

The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana, by Umberto Eco

Eco is a well-known writer of mysteries. In this heavily illustrated work, Yambo, a Milanese book dealer, suffers from memory loss – he cannot remember anything about his family, friends, or past life. He can, nevertheless, remember every plot of every book he has ever read, every line of poetry. Yet, he knows not his name... Rummaging through newspapers, comics, records, and diaries in the attic of his family home, Yambo begins to see his life as a graphic novel. Fans of psychological fiction will appreciate Yambo's painful struggles to regain control of his memory. Eco is also a renowned professor of semiotics, and it comes as no surprise that for Yambo, artifacts from his youth serve as a symbol of identity, a record of his lost personal history, and a motif for the classification and creation of records.

Films

All the President's Men (1976)

Directed by Alan Pakula and starring Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford, the film is based on Bernstein and Woodward's uncovering of the Watergate scandal, which led to Nixon's resignation in disgrace. Unusual for Hollywood, the film's action is propelled by two heroic bureaucrats, whose intimate familiarity with government records helps the two reporters expose one of the biggest political scandals in U.S. history.

Glengarry Glen Ross (1992)

Based on David Mamet's screenplay, directed by James Foley, and starring Hollywood luminaries from Jack Lemmon to Al Pacino, this bleak, character-driven film portrays the inner machinations of a real estate office and reveals its cutthroat competitiveness, as each employee struggles to hold on to his job. Roger Ebert wrote that the film's setting could be any "white-collar organization in which middle-aged men find themselves faced with sudden and possibly permanent unemployment"

(<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19921002/REVIEWS/210020302/1023>).



INF2175 H: Managing Organizational Records

A Guide to Supplementary Works of Fiction, Nonfiction, and Cinema

Created by Lana Alsabbagh

Cover image courtesy of Wikimedia
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Administrative_burden.JPG#file

University of Toronto
Faculty of Information

Nonfiction

***Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records, Bureaucrats in the Modern Age* by Marco Codebo**

This scholarly work discusses the development of the archival novel from the 1700s to the present. Codebo, an archival expert and literary scholar, defines the archival novel as a fictional genre “where the narrative stores records, bureaucratic writing informs language, and the archive functions as a semiotic frame that structures the text’s content and meaning” (p.13). Written in academic yet highly accessible prose, this is a fascinating account of the ways in which archives frame the readers’ comprehension of the text.

Fiction

***The Castle*, by Franz Kafka**

This symbolic tale of man’s alienation and the abuse of authority is a classic of German fiction. The protagonist K’s attempts to access the administration of a mysterious castle highlights the cultural, political and psychological factors that give rise to bureaucratic institutions. Anyone who has started a new job or has worked for a large organization will appreciate K’s trials and tribulations as he attempts to bypass the ‘red tape’ and reach the elusive Klamm, his presumed contact in the castle.

***The Slynx*, by Tatyana Tolstaya**

This futuristic novel takes place 200 years into the future. It is set in Moscow devastated by a nuclear blast and inhabited by mutants. Everything and everyone are controlled by an autocrat who claims literary works as his own. Will the thirst for knowledge and the revolutionary spirit of one of his copyists be the end of this tyrant? Tolstaya’s slow-paced dystopian tale finds its inspiration in Russian history, fraught with despotism and cultural repression. Gambrell’s translation preserves Tolstaya’s dark humor and plain, accessible prose.

***Ex-libris* by Ross King**

Hired to track down a stolen heretical manuscript, Isaac Inchbold wades through a maze of clues, crimes, and dangers, not knowing the real reason behind his employer’s desperation to find the manuscript. This thriller’s lightning pace, action-packed storyline, and painstakingly comprehensive historical backdrop will appeal to readers of historical mysteries. This novel is an entertaining introduction to the challenges of acquiring and maintaining controversial documents. Although the book is focused on one banned document, the theme of the legal regulation of reading material is directly transferable onto archival environments.

***Too Loud a Solitude*, by Bohumil Hrabal**

This novel from one of the most popular Czech writers tells the story of Hanta, a trash collector with the habit of preserving and reading the banned manuscripts he is required to burn. Consumed with guilt and driven to alcoholism, Hanta is eventually made dispensable by younger workers and a more modern machine. A poignantly hilarious, scathing social satire in Hrabal’s trademark visceral prose, *Too Loud a Solitude* is a richly woven metaphorical tale about the dangers of censorship and the power of the written word. Hanta, an unschooled trash collector with an encyclopedic knowledge of the classics, commands our sympathy even as he dutifully shreds so-called ‘subversive’ manuscripts.



***Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* by Haruki Murakami**

Murakami’s cyberpunk novel, set in the not-so-distant future, is stylistically complex and rife with allusions and wordplay. It tells the story of a lowly agent in a society where a single organization controls the dissemination of information to the general public. Through electronic brainwashing and other sinister methods, Agents are taught to use their subconscious minds to manipulate information. Interference from a rival group called the Semiotics threatens to drive the Agent into insanity. Murakami’s work will appeal to readers of plot-driven suspense thrillers and science fiction novels. This particular novel touches on the tainted nature of ‘filtered’ information and the way it permeates individuals’ psychological consciousness.

***All the Names* by José Saramago**

Saramago’s tale of a lonely bureaucrat obsessed with tracking down an anonymous woman has been hailed as thought-provoking and stimulating. Senhor José works at the Central Registry, which houses records of all citizens. When he comes across an incomplete birth certificate, he resolves to find the certificate’s owner, committing unprofessional acts in the process: accessing illegal records, forging papers, and breaking into the Registry’s archives after hours. According to *Publishers Weekly*, the great writers of surreal dystopian fiction, including Kafka, inspire the sterile bureaucratic landscape in Saramago’s novel. *All the Names* features organization and bureaucracy, legal regulation and censorship. Importantly, the Registry as a recordkeeping institution symbolizes the collective memory of the living and the dead. Importance associated with personal records and Senhor Jose’s ‘violation’ of these records raise crucial questions about the ethical considerations and psychological implications of managing organizational records.