

LT142 Fiction Writing Workshop

Seminar Leader: Clare Wigfall
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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

With over fifteen years experience of teaching creative writing, British Faber & Faber author and BBC National Short Story Award winner Clare Wigfall has developed a method that guarantees to inspire your imagination. Whether you are a total beginner, or a writer with some prior experience keen to now work on your craft in collaboration with other writers, her intention is to break down the barriers that inhibit, so that the creative process can come naturally. Her maxim for teaching is that in creative writing there are no rules. You'll be challenged to experiment with new writing techniques and different genres, such as dystopian fiction and writing in a historical context, as well as exploring how to mine your own experience for inspiration. You'll also be introduced to inspirational and thought-provoking fiction by established authors, from Roxane Gay to Vladimir Nabokov, and will have a chance to hone your critical skills through discussion of these texts. Encouragement and guidance will be given to help you with shaping your ideas into fully developed writing, and of course you'll gain invaluable feedback from the group through sharing your work in class. This course will work you hard and provide challenges and surprises, but it also promises lots of laughter, as well as much stimulation and encouragement from the others in the group. As per tradition, Clare's workshops always conclude with a lively public reading to which friends and family are warmly invited, offering a chance for the group to share new work with the world together.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin and is expected and fundamental to the success of the workshops. To account for minor circumstances, an absence at one of the weekly workshops will not affect the participation grade or require documentation but where possible notification should be given via email or in person for **all** excused absences. After any such absence, additional documentation is required (ie. doctor's note, proof of military obligation, court date, etc.) in order for the absence to be excused. Unexcused absences will impact upon the participation grade received. If necessary, please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing

periods of illness or leave of absence. As each session needs to begin promptly, lateness will count against attendance and will also affect the participation grade.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2021: Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

Assessment

Your final grade will be composed of four parts: Original Work (30%), Preparation for and Active Participation in the Workshops (30%), Constructive Critique of Your Peers (20%), and Evaluation of Your Personal Creative Writing Process (20%). Please see the Grade Breakdown below for further details of these categories. Midterm grades are determined on the basis of the revised first written submission, peer critiques, and class participation, each of which are given equal weight.

Assignments

The course is designed to facilitate you in building a body of creative work in which you can experiment with new techniques and styles to allow you to find your individual voice. You are urged to come to each workshop with an open mind, a willingness to experiment and explore, and the courage to follow your own imagination and inspiration. You will find that there is as much to be learned from your peers as from the workshop tutor. You will be writing in class, so please purchase a new lined notebook in advance (for example a Moleskine) and bring this, along with a favoured writing implement, to every session. Opportunity will be given to share this work aloud. You will be developing these in-class writing assignments outside of class. Please note that you will be expected to write longhand in class and to work with a printed text for the reading discussions. Laptops and other electronic devices are NOT welcome in the workshop.

The best way to learn how to write is to read, and read, and read. This course will expose you to a wide variety of authors and styles, with work dating from as early as 1939. For each workshop you must come well-prepared by reading the pre-assigned writing and listening to any assigned podcasts. All podcasts are from the New Yorker Fiction series which you can find online (<https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/fiction>) or wherever you download your podcasts. You are encouraged to write a short response to each story/piece of writing in your notebooks so that you keep a critical record of your reading. You should be working with printed copies of the text where possible, and should mark these up before class with your commentary, and highlight lines or sections that particularly stand out to you. We will also be reading more writing from established authors together in class. This is indicated on the syllabus but should **not** be read in advance.

In one of the early classes we will make a schedule of writers and submission dates for the workshoping sessions. You will have two opportunities to submit work for constructive critiquing and are expected each time to submit a piece of writing of typically 2,000 to 3,500 words. Most likely this work will be a development of a piece of writing started in class although exceptions can be made following consultation with the tutor. Work to be

workshopped during a given week shall be submitted in the preceding week's workshop with sufficient printed copies to go around the group. Submissions should be typed-up and formatted as follows: double spaced, 12pt Times New Roman, 1" margins. Pages should be numbered and the title and author name should be included on the first page. It goes without saying that texts should be proof-read and spelling/grammar checked carefully before submission. The author may include an additional note if they wish the class to focus on any particular points and it should be noted if a text is unfinished.

On the weeks where we have workshopping sessions, the assigned reading will be the texts submitted by your peers. Honour your peers by giving due time and attention to their work. Ideally you will read each piece twice – first for an initial response, and secondly so that you can read the work with a critical eye. For each piece you are expected to mark up the texts legibly where appropriate, and also to formulate a separate written personal response (approximately 200-400 words), including what you feel works well and suggestions for what might make the piece even stronger. This will help you in developing your own critical skills and in formulating your ideas for the class discussion. At the end of each workshopping session, you should submit a copy of your written response to each individual author and to the course tutor. The quality of this constructive critique of your peers will contribute to your final grade (see Grade Breakdown below). In each of the weeks that your own work is workshopped, you will have a brief one-to-one session with your tutor to talk about your writing and your writing practice.

