

# LT212 Reading Into Writing: A Fiction Workshop

Seminar Leader: Rebecca Rukeyser  
Email: r.rukeyser@berlin.bard.edu  
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 **Friday 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 6<sup>th</sup>**

The second revised piece is due: **May 15<sup>th</sup>**

*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 15<sup>th</sup>**

*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 pieces 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:**

***Important note:* This schedule is subject to change to include a master class with Saskia Vogel, final date TBD.**

January 29<sup>th</sup>

Introductions

Workshop etiquette

Workshop Sign-up

*Reading:* "The Husband Stitch," Carmen Maria Machado, "Shitty First Drafts," Anne Lamott

In-class discussion/exercise: The author as reader

February 5<sup>th</sup>

*Reading:* "Bliss," Katherine Mansfield, "Work," Denis Johnson

In-class discussion/exercise: The vitality of desire

Presentation: fiction recommendation

Workshops 1a, 2a

February 12<sup>th</sup>

*Reading:* "Misery," Anton Chekhov, "Point of View," Lucia Berlin

In-class discussion/exercise: Playing with POV

Presentation: fiction recommendation

Workshops 3a, 4a

February 19<sup>th</sup>

*Reading:* "Sluts," Saskia Vogel  
In-class discussion/exercise: Beginnings and endings  
Presentation: fiction recommendation  
Workshops 5a, 6a

February 26<sup>th</sup>

**\* Saskia Vogel masterclass \***

March 4<sup>th</sup>

*Reading:* "Cathedral," Raymond Carver,  
In-class discussion/exercise: Dialogue for characterization and storytelling  
Presentation: fiction recommendation  
Workshops 7a, 8a

March 11<sup>th</sup>

*Reading:* "Escapes," Joy Williams, "The Dirty Kid," Mariana Enríquez  
In-class discussion/exercise: Point of telling; voice and distance  
Presentation: fiction recommendation  
Workshops: 9a, 10a

March 18<sup>th</sup>

*Reading:* "Mothers, Lock Up Your Daughters Because They Are Terrifying" Alice Sola Kim  
In-class discussion/exercise: Tensions and catalysts  
Presentation: fiction recommendation  
Workshops 1b, 2b

March 25<sup>th</sup>

*Reading:* "Amor," Clarice Lispector; "My First Goose," Isaac Babel"  
In-class discussion/exercise: Plot #1: Forms of plot  
Presentation: fiction recommendation  
Workshops 3b, 4b

April 1<sup>st</sup>

*Reading:* "The Bloody Chamber," Angela Carter, "Fairy Tale As Form," Bernheimer  
In-class discussion/exercise: Plot #2: Following convention, attacking convention  
Presentation: fiction recommendation

Workshops 5b, 6b

April 15<sup>th</sup>

*Reading:* "The Night Face Up," Julio Cortázar, "Dog Heaven," Stephanie Vaughn

In-class discussion/exercise: Raising Tension Part II

Presentation: fiction recommendation

Workshops 7b, 8b

April 22<sup>nd</sup>

*Reading:* "Sorry Doesn't Sweeten Her Tea," Helen Oyeyemi, "Going For a Beer," Robert Coover"

In-class discussion/exercise: Breaking the rules once you learn them

Workshops 9b, 10b

April 29<sup>th</sup>

*Reading:* "Country Cooking From Central France," Harry Mathews

In-class discussion/exercise: Formal constraints/revisions

Presentation: fiction recommendation

May 6<sup>th</sup>

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 Friday before your assigned workshop**

*Workshop piece 1 (revision, with revision key):* **March 6<sup>th</sup>**

*Workshop piece 2 (revision, with revision key):* **May 15<sup>th</sup>**

*Literary journal overview:* **May 15<sup>th</sup>**

## **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.