

LT212 Reading Into Writing: A Fiction Workshop

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

The aim of this course is to hone your abilities as a writer and a reader of fiction through an examination of creative writing craft and theory, workshop model criticism, and the writing and revising of creative work.

We will read and discuss both classic and contemporary works of short fiction, write from prompts during class time, consider the functions of the critic, and present on short stories and literary journals—all with the goal of gaining understanding you can apply to your future fiction-writing practice.

Requirements

Reading assignments: Good writers read; we'll be close reading one short story every week. Much of our discussion on the theory of creative writing craft hinges on these stories. Please make sure to complete the assigned reading before coming to class.

Workshop pieces: Each student is required to submit two fictional pieces for peer workshop. You're not bound by genre: these can be anything from series of speculative flash fiction to a realist short story to an excerpt from a detective novel.

However, there are a few rules: the pieces should be 1,500 to 4,500 words, double-spaced, twelve-point font, and they are due the **Thursday before your assigned workshop**.

Workshop revisions: Workshops are a great editing tool. Following your workshop, you'll be revising your fiction piece and handing in a second draft. The revised pieces should also be 1,500 to 4,500 words, double-spaced, twelve-point font.

The first revised piece is due: **March 19th**

The second revised piece is due: **May 9th**

Revision Key: In addition to your revised fiction piece, you'll be handing in an informal key to the revisions you made. What did you change about your piece, and why? How does this reflect the feedback you received in workshop? How do you believe these revisions improved your fiction?

Presentation: As stated above, good writers read. They also recommend—an invaluable part of any writing community is the constant back-and-forth of reading suggestions. To this end, you'll be asked to give an informal, conversation presentation on a piece of fiction that you recommend. There's no need for a written component or essay: just spend a thoughtful ten minutes telling the class why they should read this particular piece of fiction.

You'll sign up for a presentation slot in the first week. We'll have one presentation each week.

Literary journal overview: Literary journals are the vanguard of new literature. Most authors are published for the first time in literary journals. Novels are serialized in literary journals. Prestigious prizes are won as a result of appearing in literary journals. And yet, literary journals remain tragically underfunded and under-read.

So: go out, find a literature journal, read it cover to cover, and write up an overview of it. This can be conversational rather than essayistic, but must include:

- Reviews of all the stories/poems/essays that appear in the journal
- 500 words on what you think the aesthetic project of the literary journal is

Note: Not all journals that contain fiction are literary journals. Please clear your choice with me.

This project is due **May 9th**

Workshop Letters: You're required to submit workshop letters to each workshopper. These are due **each week**. They must be at least 250 words long.

These letters serve as analysis and guidance for the fiction being workshopped. They should answer the following questions: what is the fictional piece about? and what the story's biggest strength? They should also then examine the weaknesses of the fictional piece and give constructive, critical advice on how to improve the story.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is: absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Please refer to the following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays:

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Although this class doesn't include formal essays, this applies to all written work *and* presentations due in class.

Grade Breakdown

Classroom participation: 40%

We're here to challenge one another in our perception and comprehension of fiction: this means showing up prepared and engaging in discussions. Part of your participation grade also includes the workshop letters you write to your fellow workshopers.

Workshop piece and revision: 40%

These pieces are the crux of the class. While I'm not going to grade you on in terms of aesthetics, I will be grading you on the thoughtfulness of your revisions and your revision key.

Presentation and literary journal overview: 20%

These should be thoughtful pieces; your presentation should be well prepared and your literary journal overview should demonstrate a thoughtful reading and consideration of the journal.

Schedule

January 29:

Introductions

Workshop etiquette

Workshop Sign-up

Reading: "The Husband Stitch," Carmen Maria Machado

In-class discussion/exercise: The author as reader

February 5:

Reading: "Escapes," Joy Williams

In-class discussion/exercise: Voice and distance

Presentation: fiction recommendation

Workshops 1a, 2a

February 12:

Reading: "Sonny's Blues," James Baldwin

In-class discussion/exercise: Plotting 101

Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 3a, 4a

February 19:

Reading: "Sorry Doesn't Sweeten Her Tea," Helen Oyeyemi
In-class discussion/exercise: Pattern making and pattern breaking
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 5a, 6a

February 26:

Reading: "A Temporary Matter," Jhumpa Lahiri
In-class discussion/exercise: Description and characterization
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 7a, 8a

March 5:

Reading: "Cathedral," Raymond Carver
In-class discussion/exercise: Dialogue and storytelling
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 9a, 10a

March 12:

Reading: "Mothers, Lock Up Your Daughters Because They Are Terrifying," Alice Sola Kim
In-class discussion/exercise: Raising tension, raising stakes
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 11a, 12a

March 19:

Reading: "The Frog King," Garth Greenwell
In-class discussion/exercise: Desire and character-building
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 1b, 2b

March 26:

Reading: "The Bloody Chamber," Angela Carter
In-class discussion/exercise: Conflict and conflict resolution
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 3b, 4b

April 2:

Reading: "Shirley From A Small Place," Alexia Arthurs
In-class discussion/exercise: Emotional questions and motivations
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 5b, 6b

April 9:

Reading: "The Woman and the Blue Sky," Ma Jian
In-class discussion/exercise: Writing the outsider
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 7b, 8b

April 23:

Reading: "The State," Tommy Orange
In-class discussion/exercise: Playing with point of view
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 9b, 10b

April 30:

Reading: "The Lord Rides a Swift White Cloud," Daniel Alarcón
In-class discussion/exercise: Playing with point of telling
Presentation: fiction recommendation
Workshops 11b, 12b

May 7:

Reading: "Mijito," Lucia Berlin
In-class discussion/exercise: Final thoughts/semester recap
In-class performance/reading of revised drafts
Goodbyes, and the importance of "toy trucks"

Project Deadlines

Workshop pieces (first draft): the Thursday before your assigned workshop
Workshop piece 1 (revision, with revision key): March 19th
Workshop piece 2 (revision, with revision key): May 9th
Literary journal overview: May 9th

Reading Materials

There is no reader/book purchase. Hard copies of the assigned fiction readings will be given out in class each week, and PDFs will also be made available.