



The Art of X-Ray Reading

Roy Peter Clark

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Roy Peter Clark, one of America's most influential writing teachers, offers writing lessons we can draw from 25 great texts.

Where do writers learn their best moves? They use a technique that Roy Peter Clark calls X-ray reading, a form of reading that lets you penetrate beyond the surface of a text to see how meaning is actually being made. In THE ART OF X-RAY READING, Clark invites you to don your X-ray reading glasses and join him on a guided tour through some of the most exquisite and masterful literary works of all time, from The Great Gatsby to Lolita to The Bluest Eye, and many more. Along the way, he shows you how to mine these masterpieces for invaluable writing strategies that you can add to your arsenal and apply in your own writing. Once you've experienced X-ray reading, your writing will never be the same again.

The Art of X-Ray Reading Details

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From Reader Review The Art of X-Ray Reading for online ebook

Joseph Williams says

Pretty good as writing books go. The love of the author for the works analyzed is clear. Audio book reader perfect.

Paul LaFontaine says

Writers can study how to craft language by closely studying the strategy great writers used to create remarkable impacts on their readers. Clark calls this X-Ray Reading.

For anyone interested in being a better writer, or reader, can't be better served than to read this book. Well written, interesting and at times astonishing. Excellent book.

Highly recommend.

Lori Tian Saliata says

I'm a longtime Clark fan, and this didn't disappoint. I recommend it highly for serious readers and writers alike.

Aimee Meester says

4.5 stars -- I LOVED THIS. It makes me want to be creative and read with a purpose. There's so much good stuff in here for writers who want to read in a way that makes your writing better, and it very much encourages you to think for yourself. It uses passages from great books and breaks them down to show why they're so effective, and I enjoyed the whole thing. 12/10 must buy it when I have money.

Laure says

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book - Surprisingly, it was a quick read. I had read most of the 'advice' distilled throughout the book before, but the best part of the book, in my opinion, was the discussion of the literary texts themselves.

I only have a few quibbles about the views expressed in the chapter on 'sex'. Not sure if I adhere totally to R.P. Clark's definition of erotica - we, the readers, were treated to an extract of 'Fifty Shades of Grey', which is not the best prose ever written, let's face it. Where I disagree is that the treatment of the subject matter was derided too. As opposed to 'Fifty', then was juxtaposed another text describing a metaphorical sexual experience involving bees, flowers and spring. As pretty and sensual the passage was it did not even flush

my cheeks. It felt somewhat like: 'and now, this is how a proper lady writer should write'.

I think I might be making too much of it - the rest of the book was very informative, and I would recommend its reading to any would be writer. In fact, I am going to make a quick checklist for myself of all the points mentioned in the book. Superior procrastination. :D

Beth says

I'm torn, but I'm also really glad I read this. Here, from page 49 of my copy:

Repetition is different from redundancy. Don't strain yourself looking for synonyms... Think of repetition as a drumbeat. Somehow, a marching drummer can repeat a rhythm countless times without making it sound tedious. After a while, the rhythm becomes unnoticeable, almost like a heartbeat. But it must be done for effect and with a purpose. Beware of those times when you unintentionally repeat a word or image. Readers will judge you as inattentive.

Essentially, this book teaches analysis. It argues for very close readings of famous texts - *very* close; at one point Clark points out the omitting of the word "the" prior to "leaves" in a paragraph by Hemingway, and how that omission acts as a spotlight on that particular instance of the word "leaves."

And yet this isn't "How to Analyze for Dummies." This is ferociously intelligent stuff.

In college, I wrote a paper describing Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* as an "anti-Jewish Jewish novel." I could say something similar about Joyce's narrative on Irish Catholicism and Rushdie's view of Islam in *The Satanic Verses*, for which he received officially sanctioned threats of assassination.

But it would surprise me if Joyce built his work on allusions connected with Islam or if Roth's work depended on the sacramental language of Christianity. There is instead an identifiable collection of words - the Anglo-Saxon poets called it a word hoard (like a treasure chest) - drawn authentically from the experience of growing up in a certain cultural tradition. It must be said that such a language heritage is only influential and not determinative. It can be enhanced and enriched by education and travel. But it cannot be escaped. It should be embraced.

This book simultaneously argues that writers are both deliberate and instinctive, and that certain techniques are universal because they're effective (whether deliberately done or not) which is something readers can spot when x-ray reading a work.

I don't think there's a consistent theme to this work. Instead, Clark examines 25 different novels and points out key techniques. Some works suggest certain techniques; some works suggest contrasting ones - this is especially noticeable with regard to weather and setting reflecting the mood of the work.

There are times when the close approach worked for me, mostly when looking closely at prose, where the analysis is verging on brilliant. There are times, particularly in the second half (where this work loses some momentum) when instead I was reminded of L'Engle's Newbery acceptance speech -

And I'll never forget going to the final exam and being asked why Chaucer used certain verbal

devices, certain adjectives, why he had certain characters behave in certain ways. And I wrote in a white heat of fury, "I don't think Chaucer had any idea why he did any of these things. That isn't the way people write."

I believe this as strongly now as I did then. Most of what is best in writing isn't done deliberately.

Clark doesn't believe this, and he makes a strong case for devices and symbols that are deliberately used by authors. And there are times when he convinces me, too - a big deal, considering I love that L'Engle quote.

And he ends off with a bang:

[Intertextuality] is not a euphemism or rationalization for acts of plagiarism. It is, instead, a recognition that long before an adult author has written a first novel, she has read hundreds of others. From those readings she has learned not just the grammar of written language but also the grammar of stories. There are all kinds of ways, good and bad, that she will use this knowledge in her writing...

