

2025 Terroir Creative Writing Festival

Session Descriptions

Judith Barrington: A Good Story Well Told: The Poetic Prose of Memoir There is no reason that prose writing cannot be as pleasing to read and to hear as the best poetry. This workshop will look at what we mean by “poetic prose” and how it can enhance your memoir. We will discuss the various tools used by poets and how they might be applied to prose writing. We’ll share excerpts from memoirs and from prose writers who have written about their craft. We’ll think about retrospection and how to use different time periods without disturbing the style of our story.

Mike Chasar: The Art of Writing Ekphrastic Poetry This workshop will offer a step-by-step guide to the art of *ekphrasis*—a mode of poetry writing anchored in describing and engaging with paintings and other works of visual art. Participants will encounter some of the inspirational possibilities of writing about visual art, explore strategies for generating new material, and lay the foundation for their own ekphrastic poems via a hands-on workshop focusing on the power of lyrical description, point of view, and various storytelling strategies. Participants will need a writing implement and paper or a computer/tablet.

David Ciminello: Creating Colorful Characters Through a series of prompt-driven generative exercises participants will create and flesh out vivid, complex characters. Focus on physical description (how characters inhabit their worlds), the inner life of characters (their souls and personalities), and how scene and setting as well as action and dialogue can round out and bring characters to brilliant 3-dimensional life. Close attention will be paid to literary and poetic devices.

Tove Danovich: Writing Wild Animals: Why Attention is a Writer’s Most Important Tool for Writing about the Non-human World When it comes to writing about nature, success is in the details. To write, we have to first observe. This may mean collecting research and facts or simply going outside to take notice. This class will provide tips for how to harness the power of attention in our writing and show examples from different types of writers who have done this well.

Erin Hall: The Tension Blueprint: The Secret to Unputdownable Storytelling Tension is more than just a mystery writer’s trick—it’s an essential tool for keeping your readers on the edge of their seats. In this session, we’ll break down the core components of tension, from well-timed reveals to character-driven suspense. You’ll learn how to balance pacing, stakes, and unanswered questions to create that *can’t-stop-reading* momentum. You’ll get practical tools, real-world examples, and a better understanding of how to build and sustain tension at every level of your story, regardless of genre.

Samantha Cole-Johnson: Serving your reader The principal job of a wine writer is to understand the informational desires of the audience. In this session we’ll discuss how to determine who you’re writing for and how that should influence the information you’re presenting. We’ll share ideas on how to connect with readers and think about ways to present technical or niche information in a way that excites rather than alienates.

Stephanie Lenox: Tiny Utopias: Flash Writing in an Imperfect World An ideal society, “utopia” literally translates as “no place.” Some even argue that a utopia cannot exist without its counterpoint, dystopia. Together, we’ll explore the subversive power of brevity that writers past and present use to create islands of joy in dark times. We’ll examine rebellious hybrid flash pieces—prose poems, micro memoirs, and flash fiction—and focus on carving out imaginative territory with very short creative work. No flash experience needed; we’ll cover the basics. Bring a joyful piece (one page max), yours or someone else’s. This session includes time to write and consider ways to craft miniature worlds in words.

Christopher Luna: The Work Christopher will lead a short generative poetry-writing workshop he calls “The Work.” Sample poems will be provided, along with a variety of prompts. Participants will be invited to complete one or more timed writing exercises, and we will conclude with a short period of sharing our drafts.

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Laura Stanfill: Building a Feel-Good Creative Mindset It's hard putting your work into the world, and yet that's an essential piece of the literary life: submitting pieces to journals and presses and then bracing for public response when you have a book coming out. Although there are a lot of existing resources about querying and doing publicity, the biggest challenges are often mental and emotional. In this workshop, publisher Laura Stanfill will explore gentle ways to keep your creative juices flowing while you're waiting for judgment from editors and/or readers.

Ellen Waterston Keynote: Lost in Place

What is the ballast to your helium? What allows you, as a writer, to be at once temperate and tempestuous, respecting or pushing boundaries, tuned in and out, judicious and daring, seasoned and naive? For Waterston, the high desert figures into her answer. Incorporating anecdotes, readings, and prompts, Waterston will illustrate how dynamic and frustrating and generous and intrusive a relationship with place can be and, like most relationships, among our best teachers. Bring paper and a pen or pencil.

Panel: Breaking In: How Emerging Writers Can Get Noticed by Publishers and Agents

Industry experts Laura Stanfill (publisher of Forest Avenue Press), Chip MacGregor (founder of MacGregor & Luedeke Collaborative), and Angela Grace Merritt (publisher and editor at Provender Press), with Emily Grosvenor (author of *Find Yourself At Home*) as moderator, will discuss how to find a home for your writing in a changing industry. Learn key strategies for approaching editors, agents, and other industry professionals, discover the role that building a platform might (or might not) play, and gain insight on how to stand out. Panelists will give a short presentation on their role and what they look for in new authors, and a Q&A will follow.

