

# LT326 Advanced Fiction Writing Workshop

## Module: Producing Literature / Writer and World

Seminar Leader: Clare Wigfall  
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Office Hours: By appointment

### Course Description

With over fifteen years experience of teaching creative writing, British author Clare Wigfall has developed a method that aims to break down the barriers that inhibit so that the creative process can come naturally. Under her gentle guidance, you will develop a body of new work, learning craft organically through practice and exposure to great writing. The carefully-structured workshops are a springboard, designed to stimulate ideas and encourage experimentation; one or two plan to move off campus – how might a museum prove a source of inspiration, for example? A park? The city we live in? Focus will be given to new genres you might not yet have considered, such as fantasy, or magic realism, or how you might weave myths and legends into your work. Also explored will be the subject of how our own experience can shape our fiction, while also considering the issue of how writing fiction can give us scope to imagine places and experiences we've never lived in our own lives. You have already begun to develop a voice that is uniquely your own, and will take this further now with opportunities to share your work with a group of fellow writers who you can trust to give you invaluable critique. Alongside this, the reading element of this course will be key; from writers such as Toni Morrison, to Sally Rooney, to Zadie Smith, and Neil Gaiman, the selected reading will cast the net wide to throw you into the literary sea. With a proven track record of inspiring her students to produce award-winning, publishable writing, Clare will talk with you about how to submit work to literary journals – the class may even produce a journal of its own – and is delighted to welcome a guest visit from Sharmaine Lovegrove, head editor at Dialogue Books. At the close of the course, there will be a chance to share new work with the world by giving a public reading as a group.

### Requirements

#### **Academic Integrity**

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 expected and is fundamental to the success of the workshops. Notification via email or in person is required for **all** excused absences. After two such absences, 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, whether excused or unexcused.

The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

**SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR AUTUMN 2020:** Some students might 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. In this instance, we will together discuss alternatives to in-person attendance, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

### **Assessment**

Your final grade will be composed of four parts: Original Work (30%), Constructive Critique of Your Peers (20%), Active Participation in the Workshops (25%), and Personal Essay (25%). 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.

### **Writing Assignments, Deadlines and Course Structure**

This advanced writing workshop is designed to offer a space where you can further develop your body of creative work and hone your individual voice through experimentation with new techniques and styles. 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 (in most cases) 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. You will note that the reading list is wide-ranging. The intention is to expose you to a wide variety of authors and styles, with work dating from as early as 1899 and by authors from all over the globe. For each workshop you must come well-prepared by reading the pre-assigned texts and listening to any assigned podcasts or watching assigned videos on the web. 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. The Ted Talks can be found on YouTube. Links to any podcasts or videos to be watched during a week will be shared via the Google

Classroom. You are encouraged to write a short response to each story/essay/video 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 (texts for the podcast stories will also be included in the reader), and should mark these up before class with your commentary, and highlight lines or sections that particularly stand out to you. Some of the course reading on the list may be assigned as in-class reading. You will be informed where this is the case. We will also be reading more writing from established authors together in class that is not on the list, and this will be distributed in the sessions. You will note on the syllabus that each week includes potential “discussion sparks”. These are by no means meant to be prescriptive, but are subjects that dovetail well with the week’s reading and the in-class writing exercises, and can be used, if desired, as springboards for inspiring lively and interrogative discussion. You are encouraged to give some thoughts to these “discussion sparks” as you are preparing for the class and may wish to prepare related questions or thoughts to share.

In addition to the texts in the course reader, a selection of books on writing by various authors and interviews with authors about their practice will be held for you on a reserve shelf in the library. You are absolutely **not** expected to read all of these books, instead they are there for you to dip into. They will demonstrate that while many people over the years have had theories on “how to” write, there is no definitive answer. By dipping into this selection, you may well find authors who speak to you in terms of their approach, or advice that feels relevant in developing you as a writer. This selection is also intended as a resource that you can use if you are thinking about a specific craft question on subjects such as structure, character, plot, etc. Of course, any questions like this can also be brought up for class discussion. Your perusal of these resource books will also be crucial in helping you to find your subject for the Personal Essay.

Students in the introductory class expressed a desire for more out-of-class writing exercises. Inspired by this, each week you will receive a short writing prompt to embark on outside of class. The prompt for the first week will be given by the tutor but after that a student will be assigned to each class to design and deliver the week’s prompt. The resulting writing will be shared at the opening of each class and your presentation of these exercises will contribute to your participation grade. Beyond this, the responses will not be critiqued or graded in themselves, so you should feel free to experiment and have fun with these. You are not expected to spend more than 30-60 minutes on this exercise, although you may be inspired to develop some of these pieces as your workshop submissions.

In the first class, we will also make a schedule of writers and submission dates for the workshoping sessions. You will have two opportunities to submit work for constructive critique 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 or following the external prompts, although exceptions can be made following consultation with the tutor. Work to be workshoped 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 workshoping 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 workshoping 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.

