

ENGL 7850 Reading For Writers: Weird Stories.

Thursday 2:30 - 4:25, Goldwin Smith 162

Prof. J. Robert Lennon / Goldwin Smith 339 / netID jrl24

Office Hours: Tues 1:30-3, Wed by appointment

Course Description

Thanks for taking English 7850. Reading for Writers 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 we'll define, loosely, 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 that 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. **(There is a lot of reading, so be prepared.)** One or two 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 weekly writing assignments, 1 to 3 pages in length, 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 or 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 (poetry, fiction, essay, and graphic narrative responses are all fine). But critical approaches to the prompts are welcome, as well. Your grade depends on participation and timely submission of assignments, not whether what you hand in is brilliant. So, feel free to use these assignments as opportunities to work outside your comfort zone. I won't grade each assignment, but I will give you brief narrative feedback and an edited manuscript. I'd like you to hand them in on paper, **and I'd prefer to avoid computers, tablets, and phones in the classroom.**

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 each session 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 will be available at Buffalo Street Books:

Kathryn Davis, *Duplex*, ISBN-10: 1555976913
Don DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, ISBN-10: 0743244257
Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*, ISBN-10: 0385493002
Richard McGuire, *Here*, ISBN-10: 0375406506
Jeff Vandermeer, *Annihilation*, ISBN-10: 0374104107
Tom McCarthy, *Remainder*, ISBN-10: 0307278352
Barbara Comyns, *The Vet's Daughter*, ISBN-10: 1590170296
Jim Woodring, *Fran*, ISBN-10: 1606996614
Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, ISBN-10: 0679735879
+ COURSE PACK, available at the Cornell Store.

Schedule

Thurs 1/28

Opening Discussion
Wallace, "Oblivion"

Thurs 2/4

Davis, *Duplex*
Assignment: Monsters

Thurs 2/11

Dixon, "Love Has Its Own Action"
Dart, "Rabbithead"
Assignment: Time

Thurs 2/18

DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*
Assignment: Pacing

Thurs 2/25

Cortazar, "Don't Blame Anyone"
Davis, "Five Signs Of
Disturbance"
Cauley, "Building Jumper"
Assignment: Interiority

Thurs 3/3

Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*
Assignment: Society

Thurs 3/10

McGuire, *Here*
Nabokov, "The Visit To The
Museum"
Assignment: Buildings

Thurs 3/17

Vandermeer, *Annihilation*
Assignment: Aliens & Artifacts

Thurs 3/24

Murakami, "The Elephant Vanishes"
Dybek, "Paper Lantern"
Assignment: Theme and Symbol

Thurs 4/7

McCarthy, *Remainder*
Assignment: Circularity

Thurs 4/14

Barthelme, "The Balloon"
Lin, "Westward, Ever Westward"
Mieville, "Reports of Certain
Events in London"
Assignment: Place

Thurs 4/21

Comyns, *The Vet's Daughter*
Assignment: Childhood

Thurs 4/28

Woodring, *Fran*
Link, "Stone Animals"
Lispector, "The Chicken"
Assignment: Animals

Thurs 5/5

Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*
Assignment: Logic