your Closet: A Horror Workshop with Latifa Ayad**

The cryptid is a piece of cultural capital. If I talk about Bigfoot, any American will know who I mean: a hulking fur-covered biped who is distinctly elusive. Our collective knowledge about cryptids creates a playground for subverting expectations and preying on shared societal fears. However, use of the cryptid can also be a minefield for derivative writing and cultural appropriation. In this generative fiction writing workshop, we will consider how the cryptids that haunted our childhoods can be composted into horror antagonists that are familiar, strange, and wholly terrifying.

**B2 Who We Are: Creating an "I Am" Poem from Collage Items and Words with Gayle L. Castle**

In this workshop inspired by Susan Goldsmith Woodridge's book, poemcrazy, each writer will choose from a variety of manipulatives to craft their own "I Am" poetry box that represents them as a unique individual person. With the additional aid of self-describing questions, poets will create an "I Am" poem about themselves. This session will focus time on creating, writing, and sharing. Materials will be provided.

**B3 Following the Brush with Tyler McDonald**

Zuihitsu is a Japanese hybrid form originating from Sei Shōnagon’s The Pillow Book, written during her time spent as a gentlewoman in Japanese court around the year 1000. “Zuihitsu” is often translated from Japanese as “following the brush,” meaning the author should freely glide across the page with their musings as if wielding a brush. Zuihitsu is an amalgamation of imperfections, fragmentations, and memories, creating a sense of liberation for the writer. This workshop will examine selections from Shōnagon alongside modern poets such as Kimiko Hahn, Wo Chan, and Sokunthary Svay. We will then experiment with the form through our own writing. It will be an opportunity to follow your brush and see where it leads you!

**B4 Public Art as Prompt: Inspiration Beyond Mainstream Consideration with Isabella Moreno**

This workshop will explore the public art of various sites and communities within the City of Cleveland. From new and old to conventional and innovative, from sculptures to murals—the public art will provide themes and inspiration for participants to push beyond mainstream constructs and consideration into new realms to generate inspired and original first draft stories. During the session we will: look at images of the public art, discuss the artist, the work’s history and the community where it exists. There will be in class discussion and generative writing exercises. This workshop centers public art in the city of Cleveland, and requires we actively engage with stories, community and histories that may be different from our own.

## Session C: Saturday, November 8, 9:30-10:45 am

**C1 The Writing Life with Keats with Lucas Clark**

An examination of John Keats’ practice of writing poetry. Bringing in a variety of sources, such as biographical information, academic studies, and of course, the poems, this session will focus on how contemporary writers can incorporate new insights into their daily writing practice with concrete prompts and writing activities pulled from Keats’ life.

**C2 Surrealism and Flash with Lawrence Coates**

In this workshop, we will exploit the same creative techniques used by the Surrealist Movement in Paris of the 1920s to discover stupefying images and Illogical connections that make sense in new and unexpected ways. Then we will each choose the result that most sparks our imagination and draft a flash piece of fewer than five hundred words.

**C3 Ekphrasis in Poetry: The Art of Essence with Mo Orr and Elijah Woodruff**

In this workshop, participants will explore the history of ekphrastic art and generate their own writing responding to a broad range of art. Together, we'll take a close look at artwork and the ekphrastic poems they inspired. We'll discuss the different approaches to ekphrastic poetry and the tools that poets use to capture the essence of the artwork.

**C4 There’s no I in CF with Emma Rowan**

This workshop will center around an exploration of the possibilities of creative nonfiction written with limited introspection and reflection. It's a common practice of memoir to have the “I” that is living through the experiences on the page and the “I” that is reflecting on those experiences, what some may call the current “I” or the now “I,” to be given the same weight; there are even writers who believe it is best to attribute more weight to the reflective “I” than its counterpart. Personally though, sometimes I like to leave my readers with gaps to fill in, gaps where they can not only infer my reflections on the events or circumstances I have recounted but where they can insert themselves into the work. How do they feel about the story I am telling? How does it relate to something they’ve lived through? I'd like to explore creative nonfiction that is rich enough—that has enough description, figurative language, a strong enough voice and tone, etc—that detailing exact retrospective emotions is not necessary, and in fact, would be redundant to include. Drawing from contemporary essays such as Annie Dillard’s “Total Eclipse,” Ross Gay’s “Loitering is Delightful,” and Ottessa Moshfegh’s “The Smoker,” we'll explore how each writer's voice, tone, style, and themes explored feel entirely developed despite a lack of substantial retrospection from the current or now "I" and are consequently testaments to the notion that a lighter degree of interiority in creative nonfiction does not make it meaningless, cold, or distant but rather, engaging and enjoyable.

