Overview

Recent years have seen much fresh interest in the story-telling impulse across the life and social sciences. Neuroscience and evolutionary biology are casting new attention on the study of literature, while at the same time, the insights into narrative accumulated by centuries of literary studies have become increasingly germane to fields that study human behavior at all levels. We are story-telling animals, and the drive to give experience a meaningful shape underwrites our survival in the world.

In this course we will read four books: a survey of behavioral economics, a neuroscientific treatment of imagination, a discussion of the evolutionary basis of fiction, and a complex contemporary novel that happens to be about the creation and formal study of literature. We will read not just with a mind for what these other fields can teach us about stories but with an eye toward seeing how fiction might be uniquely qualified to reveal the centrality of storytelling that so many diverse disciplines are now studying.

This course is a capstone seminar designed for English majors in their last year of study. Throughout the term, I will ask you to reflect on other works that you have read while an undergraduate in light of the patterns we are reading about. The seminar will culminate in an original research project (about 15 pages) applying insights into narrative provided by the life and social sciences to your own fields of literary expertise.

Required Books:


Byatt, A.S., *Possession*

Gottschall, Jonathan, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*

Kahneman, Daniel, *Thinking Fast and Slow*
**Evaluation**

I will run this course as a true research seminar, with each of you required to bring your convictions, discoveries, and expertise to the table. Given the small number of class sessions and our dependence on one another for meaningful and rich discussions, your attendance is required. If you need to miss a class for any reason, let me know in advance. (I can also accommodate situations where you are unable to give me advance notice, but these will have to be genuine emergencies.) Your evaluation for the course will suffer for each unexcused absence.

Your performance will consist of three components: Your in-class engagement and contributions, your short written responses to the readings posted online throughout the course, and your final paper. The final paper will represent the most important part of your grade. We will be shaping it together from the first session onward, through conferences and discussions, in an attempt to make it a capstone of your studies in English here at Stanford.

**Schedule**

**Week One: *Homo fictus in Neverland***

January 7: Gottschall, Chapters 1, 2, and 3
January 9: Gottschall, Chapters 4 and 5

**Week Two: “Hell is story-friendly.”**

January 14: Gottschall, Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9
January 16: Kahneman, Part One, Two Systems

**Week Three: Who are we when we’re at home?**

January 21: Kahneman, Part Two, Heuristics and Biases
January 23: Kahneman, Part Three, Overconfidence

**Week Four: We are not unified**

January 28: Kahneman, Part Four, Choices
January 30: Kahneman, Part Five, Two Selves

**Week Five: Endless forms most beautiful**

February 4: Boyd, Part One, Evolution and Nature
February 6: Boyd, Part Two, Evolution and Art
Week Six: Fiction as adaptation
February 11: Boyd, Part Three, Evolution and Fiction
February 13: Boyd, Part Four, Phylogeny: The Odyssey

Week Seven: All us folk on this dust speck
February 18: Boyd, Part Five, Ontogeny: Horton Hears a Who!
February 20: Byatt, Chapters 1-4 (through page 76 in Random House paper edition)

Week Eight: Automata or angel kin?
February 25: Byatt, Chapters 5-10 (through page 220, RH edition)
February 27: Byatt, Chapters 11-15 (through page 313)

Week Nine: The storytelling begins
March 4: Byatt, Chapters 16-20 (through page 413)
March 6: Byatt, Chapters 20-14 (through page 479)

Week Ten: The equally intense pleasure of reading
March 11: Byatt, finish the novel.
March 13: Summary session, class dinner at Faculty Club

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.

Honor Code
The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:
The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:
   1. 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;

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.