After your work is discussed in class you will return to it and work on a second draft. The revised draft of the first submission is due on **September 15th (week 7)**. You are expected to select one of your reworked pieces for assessment as the **Original Work** (see Grade Breakdown below). This is due to be handed in during our **final class (December 10th - week 14)** or possibly at an earlier set date if you are a senior. You are also expected to submit in **the final class** a **Written Evaluation of Your Personal Creative Writing Practice** (again, see Grade Breakdown below) which will likewise contribute to your final grade.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to 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. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Final Presentation

At the end of the course, we will together organise a reading to share your work with interested BCB students and faculty. This takes the place of the class in week 13, although we will get together for a short session earlier that day to prepare for the event. The date of this reading will be confirmed and more details will follow.

Grade Breakdown

- **Original Work (30%)** - the Original Work will consist of a piece of creative writing which is expected to be a reworked and polished version of one of the two pieces you submitted earlier for class discussion. Typically this should be between 2,000 to 4,000 words in length. You are encouraged to select whichever piece you feel is your strongest following revisions made after the workshopping sessions. This grade will take into account factors including originality of subject and voice, style, use of imagination, characterisation, structure, the craft of the writing, as well as, importantly, evidence of your ability to embrace revision, especially in regard to the feedback received following the workshop presentation of your texts.
- **Preparation For/Active Participation in the Workshops (30%)** - this is a class that is made rich by student participation, therefore the contributions you make to discussion, critique, and via sharing your work are crucial and the participation grade reflects this. It is important that the class environment feels comfortable and supportive to all involved so that everyone can find room to share their thoughts and writing. The assessment for the participation portion of the grade will be influenced by factors including attendance, punctuality, evidence of having prepared for class by reading/listening to and giving thought to the pre-assigned texts, engagement with the writing exercises in class, and most importantly contribution to discussion of the assigned texts and the in-class exercises as well as in-class critique of your peers. If you lack confidence in speaking up within a group, don't feel afraid to talk about this with the tutor.
- **Constructive Critique of Your Peers (20%)** - You will be offering feedback to your fellow writers via in-class discussion, mark-ups on their printed text, and the written responses to each piece that you will submit to the author and the course tutor at the end of each workshopping session. 20% of your final grade will be awarded for the quality of this feedback. Be honest, insightful, rigorous in your critique, and have the confidence to identify and stand by your own opinion. Meanwhile, always show respect for the opinions of others, even when they differ from your own, and be open to the possibility that sometimes the group discussion might cause you to reconsider your initial response. Additionally, please ensure that you are, at all times, thoughtful and respectful in how you voice your feedback (both in the discussion and in your written response), always listen to the views of others, and remember that the aim of the workshop is not only to offer constructive suggestions for improvement of the text, but also to be supportive and considerate of the author, especially in regard to their effort and ambitions: the value of kindness and positive encouragement cannot be underestimated.
- **Evaluation of Your Personal Creative Writing Practice (20%)** - for the final part of the grade you are asked to submit a self-reflective written evaluation of your personal writing practice, in which you might consider questions such as: how your writing has progressed during the semester; new techniques, styles, or approaches that you have taken particular enjoyment in exploring; which new authors or workshops you have found most inspiring; aspects which have helped you build self-confidence and recognise your personal skills; your reflection upon the experience of critiquing the writing of your peers; how class discussion of your own work has influenced your practice and approach to revision; challenges you have encountered; writing skills you have learned that might be of benefit beyond the writing workshop; and how the course might have changed you. Judged on

both content and form, this evaluation will typically be between 1,000 to 2,000 words in length and is warmly invited to be creative in nature if you so wish.

Essay Deadlines and Dates

The following submission dates will also be posted in the Google Classroom where work can be uploaded. Assuming we can hold classes in person, paper copies of the first draft writing submissions should be distributed to the class. In one of the first weeks, students will sign up to be in either the first or second submission group.

- September 24th (week 4) - First batch of writing submissions (for discussion in week 5)
- October 1st (week 5) - Second batch of writing submissions (for discussion in week 6) and peer reviews for the first batch of submissions
- October 8th (week 6) - Peer reviews for the second batch of submissions
- October 15th (week 7) - First revised original work due
- November 12th (week 10) - First batch of the second writing submissions (for discussion in week 11)
- November 19th (week 11) - Second batch of the second writing submissions (for discussion in week 12) and peer reviews for the first batch of submissions
- November 26th (week 12) - Peer reviews for the second batch
- December 3rd (week 13) - Public reading
- December 10th (week 14) - Revised Original Work plus Personal Reflections due

Schedule

Please note, the syllabus that follows should be viewed with some flexibility. Some dates are yet to be finalised, such as the week for our guest visitor and the date of our reading. The continuing Covid-19 situation means that we might need to be creative about how we best undertake our classes. Where possible, we will meet in-person. If circumstances prevent this, you will be provided with a Zoom link for attendance. You will be given due warning of any changes to the syllabus scheduled below.

All workshops will be held on Friday afternoons from 12:30 - 15:45.

*n.b. Please come to class well-prepared, having read/listened to the assigned reading/podcasts on the schedule below for each session and made notes/mark-ups on the text which you should bring with you to the class. Do not forget your course reader, your notebook, and a writing implement. Please note, the "in-class reading" listed on the syllabus below should **NOT** be read in advance of class.*

Week 1 - Sep 3rd Introductory session - *Free Writing and Reduction*
In-class reading (no need to read in advance):
 Don DeLillo, opening to *The Body Artist* (2001)

Week 2 - Sep 10th *Post Secrets*
Read:

Lucia Berlin, "So Long" (1993)
James Salter's "Last Night" (2002)

Listen to:

New Yorker Fiction podcast **Lauren Groff** reads **Alice Munro's** "Axis" (2011)

(<https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/fiction/lauren-groff-reads-alice-munro>)

In-class reading (no need to read in advance):

Roxane Gay, "Through the Womb" (2012)

Week 3 - Sep 17th *Memories & Senses*

Read:

Joan Didion, "Goodbye To All That" (1967)

Maggie O'Farrell, "Lungs - 1988" (2017)

Listen to:

New Yorker Fiction podcast **T. Coraghessan Boyle** reads

Tobias Wolff's "Bullet in the Brain" (1995)

In-class reading (no need to read in advance):

Sarah Hall, opening to "Vuotjärvi" (2011)

Week 4 - Sep 24th *The Button Box*

Read:

W.G. Sebald, extract from *Austerlitz* (2001)

J.D. Salinger, "For Esmé - With Love and Squalor" (1950)

Listen to:

New Yorker Fiction podcast **Sarah Shun-lien Bynum** reads

Yiyun Li's "Extra" (2003)

In-class reading:

Helen Dunmore, "Lilacs" (2000)

Week 5 - Oct 1st Workshopping session

Read:

Writing submissions from your peers

Rick Moody, "A Guide to Revision"

Week 6 - Oct 8th Workshopping session

Read:

Writing submissions from your peers

Week 7 - Oct 15th Guest author visit - author and their selected reading to be confirmed

AUTUMN BREAK No class Friday, October 22nd

Week 8 - Oct 29th *Apocalyptic and Dystopian Worlds*

Read:

Kristen Roupenian, "Cat Person" (2017)

Kristen Roupenian, "What it Felt Like when Cat Person went Viral" (2019)

View:

Jennifer Egan, as intended by the author, Chapter 12 from *A Visit From The Goon Squad* "Great Rock and Roll Pauses"

can be viewed as a Powerpoint slideshow here:

<https://www.slideshare.net/JenniferEgan/rockandroll97-2004bppt>

Listen to:

New Yorker Fiction podcast **A.M. Homes** reads **Shirley Jackson's** "The Lottery" (1948)

In-class reading:

Margaret Atwood, extract from *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)

Cormac McCarthy, extract from *The Road* (2006)

Kazuo Ishiguro, extract from *Never Let Me Go* (2005)

Octavia Butler, extract from *Parable of the Sower* (1993)

Week 9 - Nov 5th *Fear of the Big Bad Wolf*

Read:

Angela Carter, "The Tiger's Bride" (1979)

Listen to:

Jennifer Egan reads **Mary Gaitskill's** "The Other Place" (2011)

Mary Gaitskill reads **Vladimir Nabokov's** "Symbols and Signs" (1948)

In-class reading:

Clare Wigfall, "Safe" (2007)

Week 10 - Nov 12th *The Museum of Broken Relationships*

Read:

Edwidge Danticat, "Seven" (2001)

ZZ Packer, "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere" (2000)

Listen:

New Yorker Fiction podcast **Joshua Ferris** reads **George Saunders'** "Adams" (2004)

In-class reading:

Jeanette Winterson, extract from *Written On the Body* (1992)

Week 11 - Nov 19th Workshopping session

Read:

Writing submissions from your peers

Week 12 - Nov 26th Workshopping session

Read:

Writing submissions from your peers

Week 13 - Dec 3rd **Date and time to be confirmed**

Reading for students and faculty

Week 14 - Dec 10th Final session - *The Animal Kingdom*

Read:

Leonora Carrington, "The Debutante" (1939)

Raymond Carver, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" (1981)

Listen to:

New Yorker Fiction podcast **David Sedaris** reads **Miranda**

July's "Roy Spivey" (2007)

In-class reading (don't read in advance):

Karen Russell, opening to "St Lucy's Home for Girls Raised
By Wolves" (2006)

Scheduled class times will be available online under the relevant course heading:

<https://berlin.bard.edu/academics/courses/>

Required books for the course

- Course reader
- New lined notebook e.g. a Moleskine
- **Clare Wigfall**, *The Loudest Sound and Nothing*, Faber & Faber, 2007 - this is not required reading, but I strongly recommend you try to get hold of a copy of my first collection of stories. I will explain why in our first class. We will be using one of the stories "Safe" for one of our later sessions, so please try not to read this one in advance.
- During the course, if literature arises that individuals or the group would like to consult, these can be ordered for the library selection.