

ENGL 7850 Reading For Writers: Weird Stories. W 1:25 – 3:20 URH 375a

Prof. **J. Robert Lennon** / Goldwin Smith 361 / ph 255-7281 / netID jrl24

Office Hours W 9-10, 11:15-1:25, Th by appointment, please tell me if you're coming

Course Description

Thanks for taking English 7850. This class is a writing-intensive seminar dedicated to the study of literature for the purpose of craft. I've chosen to focus this semester on *weird stories*, which, for the purposes of the class, we'll define as fiction that departs, in some way, from representational reality. By this definition, of course, all stories are weird. The traditional approaches to narrative, however, seek to conceal that inherent weirdness, whereas the stuff we'll be reading strives to bring it into the foreground. Indeed, the power of these stories comes from their authors' willingness to manipulate those elements of narrative which, in conventional stories, we take for granted, and which form the “space” in which we're most comfortable reading.

The class will consist of several elements that in practice will probably not remain discrete. First, we'll all read something for each class session—either some short stories or a novel, listed below—and discuss how it works. One of you will sign up each week to lead discussion—that is, to have some ideas prepared for the rest of us to react to. There will also be short writing assignments focusing on experimentation in different elements of the story—narrative momentum, narrative voice, logic, the flow of time, and so on—and we'll read some of these aloud in class and talk about them. I'll also come prepared each week with a short talk on one subject of another—and I encourage you all to do the same. How we spend our class time is likely to evolve and change, depending upon which way the wind is blowing.

Expectations

I expect each student to hand in all the assignments. You must also participate in class discussion regularly, and lead discussion of the day's readings at least once. I am a creative writer, and expect that much of the writing generated for this class will be creative. But critical approaches to the subject are welcome, as well.

This type of class depends heavily on the open exchange of ideas, and so I urge you to study the readings carefully, take notes, and come to class ready to engage your peers in discussion. Small seminars are as only good as you're willing to make them—help me make this one lively and interesting.

Required Texts available at Buffalo Street Books: Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*; Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*; Davis, *Hell*; Ishiguro, *Unconsoled*; Lethem, *As She Climbed Across The Table*; McCarthy, *Remainder*; Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*; course pack (Cornell Book Store)

List of readings

Wed 8/25

Opening Discussion
Wallace, "Oblivion"

Wed 9/1

Lethem, *As She Climbed Across The Table*
Assignment: Voice

Wed 9/8

Link, "Stone Animals"
Woodring, "Gentlemanhog"
Assignment: Magic

Wed 9/15

Davis, *Hell*
Assignment: Time

Wed 9/22

Lem, "Vestrand's Extelopedia"
Paschal, "By The Light Of The Jukebox"
Assignment: Text

Wed 9/29

Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*
Assignment: Society

Wed 10/6

Davis, "Five Signs Of Disturbance"
Nabokov, "The Visit To The Museum"
Assignment: Interiors

Wed 10/13

Murakami, "The Elephant Vanishes"
one more story TBA
Assignment: Theme

Wed 10/20

McCarthy, *Remainder*
Assignment: Narrative

Wed 10/27

Barthelme, "I Bought A Little City"
Saunders, "CivilWarLand In Bad Decline"
Assignment: Place

Wed 11/3

Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*
Assignment: Rhythm

Wed 11/10

Dart, "Rabbithead"
Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*
Assignment: Objects

Wed 11/17

Dixon, "Love Has Its Own Action"
Mieville, "Reports Of Certain Events"
Assignment: Pacing

Wed 11/24

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Wed 12/1

Ishiguro, *Unconsoled*
Assignment: Logic

Books available at Buffalo Street Books.

Short stories are from the course pack,
available at the Cornell Bookstore.