**C5 Verse, Chorus, and the Bridge: How the Conventions of Song Writing Can Inform the Structure of Stories with Haley Souders**

With verses that introduce the song’s situation and provide context, choruses that provide an emotional throughline, and a bridge that serves to amp up the stakes, songs have specific structures for storytelling that can be applied to the structuring of short stories. I will explore how songs and stories can use this format for an impactful piece of writing with dynamic meaning.

## Session D: Saturday, November 8, 11:00 am-12:15 pm

**D1 The Inanimate Flash: An exploration of the flash fiction form with a focus on inanimate objects as character with Jordyn Damato**

We'll talk about the benefits of the short form, read and discuss select examples, then dedicate time to our own writing while straying away from familiar narratives by breathing life into the lifeless---inanimate objects.

**D2 The Exquisite Strangeness of Experimental Prose with Lara Lillibridge**

As Edgar Allen Poe wrote, “There is no exquisite beauty… without some strangeness in the proportion.” In this generative session we'll try our hand at several experimental forms in order to unblock our creativity and tell the same story in different ways.

**D3 A Fiction Writer's Guide to Publishing: A Query Letter Workshop with Jennifer Pullen**

The publishing industry is complicated, from navigating different kinds of publishers, to understanding the role of agents, or how to craft the specialized documents requested by agents and publishers (like query letters). This workshop will include a very brief overview of the publishing industry, including a discussion of the distinctions and connections between "literary" and "genre" fiction publishing. This overview will be followed by a workshop on writing a query letter, and with time, begin drafting one. The workshop will end with time for questions.

**D4 Poetry Potpourri with Mary Simmons**

How can we turn our sense of smell into a powerful tool for inspiration? This interactive workshop looks at the science behind scent and the way that particular scents might unlock memory and layers of emotion for our poetry. We'll use scent as a jumping-off point for poems about anything but scent and explore scent-based exercises for combatting writer's block.

**D5 Found, Formed, Fastened: Poetry Beyond the Page with Jessica Dawn Zinz**

Want to write a poem with found text and images and then turn it into a button? If so, this is the panel for you. This workshop invites participants to discover the art of creating compelling short-form poetry using found text and images. Over the course of our session, you'll learn how to recognize potential poetic material in everyday text sources, select and arrange found words to create new meaning, integrate visual elements that complement or enhance your text, craft concise poems that deliver emotional impact despite their brevity, and transform your finished poem into a wearable button. Maximum of 12 participants.

## Session E: Saturday, November 8, 2:30-3:45 pm

**E-Z4 Midpoint Medicine with Joseph Celizic (ZOOM)**

Whether it's the sagging middle of a novel, a short story in need of more dramatic tension, or a flash piece missing that cohesion to elevate its multiple threads, unlocking a story's middle can so often help address the issues we know we're having with our works in progress. Together, we'll discuss different approaches to midpoints, reference numerous examples, and we'll get a chance to add or revise a story's current midpoint, or even outline a new story from the middle out.

**E1 Monsters and Magic as a Metaphor with Orion Emerick**

In this workshop we’ll explore the ways magical realism and the paranormal can be used as metaphors or avenues to explore taboo experiences. We will look at some examples from a variety of media to get a taste of how things like magical realism, aliens, werewolves, and other unexplainable things can be strategies in poems and fiction, especially when talking about queer experiences, trauma, grief, and more. These examples will include everything from film, short stories, and novels. This workshop will provide you with an opportunity to generate lively stories and poems in which you use these concepts to venture new, sometimes uncomfortable places with your writing.

**E2 Undertows: Elements of Water in Poetry & Prose with Mish Gajewski-Zambataro**

In both social and individual capacities, humans have long been defined by our relation to water. Water has historically served as a source of sustenance, spirit, and temporal and geographic connection; in modernity, water is viewed more as an asset than a source, a feature of the land to be exploited for profit. Cooling data centers, transporting products, increasing property value—the exploitation of water takes many forms. This workshop will be a co-exploration of how our creative practices as human writers can reshape the collective relation to water. How human writers can forge—or find—water’s own identity in our own work. We’ll ask: Does water have an essence, a voice, with which we can join our own? We will begin with a brief discussion of how water appears in a preselected sampling of creative work, looking at style, sonics, tone, and theme. Possible authors may include Rita Wong, Sarah Lindsay, Caryl Pagel, Mary Quade, John Clare, and Annie Proulx, among others. From there, workshop attendees will be invited to generate writing inspired by our discussion, or bring with them an ongoing work to revise and/or continue. Rather than output, the session’s focus will be on examining our writerly processes and ecologic mindsets through the watery lens.

**E3 The Pain and Beauty of Tiny Writing: An Exploration of Micro, Flash, and Fragments in Prose with Lara Lillibridge**

In this generative workshop we’ll explore differences between several short-short forms such as vignettes, flash-fiction, and micro-memoirs and discuss how to use them. We’ll experiment with writing our own micro prose and learn a few places to submit our work.

