

The Eleventh Hour Lecture Series

June 16–20, 2025 | Gilmore Hall, Room 106 (112 N Capitol St) | 11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Monday, June 16

Zach Savich

You Can Say That Again: Refrain and Resonance

What happens when a phrase recurs, when language circles back on itself again and again? This lecture explores how repeated phrases and lines can add depth and meaning to writing across genres. We'll look at examples from a range of authors (from Samuel Beckett to Shane McCrae, from Ali Smith to Gertrude Stein), and we'll ask how refrain can become resonance. We'll also consider how repeated phrases work in language and life more broadly: the things we say every day, the words we live by. Attendees will leave with techniques to use in generating and revising their own writing.

Tuesday, June 17

Hilary Plum

Building Voice in Fiction (Or, "Huh, What, Right, Uh")

Voice is vital in fiction. It's often the inspiration to start writing: a new voice arrives. Yet the voice(s) in any story or novel must also develop, shift tones, serve the plot, evoke the larger world. How do you sustain a powerful convincing voice throughout a work of fiction? How does voice help create setting, conflict, politics, the passage of time, all while sounding and feeling like a person? This lecture will explore the possibilities and challenges of voice. We'll discuss Hilary Plum's new novel *State Champ* as a case study, and we'll look at some lyrics by Peaches that helped in writing the novel.

Wednesday, June 18

Mieke Erkens

The Political Is the Personal: Using Creative Writing to Advocate for Social Issues

We are in one of the most politically tumultuous times in decades. People are struggling to make sense of the daily news. One of the best tools for education, issue engagement, and advocacy is creative writing. Making a generalized political issue a personal one by zooming in on individual experience using artful language and narrative moves social issues out of the intellectual realm into the emotional realm for a reader. Moving readers emotionally through artful writing can be much more powerful in changing hearts and minds than stating the facts. In this lecture, we'll discuss how we can use our creative writing to advocate for social or political issues, explore examples of best practices, and engage in dialogue with the audience.

Thursday, June 19

Venise Berry

Exploring Culture: Building Unique Characters Through the Physical, the Cognitive, and the Behavioral

Creating cultural characters involves understanding and empathizing with different experiences. Mainstream society is based on certain ideas, perceptions, values, and beliefs that are accepted as the norm. These norms are the standards by which everything and everyone else is judged. Too often "different voices" become problematic stereotypes rather than rich, complex images and ideas. This lecture will specifically explore three elements that make up the uniqueness of culture: the physical (appearance and language), the cognitive (beliefs, values, and traditions), and the behavioral (actions and reactions). Each is an area that must be well developed in your writing if you want to create unique cultural characters.

Friday, June 20

Group reading by members of this week's Festival faculty

Speaker Bios

Zach Savich is the author of ten books of poetry, nonfiction, and works for performance. His work has received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and other honors. Savich teaches at the Cleveland Institute of Art and with the PhD in Creativity at Rowan University. His work often explores how language repeats, transforms, and invites wider change.

Hilary Plum's recent books include the novel *State Champ* (Bloomsbury, 2025), the poetry chapbook *Important Groups* (Community Mausoleum, 2025), and the essay collection *Hole Studies* (Fonograf Editions, 2022). She co-edits the Open Prose Series at Rescue Press and co-hosts the podcast *Index for Continuance*. She lives and teaches in Cleveland and works at the CSU Poetry Center.

Mieke Eerkens' writing has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The Rumpus*, *Catapult*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *PANK*, *Guernica*, and *Creative Nonfiction*, among others. *All Ships Follow Me*, a book about her parents' experiences in WWII that uses personal narrative to illustrate the issue of transgenerational war trauma, was released in 2019 by Picador/Macmillan. She earned an MFA in Nonfiction Writing from the University of Iowa, and she has taught for the University of Iowa, UCLA Extension Writers' Program, and Leiden University. She is working on a memoir about her younger years traveling with the circus.

Venise Berry's most recent publication is a co-edited anthology, *The Black Superwoman & Mental Health: Power & Pain*, published by Peter Lang (June 2025). She is the author of three national bestselling novels: *So Good: An African American Love Story* (Dutton, 1996), *All of Me: A Voluptuous Tale* (Dutton, 2000), and *Colored Sugar Water* (Dutton, 2002). Her fourth novel, *Pockets of Sanity*, is finished, and she is seeking an agent. Berry is a professor of Journalism and African American Studies at the University of Iowa, as well as a faculty member at the Solstice low-residency MFA Creative Writing Program at Lasell University in Auburndale, MA. For more information, visit www.veniseberry.com.

