

Hannah Walser
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Office Hours: W 3-4 p.m., Th 11-12

Stanford University
Spring 2015
Office: 460-312

Writing-Intensive Seminar in English (English 162W, Section 4)
“The Neuronovel”

Course Description

Literary fiction is famously adept at inducing us to project ourselves into the minds of others. Yet how does this process change when the mind we are asked to inhabit is developmentally disabled, brain-damaged, or otherwise non-“neurotypical”? This course examines how writers use the tropes and concepts of cognitive science to experiment with narrative categories and conventions. While reading contemporary novels through a narratological lens, we will also question the political implications of representing cognitively impaired characters in literature, noting the ways in which aberrant psychology has been associated with particular racial and economic demographics. Over the course of the quarter, students will practice both intensive formal attention to the representation of cognitive processes and extensive research into the critical conversations surrounding their chosen research topic.

Course Goals

This course is about writing as much as critical analysis, and we will devote equal attention to constructing complex claims about texts and communicating them in argumentative prose. By the end of the quarter, you should be able to:

- 1) Develop rigorous close readings that incorporate strategies and techniques learned from critical examples.
- 2) Situate your observations about a primary text in the context of an existing critical conversation.
- 3) Recognize and evaluate common literary methodologies (e.g. narratology, historicism, poststructuralism).
- 4) Produce a research paper that integrates multiple formal and thematic aspects of a text into a coherent, novel argument.
- 5) Think and write critically about the benefits and challenges of interdisciplinary literary studies.

Required Texts

Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Random House, 2004)
Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (Random House, 2007)
Joseph McElroy, *Plus* (Knopf, 1977) *Distributed through Coursework.

Course Requirements

1. **Attendance and Note-Taking.** In the interest of continuing our seminar discussions outside of class – and encouraging you to build upon your classmates’ insights in your own research – you will each be assigned to take minutes on two or three of our class sessions. These minutes should include both a) a detailed summary of the conversation, including speaker attribution and b) 2-3 “take home” points that you judge to be the most important of our discussion. Minutes should be posted to the course website by the start of the next class session. 15% of final grade.
2. **Critical Response (800-1200 words).** Response to a secondary text from a bibliography provided by the instructor, evaluating the content and logical structure of the author’s argument. 20% of final grade.
3. **Close Reading (800-1200 words).** Detailed formal analysis of a passage from McCarthy’s *Remainder*. 20% of final grade.
4. **Research Proposal (300 words) and Annotated Bibliography.** Prospectus and preliminary bibliography for a final project on the relevance (or lack thereof) of neuroscientific concepts/methodologies to a literary text or genre. 15% of final grade.
5. **Final Research Paper (3600-4500 words).** Critical argument, making substantive use of both primary and secondary texts, that makes a novel intervention in the field of cognitive literary studies. (Note: this intervention may be skeptical, critical, or otherwise negative.) 30% of final grade.

Detailed assignment sheets for assignments 2-5 will be distributed in class.

Stanford Honor Code

From <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/communitystandards/integrity/honorcode>:

1. The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:
 - a. that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
 - b. that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
2. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
3. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

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For the purposes of this course, the honor code requires that you do not plagiarize. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's words *or ideas*. Words copied verbatim from another source must be quoted and the source must be cited. When you paraphrase words or ideas from another source, you must acknowledge the original author *unless the ideas are common knowledge*. If you collaborate with another author to produce ideas or words presented in a written project, you must acknowledge that person's contribution – just think of citation as long-distance (and sometimes posthumous) collaboration.

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae>).

Course Schedule

WEEK 1

Monday 3/30

Introduction.

Read before class: Roth, "The Neuronovel"

Wednesday 4/1

Read: Ralph Savarese and Lisa Zunshine, "The Critic as Neurocosmopolite"
(Coursework); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Affect Theory and Theory of Mind" (Coursework)

WEEK 2

Monday 4/6

Read: Haddon, pages 1-83; Stuart Murray, "Autism and the Contemporary Sentimental: Fiction and the Narrative Fascination of the Present" (Coursework)

Wednesday 4/8

Read: Haddon, pages 83-155; *read the article you've selected for your Critical Response!*

WEEK 3

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Monday 4/13

Bring draft of critical response to class.

In-class discussion and workshop: evaluating scholarly arguments; producing a respectful and incisive critique.

Wednesday 4/15

CRITICAL RESPONSE DUE. In-class presentations and discussion of findings.

Read: Haddon, page 155-end.

WEEK 4

Monday 4/20

Read: McCarthy, chapters 1-5

Wednesday 4/22

Read: McCarthy, chapters 6-8; Catherine Malabou, chapters 1-2 of *What Should We Do With Our Brains?* (Coursework)

WEEK 5

Monday 4/27

Read: McCarthy, chapters 9-13; one article of your choice from *Modern Fiction Studies* 58.3 (Fall 2012): "New British Fiction"

Wednesday 4/29

Read: McCarthy, chapter 14-end; Namwali Serpell, "Synchronicity: Metareading Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*" (Coursework)

WEEK 6

Monday 5/4

Bring draft of close reading to class.

In-class discussion and workshop: balancing formal analysis and argumentative force

Wednesday 5/6

CLOSE READING DUE

In-class reading and discussion: Foucault, selections from *Madness and Civilization*

WEEK 7

Monday 5/11

Read: McElroy, pages 3-58

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Wednesday 5/13

Read: McElroy, pages 59-89; Catherine Emmott et al., “Stylistics Meets Cognitive Science” (Coursework)

WEEK 8

Monday 5/18

Read: McElroy, pages 90-131; James Hughes et al., “Quantitative Patterns of Stylistic Influence in the Evolution of Literature” (Coursework)

Wednesday 5/20

RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE
In-class workshop and peer review

WEEK 9

Monday 5/25

MEMORIAL DAY – NO CLASS

Wednesday 5/27

Read: McElroy, pages 132-183; Henry James, preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* (Coursework)

WEEK 10

Monday 6/1

Read, McElroy, page 184-end. Conclusions.

Wednesday 6/3

Bring partial draft of final paper to class for peer review and revision

Final paper due by 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, June 9