**E4 Meddling with Memory: The Affordances of Retrospective Narration with Kelly McElroy**

This workshop will explore the ways retrospective narrators can manipulate the events of their stories, either consciously or subconsciously, through the choices they make in their telling. We will explore our own memories and consider how they may be warped by time, distance, or bias. How do these factors affect our writing? How can leaning into retrospective narration strengthen a story? Together, we'll explore these questions through discussion, reading, and generative writing.

## Session F: Saturday, November 8, 4:00-5:15 pm

**F-Z5 Small Narratives: Microfiction and Prose Poetry with Jane Wageman (ZOOM)**

We'll examine the boundary between microfiction and prose poetry by looking at examples of short narrative forms in both genres. Most of the session will be spent with prompts designed for you to write your own short pieces: in fiction or poetry or the space between.

**F1 Listening to Your Story: Letting Your Story Take Its Own Form with Kiersten Burtz**

As writers, we do our best to create and foster stories that convey their themes and messages in the best way possible, but what if the best way possible isn't what you thought? There are loads of different mediums of storytelling, and just as many forms any one story could take. This workshop explores those forms—from short stories to graphic novels to video games and everything outside and in between—and how to best decide what form your story should take. We will work on brainstorming techniques that really get you thinking about the benefits and drawbacks of each storytelling form and how to ultimately decide which form is right for your story.

**F2 Critical Success: Using TTRPG Techniques for Character Development with Remy Donald**

In a society where tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs) have grown from games for "nerds" to a worldwide sensation, you might ask: just what makes these games so popular? From the humble opinion of both a writer and a player of these games, the answer is: the storytelling done through the player characters. In this workshop, we will delve into how to use techniques that TTRPG players use to embody their player characters to embody your written characters!

**F3 Flash Fiction Battle to the Death with Orion Emerick, Annie Williams, and Elijah Woodruff**

Your workshop leaders will give you a prompt and time to write. You and your fellow writers will square off in reading your new flash piece aloud. 2-3 finalists will be chosen to present their work at the open mic in downtown BG, where applause will choose the winner of the 2025 Flash Fiction Battle!

**F4 Writing Family in Creative Nonfiction with Katherine Gaffney, John Constantine Tobin, and David Greenspan**

Creative nonfiction is a genre beholden to truth. But that truth emerges through certain valences especially when writing about family. One’s positions within a family, blood or found, complicate any attempt to render that family’s dynamics truthfully. This generative workshop will consider definitions of family, and briefly and collaboratively frame the unique constraints involved with writing about family. Likewise, we will consider the risks and opportunities that creative nonfiction provides, and work to untangle the dialectic of writing as relationship between writer and reader v. writing as relationship between writer and family. Participants will engage with brief excerpts from the likes of Naomi Shihab Nye, Richard Siken, and Mark Doty, then engage with generative prompts to write about their own family via lenses of queerness, archival research, and genre.

**F5 Forms of Ekphrasis with B.J. Wilson**

In his poem, “Nocturne in Black and Gold,” Mark Doty describes Whistler’s “Nocturnes” as he observes a harbor: “you can barely see / the objects of perception, / or rather there are no solids, / only fields of shimmer, / fitful integers of gleam, / traces of a rocket’s shatter, / light troubling a shiver of light.” How might we engage visual art (particularly paintings) through poetry but without just description? And what poetic forms, if any, might be more conducive to engaging this medium? We will look at William Carlos Williams’ more famous reactions to Bruegel and Ann Sexton’s to van Gogh, as well “surreal” responses by Eduardo C. Corral to “surreal” paintings, among others. If you have a painting or a poem, or both (or not), we will try to generate a piece.

## You may also find these workshops on the *Mid-American Review* Youtube channel during the festival:

**From Shitty First Draft to Second Draft: How to Make Your First Draft as Useful as Possible with Caitlyn Mlodzik**

This workshop will celebrate the “shitty” first draft essential to all novels and detail how to take advantage of your early draft to set your future drafts up for success, craft characters with a solid foundation but with room to grow, and set the tone of your story. I will discuss aspects like POV, linearity, plotting, conflict, research, character backstory, goal-setting, and getting to your “why” behind the book, using insights from my writing process, craft books, and other writers’ processes.

**Writing Series Poems with Abigail Cloud**

A series opens up new horizons of development for characters, setting, and images within your poems. It could be a micro series or a larger project (Berryman’s Dream Songs, Duhamel’s Barbies). How do you start? How do you guide the series? Or is it better just to get out of your own way? I will talk about a few strategies and structures and offer writing activities to get your own series started.