Yes.

This is an almost directionless piece of writing. It features disparate techniques and is organized only with the 25 works referenced in the subtitle. But there are flashes of insight that dazzled me, along with an appreciation for various types of books and reading, and a bone-deep (heh) certainty that a closer look at famous works reveals subtle brilliance. I appreciated that.

Rachel Elizabeth says

This wasn't the best book, but it was fairly refreshing. I've read many of the books referenced in the text, so it was a fairly interesting time spent looking closer for details I've missed in the past.

Mostly, however, this book covers a lot of what a university English class covers. I'll be honest, I only picked it up because it referenced Shirley Jackson and Sylvia Plath, two of my favorite writers.

I don't think this book will make you a better reader or writer, but it does pose a few interesting elements to how we perceive opening lines, and how deep writing can go. This book will help me for future assignments in my Professional Writing program, but I'm doubtful it'll have any further long arching elements to my writing.

Dlmrose says

3.5

Jon says

The old professor stands in front of class silently waiting. When the second hand sweeps the hour, he closes his eyes and begins. He prattles on about his favorite books, all written long before you, and even he was

born, while the class sits, nodding and enraptured by his wisdom. Occasionally, he might open his eyes and blow the dust off his curled copy of The Great Gatsby in order to count for you the number of "and"s and "the"s contained in the passages that make him clutch the book to his chest on a regular basis. The class is in awe.

And you feel like you've landed on a foreign planet because all you hear is Charlie Brown's teacher groaning waah wa wahhh wah wahhh. Are you too stupid to get this? Is this the right course? Is this one of those hidden camera shows?

You have no idea. But as soon as you can get out the door, you drop the class.

This book was that class except I unexpectedly would blurt out comments like "god, I hate this book" or why am I wasting my time with this" or more often than not, "Oh fuck you, book."

Sometimes, I don't like a book. I average a book a week, so it's bound to happen. I try to give even the bad ones a chance and often read it the whole way through. this was not one of those books.

By page 20, Clark spends a full page debating Fitzgerald's use of the word ogastic vs. orgiastic, debating the merits of both and the history behind that particular word choice. He does it to share how positively fascinating it is...or maybe just to show how much more superior his knowledge of literary minutiae is than yours. If that sounds like something you're into, this is the book for you. If not, there are better books out there with more information and less of a musty smell.

Let me say this: I rarely hate books as much as I hated this book. I bulldozed 170 pages through this one before giving up. I'm at a loss for words. Fuck this book. The only reason that I can think of to read this book is if it is assigned by Clark himself in order to pass his class. Skip both and transfer out.

Olga Tsygankova says

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Cyndi says

This is a useful book for an aspiring writer. It teaches how to look into the works of other authors and see their methods. But, towards the end it became repetitive.

Elizabeth says

This was not so great.

Crystal says

For me, a literature geek and a writer, this was an interesting and entertaining book. Clark kept me engaged and moving forward. I'm glad to know that he has the same opinion of the 50 Shades of Gray series that I do. And one of the best points of humor occurs during this section. He has x-ray reading covers a wide variety of literature and I would think there is something for most everyone.

Bill W says

This book is a fascinating appreciation of and introduction to writing. So interesting and fun to read!

Jenny Baker says

I'm a voracious reader, but this book made me feel like I've never truly read a book. I mean that in the most complimentary way. I didn't realize how much I was missing when I read, until I read this book. It's a very eye-opening experience that lead to many aha moments and a ton of "OMG, I can't believe I missed that!" moments.

Each chapter focuses on a specific work and at the end of each chapter is a writing lesson. These lessons are the key elements that the reader should take away from that chapter. At the end of the book is a section called "Great Sentences From Famous Authors" and this is a chance to practice your new x-ray reading skills. Following this exercise are the "Twelve Steps to Get Started As An X-Ray Reader" which is a good reference to help new x-ray readers begin reading on a whole new level.

Out of the 25 works mentioned in this book, I've only read about half of them. Now that I have a new pair of x-ray reading glasses on, I want to reread these (as well as some of the others) with fresh eyes. I love *The Great Gatsby*, but wow, did I miss a lot! I missed the themes and symbolism, especially. I'm a Charles Dickens fan and I read Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*, but somehow I missed her parallel to *A Christmas Carol*. How in the world did I miss that? (I knew the concept of intertextuality, but I didn't know that's what it was called.) I love it when I notice it in literature, but I'm sure there are many times when it slips by me unnoticed.

One of the most eye-opening experiences was the chapter about Hemingway. Although I never read *A Farewell to Arms*, I did read *The Sun Also Rises*. I was very disappointed in it, so I gave it a low two-star rating. I noticed it received a lot of high ratings and I couldn't understand why. I wasn't fond of his terse prose and Hemingway fans are always saying that if you don't like Hemingway, then you don't understand him. I thought they were just being pretentious snobs, but after reading *The Art of X-Ray Reading*, I realize that I truly didn't understand Hemingway. I missed his rhythm and his intentional repetition and omission of words. I was too busy reading on the level of the story that I wasn't reading it on the level of the text.

This is one of those books that you'll not only want to add to your home library, especially aspiring writers, but also a book that you'll want to read more than once. I checked this book out at my local library, but I already know that I'll be buying it, rereading it and write in it. I want to absorb everything **Roy Peter Clark**

teaches in this book (and his other books) and internalize it completely. I highly recommend this book to avid readers and aspiring writers.
