

# LT212 Reading into Writing

## A Fiction Workshop

Seminar Leader: Paul Festa  
Course Times: Thu 13:30 – 16:45  
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Office Hours: by appointment

### **Course Description**

Every writer learns the craft by reading. In this course, open to students of any level, the goal is to manifest literary invention and self-expression through the analysis and absorption of exemplary works. Students will alternate writing their own work and editing each other's. Readings from masters of short and long fiction, and of criticism, will inform exercises in plot; character development, point of view and voice; figurative language, style and genre; action, atmosphere and description; the tug-of-war between showing and telling; and techniques of revision, excision, and rewriting. Online Q&As with authors on the syllabus are planned. We'll look at fiction and criticism by Gustave Flaubert, Virginia Woolf, Anton Chekhov, Julio Cortázar, Paul La Farge, Alexander Chee, Jennifer Egan, James Wood, George Saunders, ZZ Packer, Francine Prose, John Cheever, Raymond Carver, Shirley Jackson, Edward St. Aubyn, Ralph Ellison, Ray Bradbury, Amy Hempel, Ernest Hemingway, and Roy Coover.

### **Requirements**

#### **Attendance**

Attendance at all classes and screenings is critical not only for your own work, but for your colleagues', which you will be editing. Each unexcused absence after the first will bring the final grade down by 0.5. Per school regulations, "Bard College Berlin cannot offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, whether the absences are on documented medical grounds or not." In a class that meets 14 times, four is the max. In sum, one unexcused absence is overlooked; two brings a 4.0 down to 3.5 (A-); three --> 3.0 (B); four --> 2.5 (B-); and five absences, unexcused or otherwise, = finis.

Lateness will count against attendance and will also affect the participation grade, as each session begins promptly with in-class writing.

#### **Sessions & Assignments**

Sessions are in two parts:

1. In-class writing and discussion of the reading, with occasional Q&As and/or workshops with writers and critics; some writing mechanics (The Copy Desk).
2. One-on-one and group workshopping of student work

### In-class writing

Each week, students will come to class with at least two quotations from the assigned critical reading, along with corresponding passages from the assigned fiction that illustrate (or perhaps complicate) the critic's point, along with a few brief sentences articulating the connection. These will be the basis of your in-class writing. If you choose to write long-hand, type these up and submit them by Friday midnight. If you choose to bring your laptop, you may email them as-is (same deadline).

### Assignments

There are six assignments. Three of them are the same:

1. Choose a passage of criticism and corresponding fictional passage from any work on the syllabus. You may use one already submitted with your in-class writing, or choose another.
2. Write a short story of between five and ten pages that gives full expression to the relevant technique or style.

The remaining three assignments will be a rewrite of a prior story. The rewrites do not require fresh quotations from the reading (you do not have to repeat Step 1 above); instead, the writer will file a proposal of about 500 words to her editor and the instructor by Friday midnight, laying out the problems of the prior draft and some ideas, however tentative, for tackling them in the new one. The proposal is worth 30 percent of the assignment grade and is subject to standard late penalties.

Work is graded on the standard scale of zero to four:

A	3.86 – 4.00
A-	3.46 – 3.85
B+	3.16 – 3.45
B	2.86 – 3.15
B-	2.46 – 2.85
C+	2.16 – 2.45
C	1.86 – 2.15
C-	1.36 – 1.85
D	0.51 – 1.35
F	0.00 – 0.50

### Assignment groups: writers & editors

The class is divided into two assignment groups of five. Members of Group *Glawr* will file their work both to me and to an editor in Group *Jour De Ma Vie!* by Monday midnight, and vice-versa, alternating weeks. The editor has the following responsibilities:

1. Brainstorm with the writer before she writes.
2. Be available to sound out ideas and look things over in process.
3. Read the work ASAP and provide both writer and Festa with a typed critique (due in class with crit).
4. Discuss the work and critique one-on-one with the writer in class.
5. Present the work to the full class, both describing and evaluating the project. Editor or writer may choose to read the work aloud in whole or in part for full class discussion.

### Final project: the magazine

Our final project will be a fiction magazine featuring our most successful work, and possibly contributions from the BCB community and LT212-2016.

### Deadlines

1. Typed in-class writing, with passages from the prior week's reading, due Friday midnight. Submissions between then and Saturday midnight marked down a full grade; work cannot be accepted after Saturday midnight.
2. First-draft writing assignments are due emailed to both editor and me Monday midnight. Work received between Monday midnight and Tuesday midnight will be marked down a full grade; work cannot be accepted after Tuesday midnight.
3. Revision proposals, worth 30 percent of the revision score, are due Friday midnight. Submissions between then and Saturday midnight are marked down a full grade; work cannot be accepted after Saturday midnight.

## **Grade Breakdown**

The final course grade averages seven equal scores:

1. The top-scoring five of six writing assignments (provided that you hand in all six; if not, the course grade averages all six assignment scores).
2. Class participation (editing, workshop contributions, in-class writing, punctuality).
3. Your contribution to the LT212 magazine, a rewritten and revised assignment (to be submitted the week you \*edit\* assignment 5).

