

CRW 6166—Literary Form: Short Novels/Long Stories
Wednesdays 4:05-7:05 in CBD 224
Camille Bordas, bordas.camille@ufl.edu
Office hours: by appointment

Required Texts:

Novels you'll need to purchase/borrow at the library:

Martin Amis, *Night Train*

Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day*

Agota Kristof, *The Notebook* (this is the first volume of a trilogy, it stands on its own entirely and we won't read the other two, but the collected three novels, as put out by Grove Press, are easier to find than *The Notebook* alone.)

Edouard Levé, *Autoportrait*

Leonard Michaels, *Sylvia*

Harry Mulisch, *The Assault*

Patrik Ourednik, *Europeana*

Short stories (I will send them all to you via email by the end of the week):

Rebecca Curtis, "The Gusher"

Deborah Eisenberg, "Taj Mahal"

Keith Gessen, "The Vice President's Daughter"

Denis Johnson, "Doppelgänger/Poltergeist" and "The Starlight on Idaho"

José Emilio Pacheco "Battles in the Desert"

George Saunders, "Pastoralia"

About Our Class

This is not a traditional literature class, but a class designed to make us better writers through close reading.

Discussion: Apart from in-class exercises, this seminar will mostly be discussion-based. You must participate in discussion. Disagreements will arise during discussions, as they should.

Presentations: each week, one or two students will present on either an assigned story or novel. These presentations should follow some basic rules (outlined below), but are mainly meant to start off our conversation. They needn't be exhaustive, and shouldn't concern themselves with contextualizing the piece (be it within the author's career or literary history), only with what makes the piece function as a work of art.

This goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway: EVERYONE (not only the presenter) is expected to closely read the piece or pieces to be discussed each week, and to come to class with a couple of questions and observations that the piece(s) raised for you.

Outline for presentations:

- 1) Give a summary of the story/novel.
- 2) Offer your point of view on the story's/novel's "meaning" using evidence from the text to support your claims.
- 3) Offer your thoughts on what makes this particular story or novel this particular story or novel. How does the author keep us moving through it? Where are the pleasures in it to be found? Where does it behave in ways we aren't expecting? In other words: where did you expect it to go, and did it go there?
- 4) Lead a discussion on the story. Have at least three questions with which to provoke the discussion.

1 should take NO MORE than five minutes. 2 and 3 (combined) should take NO LESS than fifteen minutes. 4 will take as long as 4 takes.

Questions you'll want to ask yourselves as you prepare your presentation:

- 1) What do we know about the protagonist? What do we suspect about the protagonist?
- 2) In what kind of world is the story set (ours, ours+, fantastical, etc.)?
- 3) Where exactly is the story set? If this is unclear, make an informed guess. Be descriptive.
- 4) What is at stake? At what point do we realize what is at stake?
- 5) What questions does the story address?
- 6) What is/are the primary source/s of narrative tension? Another way to phrase that: what is propelling us through the story? (note: don't just say "the voice." If that's the answer, then describe the qualities of the voice that propel us.)
- 7) What is the author asking us to pay attention to? How do we know?
- 8) What are the scenes/images that stuck with you the most? Why?

Exercises: I may or may not assign in-class exercises based on the readings. These are supposed to be fun, and to get us (I usually do them as well) to write in different voices or traditions, and, more generally, explore new paths and styles than those we're used to writing in (and that we may feel hemmed in by), all without pressure, the hope being that by writing things completely unrelated to what we're working on, by loosening up something in the process we're used to,

we might unlock something interesting, find new ways to approach old problems, and create a couple new ones as well.

Course Calendar

Week 1, August 21— Introductions

Week 2, August 28— Denis Johnson, “Doppelganger, Poltergeist.”
“The Starlight on Idaho”

Week 3, September 4— Keith Gessen, “The Vice President’s Daughter.”

Week 4, September 11—Agota Kristof, *The Notebook*

Week 5, September 18— George Saunders, “Pastoralia”

Week 6, September 25—Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day*

Week 7, October 2—José-Emilio Pacheco, “Battles in the Desert”

Week 8, October 9—Patrik Ourednik, *Europeana*

Week 9, October 16— Deborah Eisenberg, “Taj Mahal”

Week 10, October 23—Harry Mulisch, *The Assault*

Week 11, October 30— Édouard Levé, *Autoportrait*

Week 12, November 6— Rebecca Curtis, “The Gusher”

Week 13, November 13— Martin Amis, *Night Train*

Week 14, November 20—Leonard Michaels, *Sylvia*

November 27—THANKSGIVING, no class

December 4—Conclusion

