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

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 no more than 48 hours after class.

2. **Critical Response (800-1200 words).** Response to one of the secondary texts on the syllabus, evaluating the content and logical structure of the author’s argument.

3. **Close Reading (800-1200 words).** Detailed formal analysis of a passage from McCarthy’s *Remainder*.

4. **Research Proposal (300 words) and Outline.** Prospectus and detailed outline for a final project on the relevance (or lack thereof) of neuroscientific concepts/methodologies to a literary text or genre.

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.)

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

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**Stanford Honor Code**

From [http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/communitystandards/integrity/honorcode](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.

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 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”

Wednesday 4/8
   Read: Haddon, pages 83-155; Catherine Malabou, chapters 1-2 of What Should We Do With Our Brains?

WEEK 3
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
Read: Haddon, page 155-end.

WEEK 4
Monday 4/20
Read: McCarthy, chapters 1-5

Wednesday 4/22
Read: McCarthy, chapters 6-8; special section on “Cognitive Fictions,” American Book Review 31.6 (2010) (Coursework)

WEEK 5
Monday 4/27
Read: McCarthy, chapters 9-13; Julian Murphet, “A Loose Democracy in the Skull: Characterology and Neuroscience” (Coursework)

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

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 OUTLINE 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

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**