

CRW 5386 CONSCIOUSNESS IN FICTION

CRW 5386 Minding Fiction — Spring 2020



“But what, then, am I?
A thinking thing, it
has been said, but
what is a thinking
thing? It is a thing that
doubts, understands,
conceives, affirms,
wills, refuses; that
imagines also, and
perceives.”
—René Descartes

CRW 5386 — 28288 *Representations of Consciousness in Fiction*

ONLINE — January 21 – May 7, 2020

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Introduction

Consciousness is paradoxically a common experience to all humans, yet it remains a mystery. The nature of consciousness has interested philosophers, psychologists, and, in the past century, neuroscientists. However, fiction remains the oldest and most reliable technology to explore it.

The goal of this course is to give students a solid foundation on our current understanding of consciousness as well as the fiction writing techniques used to represent it. To accomplish this, we will read selected texts on the nature of consciousness, which we will use in turn to read significant works of fiction. This dual approach will help us see that the representation of consciousness depends on the

writer’s introspection as much as their contemporary ideas on the mind.

Students will be required to read analytically an average of one book of either theory or fiction per week in order to participate in our discussions and complete the course assignments. Students will also be required to write a long-form analytical essay exploring how consciousness is represented in a particular work of fiction.

Given that this class is oriented towards writers, students will also be required to create short works of fiction (sketches or self-contained pieces) exploring the ideas about consciousness and the narrative techniques we have discussed in class.

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Course Goals

- Give students a historical understanding of the theories of consciousness
- Give students a solid background on how consciousness is represented in fiction
- Give students the opportunity to experiment and develop techniques to represent consciousness
- Allow students to develop their own philosophy of consciousness as part of their evolving poetics

Required Texts

The following texts are required to complete the class assignments and to participate in our discussions. Make sure that you have access to the required texts, or make arrangements to buy them in advance.

Theory

- Short excerpts of theoretical works will be available through Blackboard under the week in which they will be discussed.
- Susan Blackmore: *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford U.P. ISBN 978-0192805850)
- Antonio Damasio: *Self Comes to Mind* (Vintage ISBN 978-0307474957)

Films

- The Wachowski Sisters: *Matrix* (1999)
- James Cameron: *Avatar* (2009)
- Wally Pfister: *Transcendence* (2014)

Fiction

- Virginia Woolf: *Mrs. Dalloway* (Harcourt Books ISBN 978-0156030359)
- Manuel Scorza: *Drums for Rancas* (Harper & Row ISBN 978-0060138141)
- Patricia Highsmith: *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (Norton & Company ISBN 978-0393332148)
- John Updike: *Terrorist* (Random House ISBN 978-0345493910)
- Joyce Carol Oates: *The Tattooed Girl* (Harper Perennial ISBN 978-0061136047)

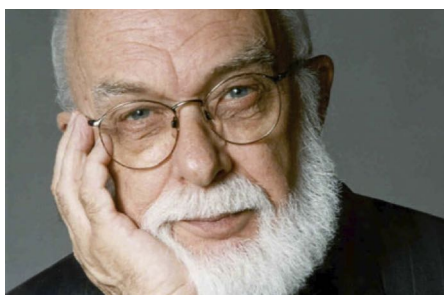
Communication Channels

Because our interaction will happen through Blackboard, if you have a question consider the following:

- If you have trouble with Blackboard, contact Blackboard Central by phone at 915-747-5940, or online at: <http://at.utep.edu/bbc/>.
- If you have a question about the course mechanics, review the syllabus, and make sure you are familiar with the way in which this class is run.
- Check the General Questions forum in the Discussion Board where you can also post questions.
- If everything else fails, or if you have a private issue to discuss, send me an email to jdepierola@utep.edu. I reply to emails once a day, starting at 5:00PM, in the order in which they were received. IMPORTANT: Emails received after 5:00PM will be answered the next business day.

Suggested Fiction Writers

These are the suggested authors for your RESEARCH PROJECT: James Joyce • Marcel Proust • Patricia Highsmith • Paul Auster • Jorge Luis Borges • Javier Cercas • Umberto Eco • Ha Jin • Cormac McCarthy • Toni Morrison • Orhan Pamuk • Mario Vargas Llosa • Francine Prose • Jhumpa Lahiri • José Saramago • Milan Kundera • Ismail Kadare • Joyce Carol Oates • Alice Munro • Julio Cortázar • Vladimir Nabokov • Gustave Flaubert • Jane Austen • T.C. Boyle • Haruki Murakami



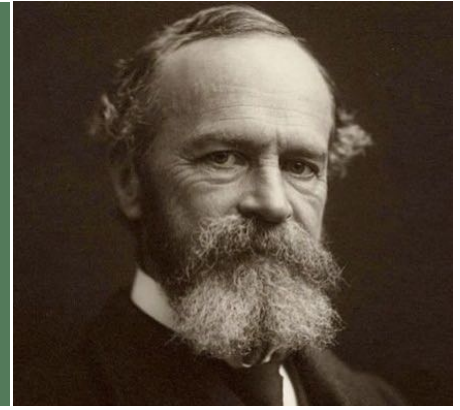
“Human consciousness is just about the last surviving mystery.”
—Daniel Dennett





“To perceive the world differently,
we must be willing to change our
belief system, let the past slip away,
expand our sense of now, and
dissolve the fear in our minds.”