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 **October 16th (week 7)**. You are expected to select one of your reworked pieces for assessment as the **Original Work**. This is due to be handed in during our **final class (December 11th)** or possibly at an earlier set date if you are a senior. You are also expected to submit by **this same date** a **Personal Essay** which will likewise contribute to your final grade.

Another request from former students was to experiment with writing in new locations, so two of the workshops are scheduled to move off-campus (pandemic-restrictions allowing). The first is scheduled for Week 4, when we will be exploring the city as we write. The second is scheduled for Week 9, when the intention is to visit a museum together.

Mid-way through the course, we have the pleasure of welcoming Sharmaine Lovegrove to the session. Sharmaine is head editor at Dialogue Books, an exciting new UK imprint which focuses on shining a spotlight on stories for, about and by readers from the LGBTQI+, disability, working class and BAME communities. Sharmaine has followed a fascinating and very varied career path within the publishing industry, and has been instrumental in illuminating voices traditionally excluded from the mainstream. She has generously agreed to share her experience in the industry with us, which will open a conversation on advice on getting published and career options in the field of publishing. She will also, hopefully, be guest selecting our reading for the week and will join in with our discussion.

Should it become necessary to move our class online due to the Covid-19 situation, some adjustments to our syllabus may be required, but rest assured that your tutor has extensive experience with running online writing workshops and the transition will be as seamless as can be. Thanks to modern technology, it is absolutely possible to maintain a warm writing community online and you can be guaranteed that the workshops will be every bit as inspiring.

### **Policy on Late Submission of Papers**

As per the Student Handbook: *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.*

### **Final Presentation**

At the end of the course, we will together organise a reading to share your work with interested BCB students and faculty. The class session during the reading week will most likely be a shorter session intended to prepare for the reading and possibly to discuss any group publication that you might be working on if the class has shown sufficient interest and motivation (e.g. print journal, podcast series, online blog). The date of the 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 evidence of your ability to embrace revision, especially in regard to the feedback received following the workshop presentation of your texts.
- **Active Participation in the Workshops (25%)** - 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 read/listened to and given 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.
- **Personal Essay - an Opportunity to Reflect (25%)** - for the final part of the grade, you are asked to submit a personal essay. This should be in some way connected with your writing practice, should reference in some way the resource books on the reserve shelf and

the assigned readings, and should be personal in nature, but beyond that the form and subject is free for you to choose as desired. We will be looking at some examples on the course. You may wish, for example, to explore a particular element of craft, such as character or plot, and look at how the various resource books approach this and what conclusions you have come to. Perhaps one of the discussions has raised a question you wish to explore further; why is this of particular relevance to you and your practice? It may be that advice you have come across has changed your thinking about your writing and you wish to share this. Experiments with style and genre might have proved inspirational to you during the course and this could be something you wish to discuss. Was there a specific work that changed the way you think about writing? You are urged to see the Personal Essay as a way to think more deeply about what writing means to you and should feel free to discuss your subject with your tutor in advance. Judged on both content and form, this evaluation will typically be between 1,000 to 2,500 words in length and may be creative in nature. If time allows, you will have the opportunity to read this essay in the final class, thereby allowing you to share with the rest of the group what has inspired you personally.

## 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 visit from Sharmaine Lovegrove and the date of our reading. Likewise, it is not yet confirmed whether our museum trip will definitely be to the Gemäldegalerie (if this is not possible, every endeavour will be made to find an alternative). And of course, the Covid-19 situation means that we might need to be creative about how we best undertake our classes. 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.*

### Week 1 - Sep 4th

Introductory session - *How to Become a Writer*

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

**Lorrie Moore**, "How to Become a Writer" (1985)

**Junot Díaz** reads "How to Date a Brown Girl (Black Girl, White Girl, or Halfie)" (1995)

**Alicia Rodríguez**, "How to Know You're a Woman in a Junot Díaz Novel"

**Edwidge Danticat** reads **Jamaica Kincaid's** "Girl"

Discussion sparks - *The Writer and the Writing / What does it even mean to say we are writers?*

Week 2 - Sep 11th

*Photo Stories*

Read:

**Annie Proulx**, "Brokeback Mountain" (1997)

**Clare Wigfall**, "The Numbers" (2006)

**Zadie Smith**, "Fascinated to Presume: In Defence of Fiction" (essay)(2019)

**Alexander Chee**, "How to Unlearn Everything - When it Comes to Writing the "Other" - What Questions Are We Not Asking?" (essay) (2019)

**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**, "Jumping Monkey Hill" (2006)

Watch (optional):

**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**, "The Danger of a Single Story" (Ted Talk) (2009)

Discussion sparks - *Permission to Imagine / Flipping the Single Story / Considering Voice*

Week 3 - Sep 18th

*Myths and Magic*

Read:

**Gabriel García Márquez**, "Eyes of a Blue Dog" (1950)

**Neil Gaiman**, "Soft Places" from *The Sandman* (1992) (will be shared via the Google Classroom)

**Aoko Matsuda**, "Smartening Up" (2014)

**Carmen Maria Machado**, "The Husband Stitch" (2014)

**Kurt Vonnegut**, "Harrison Bergeron" (1968)

**Ursula Le Guin**, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973)

Discussion sparks - *Embracing fantasy / Building worlds / Re-versioning / Multimodal approaches*

Week 4 - Sep 25th

*Writing the City / Conjuring Place*

Read:

**Teju Cole**, extract from *Open City* (2011)

**Barbara Hepworth**, extract from a BBC interview with the artist (1950)

**Mariana Enriquez**, "The Dirty Kid" (2014)

**Eudora Welty**, "Place in Fiction" (1955) (will be shared via the Google Classroom)

Listen to:

**Allegra Goodman** reads **Eudora Welty's** "No Place for You, My Love" (1952)

Discussion sparks - *Capturing place / Grounding our fiction*

Week 5 - Oct 2nd

Workshopping session

Read:

Writing submissions from your peers

**Week 6 - Oct 9th**

Workshopping session

Read:

Writing submissions from your peers

**Week 7 - Oct 16th**

*Towards the Inevitable*

Read:

**Lawrence Sargent Hall**, "The Ledge" (1960)

**Alice Elliott Dark**, "In the Gloaming" (1993)

**Ernest Hemingway**, "Hills Like White Elephants" (1927)

**Gish Jen**, "Who's Irish?" (1998)

Listen to:

New Yorker Fiction podcast **Tommy Orange** reads **Louise Erdrich's** "The Years of my Birth" (2011)

Watch:

**Andrew Stanton**, "The Clues to a Great Story" (Ted Talk) (2012)

Discussion sparks - *Plot / Story / Tension, etcetera*

**FALL BREAK**

No class on Friday, 23rd October

**Week 8 - Oct 30th**

Guest visit from Sharmaine Lovegrove, head editor at Dialogue Books

Guest readings selected by Sharmaine will be confirmed before class

**Week 9 - Nov 6th**

*Writing in the Museum*

Read:

**William Trevor**, "After Rain" (1995)

**Fleur Jaeggy**, "Thomas de Quincey" (essay) (2015)

**Katherine Mansfield**, "Bliss" (1918)

**Sarah Hall**, "The Nightlong River" (2011)

**Tim O'Brien**, "The Things They Carried"

**Jorge Luis Borges**, "The Library of Babel" (1941)

Listen to:

**Cynthia Ozick** reads **Steven Millhauser's** "In the Reign of Harad IV" (2006)

Discussion sparks - *Making Art / Striving for Beauty and Perfection*

**Week 10 - Nov 13th** *Grand Themes*

Read:

**Sally Rooney**, "At the Clinic" (2016)

**Jhumpa Lahiri**, "A Temporary Matter" (1998)

**Ali Smith**, "A Story of Love" (1999)

**Toni Morrison**, "Recitatif"

**Carmen Maria Machado**, "Inventory" (2017)  
**Joan Didion**, "On Keeping a Notebook" (1968)

Listen to:

**Etgar Keret** reads **Janet Frame's** "You Are Now Entering the Human Heart" (1969)

Read (optional):

**Toni Morrison**, The Art of Fiction No. 134, Paris Review interview (link will be given on the Google Classroom)

**Scholastique Mukasonga**, "Grief" (2020)

**Etgar Keret**, "Breaking the Pig"

Discussion sparks - *The stories that move us, the ones with gravity / How our own experience can shape our fiction*

**Week 11 - Nov 20th** Workshopping session

Read:

Writing submissions from your peers

**Week 12 - Nov 27th** Workshopping session

Read:

Writing submissions from your peers

**Week 13 - Dec 4th** (tbc) **Final date, time and location to be confirmed**

Reading for students and faculty

We will have a short class starting at 12:30 to prepare for the evening's reading

**Week 14 - Dec 11th** Final session - *The Wild Card*

*"Nobody knows anything about the art of fiction"* Virginia Woolf, 1927

Read:

**Francine Prose**, "Learning from Chekhov" (2006)

**Anton Chekhov**, "The Lady with the Dog" (1899)

**James Baldwin**, "Sonny's Blues" (1957)

**Flannery O'Connor**, "Good Country People" (1955)

**Alice Munro**, "Wenlock Edge" (2005)

**Grace Paley**, "Wants" (1974)

Discussion sparks - *Reading as a life work / Why there are no rules / What next?*

## Reference books on the reserved shelf

Marie Arana (editor), *The Writing Life: Writers On How They Think And Work* (2003)

Dorothea Brande, *Becoming a Writer* (1934)

Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (1989)

Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones* (1986)  
Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story* (2002)  
E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927)  
Stephen King, *On Writing – A Memoir of the Craft* (2000)  
Verlyn Klinkenborg, *Several Short Sentences About Writing* (2012)  
Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird* (1994)  
Ursula Le Guin, *Steering the Craft – A Twenty-First Century Guide to Sailing the Sea of Story* (1998)  
David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (1994)  
Paris Review Interviews Vols. I-IV  
Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer* (2006)  
Richard Skinner, *Writing a Novel* (2018)  
William Strunk Jr. And E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* (1920)  
Eudora Welty, *On Writing* (2002)

## **Required books for the course**

- Course reader
- New lined notebook e.g. a Moleskine