Texts

Writers must bring the assigned reading with them to class. Participation is contingent on having the text with you; sharing is not permitted.

Books

R.V. Cassill, *The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*, 5th Edition\*

James Wood, *How Fiction Works*

(10 library copies)

Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer*

Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Gustave Flaubert, *A Sentimental Education* (trans. Douglas Parmée)

(6 library copies)

Edward St. Aubyn, *Bad News*

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

(11 library copies)

Z.Z. Packer: *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*

Course Packet

Francine Prose, "After Great Expectations" (review of Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*)

Wyatt Mason, "Make This Not True" (review of George Saunders, "The Tenth of December")

George Saunders, "The Tenth of December"

Paul La Farge

"Another Life"

"Rosendale"

Alexander Chee, "The Insincere House"

Robert Hass, "A Story about the Body"

\* The Norton readings are drawn from the 5th edition. They are very likely to be in other editions as well—in the current 8th edition, for example, only the Coover and the Chekov are missing. You don't want the 8th edition anyway, it will bankrupt you. Try to land as close to 5 as you can and we'll photocopy to fill in the gaps.

## **Schedule**

### WEEK 1, FEBRUARY 2

Wood: Narrating (3-38)

Jennifer Egan, A Visit from the Goon Squad

“Found Objects” (3-14); “Out of Body” (140-156); “Great Rock and Roll Pauses” (176-251)

ASSIGNMENT 1: GLAWR

### WEEK 2, FEBRUARY 9

Prose: Narration (85-108)

Virginia Woolf, Orlando, Chapter 1 (1-40)

ASSIGNMENT 1: JOUR DE MA VIE!

### WEEK 3, FEBRUARY 16

Prose & Wood on narration (review)

Virginia Woolf, Orlando, Chapter 2 (41-74)

→ recommended: Get a head start on Flaubert

ASSIGNMENT 2: GLAWR

### WEEK 4, FEBRUARY 23

Wood: Flaubert (39-58)

Gustave Flaubert, A Sentimental Education, Part I (3-111)

ASSIGNMENT 2: JOUR DE MA VIE!

### WEEK 5, MARCH 2

Wood: Truth, Convention, Realism (223-248)

Ralph Ellison, “King of the Bingo Game” (Norton, 441-449)

Richard Ford, “Great Falls” (Norton, 623-636)

Julio Cortázar, “A Continuity of Parks” (Norton, 346-347)

Roy Coover, “The Babysitter” (Norton, 324-345)

ASSIGNMENT 3: GLAWR

### WEEK 6, MARCH 7

Prose: Close Reading (1-12), Words (13-34), Sentences (35-62)

Francine Prose, "After Great Expectations" (review of Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*)  
Edward St. Aubyn, *Bad News*, Chapters 1-4 (omnibus 135-177)

ASSIGNMENT 3: JOUR DE MA VIE!

WEEK 7, MARCH 14

Wood: Detail (59-94)

Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery" (Norton, 782-789)

Amey Hempel, "In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson Is Buried" (Norton, 760-767)

ASSIGNMENT 4: GLAWR

WEEK 8, MARCH 23

Prose: Paragraphs, Details (63-84; 193-208)

Donald Barthelme, "Me and Miss Mandible" (Norton, 58-67)

Wyatt Mason, "Make This Not True" (review of George Saunders, "Tenth of December")

George Saunders, "The Tenth of December"

ASSIGNMENT 4: JOUR DE MA VIE!

WEEK 9: MARCH 30

Wood: Character; *A Brief History of Consciousness* (95-138; 139-168)

Ernest Hemingway, "Hills like White Elephants" (Norton,)

ZZ Packer: *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*

ASSIGNMENT 5: GLAWR

**MAGAZINE SUBMISSION: JOUR DE MA VIE!**

WEEK 10, APRIL 6

Prose: Character (109-142)

Paul La Farge

"Another Life" and "Rosendale" - OR - *The Night Ocean*

ASSIGNMENT 5: JOUR DE MA VIE!

**MAGAZINE SUBMISSION: GLAWR**

\*\*\*SPRING BREAK – APRIL 13\*\*\*

WEEK 11, APRIL 20

Wood: Sympathy & Complexity (169-180)

Prose: Gesture (209-232)

Alexander Chee, "The Insincere House"

Robert Hass, "A Story about the Body"

ASSIGNMENT 6: GLAWR

WEEK 12, APRIL 27

Wood: Language (181-212), Dialogue (213-222)

Prose: Dialogue (143-192)

Raymond Carver, "Cathedral" (Norton, 119-131)

John Cheever, "The Enormous Radio" (Norton, 182-191)

ASSIGNMENT 6: JOUR DE MA VIE!

WEEK 13, MAY 4

Prose 233-274 (Learning from Chekhov; Reading for Courage)

Anton Chekhov, "The Lady with the Little Dog" (Norton, 203-217); "The Darling" (Norton, 217-227)

WEEK 14, MAY 11

Zine release and public reading