

CRW 6166—Literary Forms: Action/Close Readings

Tuesdays 4:05-7:05 FLI 101

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Office hours: Tuesdays 2 to 4

Required Texts:

All in course packets

About Our Class

This is not a traditional literature class, but a “literature for writers” class: designed to make us better writers through close reading, identifying where authors before us have done something great, and how they did it.

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 of you will present on a story or novel excerpt from the packet. 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 (or scene/excerpt) function, what makes it what it is.

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 them.

Outline for presentations:

- 1) Give a summary of the story/excerpt
- 2) Offer your thoughts on what makes this particular story/excerpt *this* particular story or excerpt. Some questions you can ask yourself as you prepare a presentation: How does the author keep us moving through the story? Where are the pleasures in it to be found? Where does it behave in ways we aren't expecting? What keeps our attention? How is the pace? Does it change throughout? What do you notice that surprises/moves/thrills you? What is at stake? At what point do we realize what is at stake? What images stuck with you after you were done reading? Why? Etc. etc.

- 3) Lead a discussion on the story. Have at least three questions with which to provoke the discussion.

1 should take NO MORE than two minutes. 2 should take NO LESS than fifteen minutes. 3 will take as long as 4 takes.

Workshop: I don't know how this class will go. If it turns out someone is presently writing an action scene, or is struggling with some of the notions we've been discussing and wants the class to offer feedback on it, we might (on a voluntary basis) workshop excerpts or scenes here and there. The calendar is a work in progress.

Walk-ins: similarly, if you find yourself reading something amazing that fits the (very loose) boundaries of our topic (ie "action" basically seen as anything happening) and if you want to share with the class why you think it works so well: do bring it.

Exercises: I will assign in-class exercises, sometimes based on the readings, sometimes not at all 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 hopefully create new problems for ourselves, too.

Course Calendar

Week 1, January 10—Introductions.

Week 2, January 17—

Week 3, January 24— César Aira, *Dinner* (excerpt)

Week 4, January 31— Agota Kristof, *The Notebook* (excerpts)

Week 5, February 7— Albertine presents on “Emergency” or “Car-Crash While Hitchhiking” or both.

Week 6, February 14— Molly presents on “Poetics for Bullies,” by Stanley Elkin.

Week 7, February 21— Roy presents on...Harry Mulisch? John Jeremiah Sullivan? John Edgar Wideman? Bohumil Hrabal? Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah?

Week 8, February 28— Ara presents on “The Hat Act,” by Robert Coover

Week 9, March 7— Cosmo presents on Maylis de Kerangal, *The Heart* (excerpt)

March 14—*Spring Break*

Week 10, March 21— Albertine presents on “Victory Lap,” by George Saunders.

Week 11, March 28— Molly presents on “Murderers,” by Leonard Michaels.

Week 12, April 4— Roy presents on...Harry Mulisch? John Jeremiah Sullivan? John Edgar Wideman? Bohumil Hrabal? Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah?

Week 13, April 11— Ara presents on Daniil Kharms

Week 14, April 18— Cosmo presents on *White Noise* (excerpt) by Don DeLillo

Week 15, April 25—TBD (probably we’ll read *Europeana*, by Patrik Ourednik)