—William James



Guidelines

- Your learning and performance in this class will depend on carefully reading texts, responding critically to them, and engaging with your classmates' ideas in the Discussion Board.
- You are expected to complete assignments in advance, including that of Week 1.
- Assignments for this class are of two types: **POSTS** on Blackboard, and **ASSIGNMENTS** submitted through Blackboard.
- You are expected to **POST** a reply for least one of the **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** and to **REPOST** at least once by replying to your classmates' **POSTS** (see Course Mechanics).
- The **ASSIGNMENTS** will be submitted in **PDF** format in a letter-size page with a 1.5" upper, lower, and left margin, and a 2.5" right margin; 1.5 line spacing; and a 12 point Roman font (Garamond, Georgia, Palatino). The first page should bear on the upper right corner: name, date, assignment's name, and word count, as follows.
Ellen James
January 20, 2020

The Use of FIS in *The Green House*
678 words

- Except the first, all pages should bear on the upper right corner your last name and page number: James / 9
- Deadlines are not flexible. All of the assignments should be turned in on time. Blackboard will time stamp your **POSTS** and **ASSIGNMENTS**.
- **IMPORTANT:** We will be reading and producing texts in **PDF** format. Make sure your computer has installed a program to read **PDF** files, and that you know how to create **PDF** files (see Resources in Blackboard). **NOTE:** **ASSIGNMENTS** in other formats are not acceptable.
- **ON DEADLINES:** Because this is an online class, with students potentially living across time zones, we will use El Paso local time, **MDT** for all of the deadlines (see Resources in Blackboard).
- **ON GUIDELINES:** Detailed guidelines for each assignment are available though Blackboard. Make sure you read the corresponding guidelines before you submit your assignment.

Assignments

- **CREATIVE RESPONSE:** Due by Friday at 5:00 PM each week we read critical work (weeks 1 to 7). This is a two page (≈ 600 words) fictional sketch in which you test one of the ideas on consciousness you have read about. Your creative response should state which one you are experimenting with. (**CREATIVE** in the Program).
- **ANALYTICAL RESPONSE:** Due by Friday at 5:00 PM each week we read works of fiction or watch films (weeks 8 to 13), this is a two page (≈ 600 words) critical assessment of the novel or film for that day (see Program), focusing on one narrative technique used to represent consciousness. (**ANALYSIS** in the Program).
- **RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL:** Due Friday of Week 12, this is a two page (≈ 600 words) outline of your **RESEARCH PROJECT**. It should include: 1. Your main argument, 2. Your project's outline, and 3. Your tentative bibliography (including at least two external sources).
- **RESEARCH PROJECT:** Due Friday of Week 15, this is an in-depth discussion of how the mind is represented in a work of fiction. For this long-form essay of about 15 pages ($\approx 4,500$ words), you are required to write on any novel by one of the writers listed under Suggested Writers. **IMPORTANT:** If you intend to write on a work by a different writer, you must contact me for approval one week before your **RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL** is due.

Course Mechanics Program

- Students will turn in their CREATIVE RESPONSE or ANALYTICAL RESPONSE to the assigned critical readings, novels or films by Friday at 5:00 PM.
- Discussion Questions will become available by Monday at 9:00 AM. However, you will not be able to see your classmates replies until you post yours.
- Students will POST a reply to at least one of the Discussion Questions by Wednesday at 5:00 PM. Your POST should show that you have read carefully the text under consideration. Depending on the quality of your POST, and not on the length, you may earn up to 5 points.
- Students will REPOST engaging with at least one POST by another student by Friday at 5:00 PM. Each REPOST may earn you up to one point, and all the REPOSTS may earn you up to 3 points each week. This is the central learning activity in our seminar; therefore, grading will reflect closely the quality of your participation in the Discussion Board.
- Your POSTS and REPOSTS must show that you are following closely the thread in which you are participating. Responses that address just the previous post, or repeat what other students have posted already do not count. For more information, read “Discussion Board Guidelines” under Assignments.

Week 1—JAN 20: CREATIVE
Descartes: *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Week 2—JAN 27: CREATIVE
James: *The Principles of Psychology*

Week 3—FEB 3: CREATIVE
Merleau-Ponty: *The World of Perception*

Week 4—FEB 10: CREATIVE
Dennett: *Consciousness Explained*

Week 5—FEB 17: CREATIVE
Blackmore: *Consciousness*

Week 6—FEB 24: CREATIVE
Damasio: *Self Comes to Mind*

Week 7—MAR 2: CREATIVE
Lodge: *Consciousness and the Novel* • Cohn: *Transparent Minds*

Week 8—MAR 9: ANALYSIS
Woolf: *Mrs. