

Syllabus

English H597.04 Interdisciplinary Approaches to Narrative in the Contemporary World: “Narrative, Emotion, and the Contemporary World”

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GEC Statement

English H597.04 meets GEC Category 5: Capstone: Issues of the Contemporary World.

The goals and outcomes for this GEC category include the following:

Goals

By drawing upon multiple disciplines—philosophy, psychology, neurobiology, and cognitive science—coursework for H597.04 “Narrative, Emotion, and the Contemporary World” provides a capstone experience that helps Honors students enrich their experiences of narrative in the increasingly global nature of the contemporary world.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students synthesize and apply knowledge from a range of disciplines vis-à-vis narrative.
2. Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between information derived from different disciplines by interacting majors across the university campus.
3. Students write about or conduct research on narrative using the tools of the different disciplines that include philosophy, psychology, neurobiology, and cognitive science.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students synthesize and apply knowledge from a range of disciplines vis-à-vis narrative.

By drawing upon cutting edge research in multiple disciplines (cognitive science, neurobiology, and philosophy, for instance), H597.04 “Narrative, Emotion, and the Contemporary World” coursework provides an intensive capstone experience whereby students will gain a deep understanding of how their everyday emotive experiences function in their study of various contemporary narratives created, produced, and consumed in an increasingly global contemporary world.

2. Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between information derived from different disciplines by interacting majors across the university campus.

The course provides tools to evaluate narrative fiction (short stories, graphic stories, and films) considered significant contemporary works of the imagination from the aesthetic and social points of view. The tools selected are being developed within disciplines across the university campus that includes: cognitive science, neurobiology, paleoanthropology, archeology, linguistics, history, philosophy, and psychology.

3. Students write about or conduct research on contemporary narrative using the tools of the different disciplines that include philosophy, psychology, neurobiology, and cognitive science, among others.

The theoretical and scientific readings provide a fresh perspective from which to understand how narrative fiction engages us emotively and cognitively in our contemporary world. The intellectually demanding readings require a sustained focus, not a previous knowledge in the relevant sciences, and will provide the tools for students to be able to write and conduct research on how narratives engage readers and viewers. (All previous knowledge necessary will be supplied in user-friendly manner, especially during discussions.) The readings perhaps imply an added effort for readers not acquainted with philosophical and scientific texts, but they provide also an important opportunity to develop information literacy and to sharpen reading and critical skills, together with clear-writing abilities.

Additional Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will combine literary analysis, science (especially cognitive and neurobiological based), and the study of current narrative forms and the contemporary events they depict as launched from the study of emotion and its interface with dreaming, theory of mind, aggression, and cruelty.

The course readings allow the students to develop the ability to understand the mind/brain mechanisms underlying the imagination as well as an author's will to produce an aesthetically positive response and judgment to her work, together with a reader/viewer's acquiescence or rejection. The course readings also allow students to develop capacities to identify factors associated with the global formation of contemporary narratives and their degrees of acceptance and rejection.

2. The students learn that narratives are created, produced, and consumed by reader/viewers (mind/brain) who are socially and historically situated in our contemporary world.

To foster a learning environment whereby students learn that narrative fiction is an expression of historically situated individuals and is thus endowed with mind/brains that are in turn formed and developed in particular and even peculiar circumstances, the course will underlie its hermeneutical purposes and foster skills in interpretation and evaluation through an understanding of the material (biological and social) basis for the contemporary production and reception of narrative as a universal human activity.

3. Students will develop critical thinking and writing by developing critical listening, reading, and seeing of narrative fictions through the lenses of advances made in today's cognitive and neurobiological science research.

The course focuses on the multilayered relations between emotions and cognition, and on the over-determined relations between the biological and the social, so all along it demands the application and development of critical skills. This is, so to speak, an inbuilt exigency as well as outcome of the course. Otherwise the door is open for all kinds of non-scientific reductionisms. In additions, by requiring regular writing assignments, it will encourage rigorous critical thinking and writing.

4. Students learn how narrative conveys meaning and moves reader/audiences by using different techniques and devices in a variety of media: written (short story), visual and verbal (graphic novel), visual and aural (film and television).

The course is built around specific instances of narrative fiction created, produced, and consumed in our contemporary world, and every week the concepts and devices (point of view, panel distribution, editing, and so on) learned will be used in respective discussion of the short stories, comic books, tv shows, and films assigned. This method leads to informed reflections on the creating, producing, and consuming of contemporary narrative fiction.