Speaker Bios

Judith Barrington's most recent book is *Virginia's Apple: Collected Memoirs* (OSU Press, 2024). Her *Lifesaving: A Memoir* won the 2001 Lambda Book Award and was a finalist for the PEN/Martha Albrand Award for the Art of the Memoir. She is also the author of the best-selling *Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art*. judithbarrington.com

Mike Chasar has taught literature and creative writing at Willamette University since 2009. A 2016 National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, he is the author of two monographs from Columbia University Press and has published poetry and essays in journals such as *Poetry*, *Poets and Writers*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. my.willamette.edu/people/mchasar

David Ciminello is the author of the novel *The Queen of Steeplechase Park* (a Kirkus Best Book of 2024). His fiction has appeared in the Lambda Award-winning anthology *Portland Queer: Tales of the Rose City*, *Nailed Magazine*, *The Untold Gaze*, and elsewhere. His original screenplay *Bruno* was a finalist for an Academy Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting. davidciminello.com

Samantha Cole-Johnson is a Portland-based writer, speaker, and educator who serves as the Senior Editor US for JancisRobinson.com. Her work has been featured in online and print publications including *GuildSomm*, *Wine & Spirits*, *SevenFifty Daily*, *Hugh Johnson's Pocket Wine Book*, and *The Oxford Companion to Wine*. Sam teaches WSET 3 and Diploma qualifications at Portland's Wine and Spirit Archive. jancisrobinson.com/author/samantha-cole-johnson

Tove Danovich is the author of *Under the Henfluence*, which was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award. Her essays on nature have been published in *The Washington Post*, *Orion*, *The Atlantic*, *Earth Island Journal*, and many more. She lives in Portland, Oregon. tovedanovich.com

Emily Grosvenor is the longtime communications director for the festival. She is author of *Find Yourself At Home*, editor of design magazine *Oregon Home*, and author/publisher of the Substack [★ I would do it differently ★](#).

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Erin Hall is a content marketer, writing coach, and author of *Dear Sylvia, Love Jane* (Detective Molly Malone, Book 1). She's on the board of Newberg's Gather Repertory Theatre and is a member of The Oregon Historical Society and Willamette Writers. Erin has a Master of Arts in Writing and Publishing from Portland State University's Ooligan Press. ehallwrites.com

Stephanie Lenox is a writer, teacher, and editor. Her book *Short-Form Creative Writing* explores flash writing techniques. She authored two poetry collections, *The Business* and *Congress of Strange People*. An enrolled citizen of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, Stephanie studies her ancestral language, an experience that inspires her creative projects. stephanielenox.com

Christopher Luna served as the inaugural Poet Laureate of Clark County from 2013-2017. A graduate of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, he founded the anti-fascist, anti-racist, pro-science LGBTQ+ friendly, all-ages and uncensored Ghost Town Poetry Open Mic in 2004. His most recent book is *Voracity* (Lightship Press). christopherlunapoetry.com

Chip MacGregor refers to himself as a "book guy," having spent nearly his entire life in the world of publishing. A former publisher at Time-Warner and Hachette Book Group, he has more than 20 years experience as a literary agent, and has done more than a thousand book contracts. Chip and his wife live on the Oregon coast. macgregorandluedeke.com

Angela Grace Merritt is the owner of McMinnville publishing company Provender Press, which publishes books in many different genres, including speculative fiction (sci-fi and fantasy), women's literature, self-help and wellness, business, and books for children, teens, and young adults. Merritt has worked as a creative director, writer, magazine layout artist, indie music promoter, programmer/analyst, user-interface designer, and serial entrepreneur. provenderpress.com

Laura Stanfill is the author of *Imagine a Door: A Writer's Guide to Unlocking Your Story, Choosing a Publishing Path, and Honoring the Creative Journey*. She lives in Portland, Oregon, where she runs Forest Avenue Press. laurastanfill.com

Award-winning poet and author **Ellen Waterston** has dedicated herself to writing and advocating for the literary arts in the high desert region of Oregon, all the while continuing to write poetry and nonfiction works that have evolved into essential reading about Oregon and the West. She has published four poetry and five literary nonfiction titles, including, most recently, *We Could Die Doing This* (2024) and *Walking the High Desert* (2020). She is the founder of the Writing Ranch and of the annual Waterston Desert Writing Prize. In 2024 Waterston received Soapstone's Bread and Roses Award, Literary Arts' Stewart H. Holbrook Award, and was named the 11th Poet Laureate of Oregon. writingranch.com