The Eleventh Hour Lecture Series

June 23–27, 2025 | Gilmore Hall, Room 106 (112 N Capitol St) | 11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Monday, June 23

Kevin Smith

To Practice Is to Blossom

We want our first draft to be amazing. Sometimes, our first draft isn't amazing. But rather than experience this as disheartening, we can turn to what musicians and athletes know in their bones: to accomplish our goal, there must be hundreds, even thousands of hours of practice. Whether it's running laps, playing scales, or penciling a sketch before committing a vision to paint, our creative endeavors flourish through an appreciation for practice. Practice is a kind of blossoming, an acknowledgment of time as our partner. This talk will outline strategies for restoring practice as the center of your writing life.

Tuesday, June 24

Kat O'Brien

Finding the Funny: Chicago Comedy Scene Wisdom for Writers of All Genres

Whether you're writing for page, stage, or screen, understanding how to "find the funny" can sharpen your storytelling vision and voice for writing in all formats and genres. Drawing from her years in Chicago's legendary comedy scene—as a performer, producer, and writing professor—comedy writer Kat O'Brien shares tools from the trade that every writer can use in their work. This talk explores how finding levity and executing a "comedy punch-up" isn't just about punchlines—it's about finding patterns in power and privilege, pain and perspective, and owning our authenticity and personal truths. (Kat knows that doesn't sound terribly funny. She promises you'll laugh at least once, though!)

Wednesday, June 25

Eric Goodman

Reviving the Dead: Creating Vivid Characters in Historical Fiction and Memoir

Creating characters that pulse on the page presents special problems for writers of historical fiction and memoir. Not only are they trying to breathe life into nouns, verbs, and maybe a few adjectives, they are attempting to reanimate characters who may have lived and died 50 or even 150 years ago. In this lecture, we'll discuss different sorts of research as well as specialized writerly tricks to reanimate the dead. In addition to Eric's experience, this lecture will reference the work of other writers to help advise the audience on how best to perform the Frankenstein-ian task of Reviving the Dead.

Thursday, June 26

Susan Hill Newton

You've Been Signed. Now What? The Business of Working with Your Editor

Great news: your manuscript has been signed with a publisher! Now comes the work of turning a manuscript into a book. Susan Hill Newton, managing editor at University of Iowa Press, will walk you through the steps of working with your editor(s) as you learn to let go and let the business of publishing take the lead. Offering advice on and insight into how authors benefit by learning to trust the process, Susan will speak to the author–editor relationship, the editorial process, the crossover work with marketing, and the fusion of author, publisher, bookseller/buyer, and reader.

Friday, June 27

Group reading by members of this week's Festival faculty

Speaker Bios

Kevin Smith received an MFA in Fiction from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and a PhD in French from Princeton University. An Iowa Arts Fellow, he is the recipient of the Provost Postgraduate Visiting Fellowship in Fiction at the University of Iowa, the Steinbeck Fellowship at San José State University, and the Chateaubriand Fellowship. Writing prizes include the Power of Purpose Award and the Arch and Bruce Brown Award. He has held teaching positions at the University of Washington, The George Washington University, Université de Bordeaux III, and the University of Iowa.

Kat O'Brien is a comedy writer, producer, consultant, professor, and mom. For over 20 years, Kat has worked as a comedy screenwriter and producer/consultant developing film and television for major studios, production companies, global institutions, and critically acclaimed filmmakers, applying her comedic voice to content of all formats and genres. During the pandemic, Kat executive produced the award-winning *We Still Teach TV*. She currently teaches at the University of Chicago, DePaul University, The Second City Film School, and the Iowa Summer Writing Festival. She holds a BFA in Writing for Film and Television from the University of Southern California.

Eric Goodman's first historical novel and eighth overall, *Mother of Bourbon*, was published in April 2025. It tells the story of Mary Dowling (1859–1930), the only woman who owned major distilleries in pre-Prohibition Kentucky. His sixth book, *Cuppy and Stew*, combines historical fiction with the faux memoir of a woman who shares his wife's name. He has taught at the Iowa Summer Writing Festival for many years and was the long-term Director of Creative Writing at Miami University (Ohio) before retiring to write full time.