5. Students learn how our emotion and cognitive systems work vis-à-vis our engagement with contemporary narratives.

The focus of the scholarly texts on key ingredients of contemporary narrative fiction, such as emotions, theory of mind, social cognition, time, romantic love, sexual desire, beauty, ugliness, cruelty and aggression, dreams and dreaming, motion, and music, to name a few, will enrich both the experience of fiction and the knowledge of the functioning of fiction in today's contemporary world.

Assessment Plan

The effectiveness of this course to achieve the learning objectives above will be assessed in an ongoing manner over time. Measures include:

1. Macro level assessments such as a midterm course evaluation that asks students a series of questions such as "are readings clear and relevant to the topics? Are the different disciplinary approaches clear thus far?" It will also include an assessment of a random sampling of writing assignments collected during a 5-year period and will be used to evaluate if the class is meeting the three Expected Learning Outcomes. (Please see grid provided in the enclosed GEC Rationale and Assessment Plan.)
2. Micro level assessments such as assignments analytical essay assignments (direct measures) as well as SEIs and discursive evaluations (indirect measures).

(For more information on goals and assessment, please see additional document "GEC Rationale and Assessment Plan.)

Course Description and Objectives: This version of H597.04 “Narrative, Emotion, and the Contemporary World” explores the following questions: What role do emotions play in the making and engaging with narrative fiction in general and contemporary narrative fiction in particular? How does the emotion system help articulate the worldview and the ethical system in the implied author/artist/filmmaker as construed by the reader or viewer? How do emotions work at the level of characters, informing their worldviews, morals, goals, incentives, and motives for action? How do the narrative devices used in any given narrative fiction media work to trigger in the reader or viewer specific kinds of emotions? What are some of the distinctive patterns of devices being employed in contemporary narrative, and what do those patterns reveal about contemporary culture? How might different assemblies of content and form in the narrative fiction create peculiar forms of feelings, nervous tensions, and moods in readers and viewers? How is the more durative mood established?

Our first step will be to determine what distinctions make a theoretical and empirical difference. It will be necessary for us to clarify the conceptual and behavioral criteria that distinguish emotions from appetites, desires, moods, sensations and other non-emotional feelings. Our second step will be to see the difference between the causes and the objects of an emotion, and the connection between emotion and cognition. Discussions in philosophy and findings in human neurobiology will be essential instruments for us in these two preliminary steps of clarification. Our third step will be to move from these discussions to analyze the details of the emotion system in selected contemporary narratives.

More particularly, we will study how the emotion system’s stimuli or signals pass through the human brain’s amygdalo-hippocampal system (where those signals have their first impact and leave their first trace), the left peri-Sylvian region (where language is formulated), and the frontal cortices and their subcortical connections (where the distinction between real and fictional is made). Such recent findings in neurobiology will allow us to state in arguably more solid terms the old problem of the difference between real-life emotions and fiction-elicited emotions. They will allow us to understand how both kinds of emotion-signals or emotion-information follow the same neurologic circuits from the brain’s emotional system to its cognition system and then diverge in their effects when the latter determines what kind of response is warranted: to act or react when the information is identified as pertaining to real life and to stop or not initiate action when the information is identified as pertaining to make-belief or fiction. Our capacity for fiction-elicited emotions is a key ingredient in both our engagement and creation of verbal, aural, and visual art. We will test—and elaborate upon—these points in our analysis of examples of contemporary prose fiction, film, television, and graphic narrative.

To put all this another way, in this course we will read accessible articles in the cognitive and neurobiological sciences as well as in developmental psychology and narrative theory to begin to establish a solid basis to the hypotheses that emotions are foundational to our social functioning as human beings as well as in generating cross-culturally prototypical narrative fictions in the most diverse ways and through the most diverse means.

Fictional Works:

Carlos Fuentes's and Julio Ortega's *The Vintage Book of Latin American Stories*.

Christopher Nolan's film, *Memento*.

Robert Rodriguez's film, *Sin City*.

Alex Ross's television series, *Heroes*.

Wilfred Santiago's graphic novel, *In My Darkest Hour*.

TV shows and films are available on closed reserve at our main library.

All theoretical readings are available for download via Carmen and the class "Content" page: www.carmen.osu.edu

Course Requirements and Grading

1. The course will be limited to 20 students.
2. Attendance and active class participation. 10%
3. Three papers (2,000 words each, 12 font, Times, 1" margins), due in weeks 3, 7, and 10. These papers should focus on the possibilities as well as the limits of the theoretical framework you are using as your investigative lens for the fictional text. 60%
4. Seven journal entries (250 words each, 12 font, Times, 1" margins), no journal entries due weeks 3, 7, and 10. 30%

Notes on these assignments

1. I have capped this course at 20 to allow for the students to benefit fully from intensive discussion and interaction with one another and myself to maximize the learning process.
2. Given that real learning takes place when we are all present to discuss the theories and concepts, I require that you attend all classes--with exceptions for illness or family emergencies. Attendance allows for the fostering of a serious learning environment. Points will be deducted from your grade for non-attendance. I consider 7 or more absences excessive and I will no longer grade any assignments.
3. I will provide paper prompts for each of the three papers. They will provide a list of 5 topics that you can use as a springboard to develop your own argument and analysis. Your essay should present a concrete, manageable argument followed with close readings and analysis of a given narrative fiction read/viewed for the course (short story, graphic novel, film, and TV show). The essay will necessarily require you to employ the appropriate theoretical tools learned during the course in the substantiating and development of your thesis that explores the relation between a given narrative fiction and experiences our contemporary world. Please write in a jargon-free, personalized style.
4. Journal entries will act as a springboard of sorts to stimulate class discussion and exploration of how our work thus far asks questions and poses problems in relation to our experiences in our contemporary world. The entries can be informal and addressed to

me. They should consider issues that come up in response to the assigned texts, discussing whether or not the concepts or tools presented enrich your understanding of the week's assigned narrative fiction as it relates to our contemporary world. You have the choice of responding either to the first or second day of class for a given week. I will collect the responses at the end of class and return with comments.

Notes on Grading

Journal responses will be graded as Satisfactory or non-Satisfactory--a satisfactory journal response explores how a concept or tool from the research-oriented reading interfaces with the narrative fiction.

Written essays will be graded as follows: A-, A, A+ (Excellent); B-, B, B+ (Good); C-, C, C+ (Satisfactory); D, D+ (Minimal pass); E (Failure). Percentage conversion: A+ (90-100%), A (85-89), A- (80-84), B+ (77-79), B (73-76), B- (70-72), C+ (67-69), C (63-66), C- (60-62), D+ (57-59), D (53-56), D- (50-52), E (0-49).

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/info_for_students/csc.asp).

Students with Disabilities.

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

Weekly Syllabus

Week 1: What Emotions are—and are Not

Articles: Peter M.S. Hacker's "The conceptual framework for the investigation of the emotions" (10 pages); Paul E. Griffiths's "What emotions really are" (20 pages); Paul Eckman's "All emotions are basic" (5 pages); Jaak Panksepp's "The basics of basic emotion" (5 pages); Richard J. Davidson's "On emotion, mood, and related affective constructs" (5 pages); Jerome Kagan's "Distinctions among emotions, moods, and

temperamental qualities” (5 pages); Greg Smith "The Emotion System and Nonprototypical Emotions" (28 pages).

Short story: Borges's "El aleph".

Week 2: Emotion and Cognition: a Distinction that makes a Difference?

Articles: Luiz Pessoa's "On the relationship between emotion and cognition" (11 pages); K. Oatley's "Emotion in cognition" (5 pages); Joseph E. LeDoux's "Cognitive-emotional interactions in the brain" (8 pages); Kevin N. Ochsner and Elizabeth Phelps's "Emerging perspectives on emotion-cognition interactions" (2 pages); Gerald L. Clore's "Why emotions require cognition" (12 pages); Richard A. Shweder's "You're not sick, you're just in love: Emotion as an interpretive system" (13 pages); Phoebe C. Ellsworth's "Levels of thought and levels of emotion" (5 pages); Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers and Giacomo Rizzolatti's "A unifying view of the basis of social cognition" (8 pages);
Short story: Julio Cortázar's "Continuity of Parks".

Week 3: Why We Tell Stories in Our Contemporary World?

Articles: David Herman's "Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind: Cognitive Narratology, Discursive Psychology, and Narratives in Face-to-Face Interaction" (30 pages); Joseph Flanagan's "Knowing More Than We Can Tell: The Cognitive Structure of Narrative Comprehension" (24 pages); Kay Young and Jeffrey L. Saver's "The Neurology of Narrative" (13 pages); Zunshine's "Why We Read Fiction" (5 pages); A.M. Leslie's "Theory of Mind" (5 pages);
Short story: Mario Levrero's "Notes from Buenos Aires".

Paper I Due!

Week 4: Emotions elicited across Contemporary media

Articles: P.A. Frensch's "Cognitive psychology" (6 pages); Alison Gopnik's "What Children Learn About Things" (15 pages); Herbert Lindenberger's "Arts in the Brain; or What Might Neuroscience Tell Us?" (18 pages); B. Calvo-Merino, C. Jola, D.E. Glaser, P. Haggard's "Towards a sensorimotor aesthetics of performing art" (12 pages); Jonathan Frome's "Representation, reality, and emotions across media" (11 pages); Jinhee Choi's "All the right responses: Fiction films and warranted emotions" (14 pages).
Short story: Virgilio Piñera's "The One Who Came To Save Me"; Juan Rulfo's "Luvina".

Week 5: Brain and Bliss

Articles: John Tooby and Leda Cosmides's "Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds? Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Aesthetics, Fiction and the Arts" (22 pages); S. Zeki's "The neurobiology of love" (5 pages); Lisa M. Diamond's "Emerging perspectives on distinctions between romantic love and sexual desire" (5 pages); Patrick Colm Hogan's "Seeing Indian style: The brain and its visual culture" (53 pages).
Short story: Cortázar's "Manuscript found in pocket".

Week 6: Time, Theory of Mind, in Contemporary Media

Articles: Susan Feagin's "Time and Timing" (25 pages); Rebecca Saxe and Simon Baron-Cohen's "The neuroscience of theory of mind" (10 pages); Michael Tomasello, Malinda Carpenter, Josep Call, Tanya Behne, and Henrike Moll's "Understanding and sharing intentions: The origins of cultural cognition" (60 pages).

Film: Nolan's *Memento*.

Week 7: Dreaming, Dreamers, in Contemporary Media

Articles: Colin McGinn's "Dream and Film" (25 pages); G. William Domhoff's "A New Neurocognitive Theory of Dreams" (12 pages); Wade's "Vision and Visualization" (10 pages); Titone's "Memories Bound: The Neuroscience of Dreams" (15 pages). V. S. Ramachandran's "Broken Mirrors: A Theory of Autism" (10 pages); Antonio R. Damasio and Meyer's "Behind the Looking-Glass" (15 pages).

Film continued: Nolan's *Memento*.

Paper II Due!

Week 8: Telling Stories in Other Contemporary Media

Articles: William P. Seeley's "Naturalizing aesthetics: art and the cognitive neuroscience of vision" (18 pages); Arieta Chouchourelou, Toshihiko Matsuka, Kent Harber, and Maggie Shiffrar's "The visual analysis of emotional actions" (11 pages); Andrea Samson et al. "Cognitive Humor" (16 pages); Norman Kreitman's "Fantasy, Fiction, and Feelings" (18 pages); Kevin N. Ochsner and Elizabeth Phelps. "Cognitive-emotional interactions" (2 pages); Andrea C. Samson, Stefan Zysset, and Oswald Huber's "Cognitive humor processing: Different logical mechanisms in nonverbal cartoons; an fMRI study" (17 pages); Kai Mikkonen's "Presenting Minds in Graphic Narratives" (21 pages).

Comic book: Wilfred Santiago's *In My Darkest Hour*.

Week 9 Cruelty and Aggression in the Televisual Experience

Articles: Jason Mittell's "Film and television narrative" (25 pages); Shepherd's "Smell Images"; Siever's "Neurobiology of Aggression"; Victor Nell's "Cruelty's rewards: The gratifications of perpetrators and spectators" (47 pages); Eisler and Levine's "Nurture, Nature, and Caring" (10 pages); Vogt "Pain and Emotion" (12 pages).

Television show: Alex Ross's *Heroes*.

Week 10: Experiences of Music in Contemporary Narrative Adaptations

Articles: Rob Parke, Elaine Chew, and Chris Kyriakakis's "Quantitative and visual analysis of the impact of music on perceived emotion of film" (60 pages); Porter Abbott's "Adaptation Across Media" (15 pages).

Film: Rodriguez's *Sin City*.

Paper III Due!