Susan Hill Newton has worked in all realms of book editing, serving both trade and academic publishers and nonprofits. Her breadth of experience ranges from acquisitions to book development, line editing to program direction, as well as the writing and editing of marketing collateral. She presently sits as the managing editor at University of Iowa Press, where she oversees the editorial program of roughly thirty books per year. Susan lived in Denver, Colorado, for more than twenty years before making the move to Iowa City with her husband and two daughters.

The Eleventh Hour Lecture Series

July 14–18, 2025 | Gilmore Hall, Room 106 (112 N Capitol St) | 11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Monday, July 14

Diana Goetsch

“Emotional Truth” or Making Shit Up? How Far Should “Creative” Nonfiction Go?

The proliferation of Creative Nonfiction departments came with a campaign for a new and distinct genre. Since “truth” is relative (the argument often went) and memory is unreliable, why not mix fictive techniques with fact and experience to better “shape” nonfiction narratives? OK, but what becomes of our contract with the reader when we embellish or omit key elements of what we know, or invent what we don’t? How far is too far? What’s creativity, and what is making shit up? This talk, rife with examples and craft considerations, will dive into the hornets’ nest of nonfiction ethics and imagination.

Tuesday, July 15

Katie Runde

How to Navigate the Agent Querying Process

The process of finding a literary agent is both a simple and straightforward endeavor and an emotional roller coaster. Through an FAQ format, we will discuss the basics of query letter writing, best practices for researching and reaching out to literary agents, common mistakes to avoid and etiquette to keep in mind, what your rejections might teach you about your project and its place in the marketplace, and how to keep your ego intact through the process of finding an agent for your book. We will also discuss several real-life query letters that ended up connecting writers with agents and ultimately with the perfect publishers for their books.

Wednesday, July 16

Anna Bruno

Campus Fiction: A Model for World-Building Across Genre

A campus is more than a setting. It is a collection of characters, a set of social mores, an intersection of identities, and a time capsule. Situated in its broader community, the campus is also a nexus of insiders and outsiders. In other words, it is a microcosm of society. Great campus fiction provides essential craft lessons on world-building and satisfies the question at the heart of creative writing: Why does this story matter? This lecture will examine campus fiction with the goal of identifying lessons for world-building that writers can apply across genres.

Thursday, July 17

Andrea Wilson

Narrative Alchemy: Storytelling as a Tool for Creative Transformation

As writers, we shape stories—but the stories we tell ourselves often shape us in return. This cross-genre lecture invites participants to examine the narrative structures that influence both our creative work and lived experience. We’ll consider how personal and cultural narratives inform voice, form, and content—and how revising these inherited frameworks can open new imaginative possibilities. Through writing exercises and the discussion of examples from literary works, participants will deepen their sense of narrative agency and explore how language can unsettle, reframe, and remake. This is a space for writers to interrogate the stories that confine and discover those that compel.

Friday, July 18

Group reading by members of this week’s Festival faculty

Speaker Bios

Diana Goetsch has written dozens of nonfiction features, essays and columns for *The New Yorker*, *The Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *The American Scholar*, LitHub, and elsewhere. *This Body I Wore*, her memoir about the budding trans communities in late 20th century New York City, was cited among “Memoirs That Changed a Generation” at Oprah Daily. Goetsch has also published eight volumes of poetry and has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, The New York Foundation for the Arts, Yaddo, and The New School, where she was the Grace Paley Teaching Fellow.

Katie Runde is the author of *The Shore*, an NYTimes Editors’ Pick, an Indie Next Pick, an Amazon Editors’ Choice, and a Barnes & Noble Discover Pick, as well as a “best book of summer” choice by *Glamour* and *Entertainment Weekly*. She is originally from the Jersey Shore, where her novel is set. She attended the Iowa Summer Writing Festival in 2007 and 2008, when she took classes that she loved so much she decided to keep writing forever, and she holds an MFA from Warren Wilson College. She lives in Iowa City with her husband and two daughters.

Anna Bruno is the author of *Fine Young People* and *Ordinary Hazards*. She holds an MFA in fiction from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, an MBA from Cornell University, and a BA from Stanford University. She lives in Iowa City with her husband, two sons, and blue heeler.

Andrea Wilson holds a master’s in Creative Writing from Cornell College and a master’s in Narrative Therapy from the University of Melbourne. She is the founder of the Iowa Writers’ House and editor of *We the Interwoven: An Anthology of Bicultural Iowa*. Her work bridges storytelling, identity, and healing, focusing on how narrative shapes consciousness. Currently, she is researching the intersection of mental health and creative writing at the University of Iowa. Andrea’s passion lies in helping writers use their craft not only to refine their voices but also to catalyze personal growth, awareness, and transformative story-making.

The Eleventh Hour Lecture Series

July 21–25, 2025 | Gilmore Hall, Room 106 (112 N Capitol St) | 11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Monday, July 21

Deborah Taffa

Adding and Subtracting: The Art and Artifice of Arranging Oneself on the Page

We dread flat writing. When using the “I,” we want the voice to be complex. We seek to add character contradictions to humanize our first-person narratives, but we don’t always think about subtraction. To build a self on the page, the nonfiction writer engages in artful cutting if and when it serves the story. This craft talk will explore the way essayists and memoirists are constantly mining the gap between who they want to be versus who they actually are.

Tuesday, July 22

Katy Herbold

Secrets of Bookselling: Helping Your Book Find Its Readers

Are you an author hoping to publish a book and wondering how it will make its way into bookstores? Join Sidekick Coffee & Books owner Katy Herbold as she shares insider knowledge on the book-buying process, what bookstores look for, and how authors can identify their purpose in writing a book and increase their chances of getting stocked. Learn what happens after publication and how to best position your book for success on the shelves.

Wednesday, July 23

Hope Edelman

Writing About Real People

Real people often find their way into our stories, whether as supporting characters in nonfiction or as inspiration for characters in fiction. Writing about them can be tricky, especially when a character’s memories of past events don’t align with yours. Because memory is often imperfect, what do we need to consider when writing about real people, directly or indirectly? How much should we rely on our own memories versus others’ perceptions of events? And when and how do legal matters come into play?

Thursday, July 24

Afabwaje Kurian

How Not to Write a Novel

Mistakes are an inevitable part of the writing journey as you find your way into the world of a novel manuscript. However, some mistakes can be prevented if you know what to avoid. In this lecture, Afabwaje Kurian will distill the lessons she learned in the ten years it took her to complete her debut novel. This lecture will pull from Kurian’s experience and will cover approaches to navigating novel architecture, shaping characters, trusting beta readers, honing authorial sensibility, and surviving the grueling process of revision.

Friday, July 25

Group reading by members of this week’s Festival faculty

Speaker Bios

Deborah Taffa's *Whiskey Tender* was a finalist for the 2024 National Book Award. Named a top ten book of the year by *The Atlantic*, *Time Magazine*, NPR, *Elle*, *Esquire*, Audible, and other outlets, it was also longlisted for a 2025 Carnegie Medal of Excellence in Nonfiction. Taffa is a 2024 NEA Fellow and a 2022 PEN/Jean Stein grant winner, and she has received fellowships from Tin House, the University of Iowa, MacDowell, the Ellen Meloy Fund, and other organizations. She is director of the MFACW program at the IAIA in Santa Fe, NM.

Katy Herbold is the owner of Sidekick Coffee & Books in Iowa City, a children's book aficionado, and a Book Buddy. She loves a good story and has learned much along her journey through life as a teacher, mother, and avid reader. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and communications. She is certified in IMSE Orton-Gillingham and has worked as an ELL and first-grade teacher. She's also been an event planner for the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and at the University of Iowa Center for Conferences.

Hope Edelman is the author of eight nonfiction books, including the bestsellers *Motherless Daughters*, *Motherless Mothers*, and *The AfterGrief*. A graduate of the Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program, she has been teaching at the Festival since 1995.

Afabwaje Kurian is the author of the novel *Before the Mango Ripens* (Dzanc Books, 2024), which was a finalist for the 2025 Aspen Words Literary Prize and longlisted for the 2025 VCU Cabell First Novelist Award. She received her MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her short fiction has appeared in *Guernica*, *McSweeney's*, *Callaloo*, *The Bare Life Review*, *Joyland Magazine*, and other literary publications. She has served as visiting faculty at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and has taught fiction at the University of Iowa, for the International Writing Program, and for The Writer's Center.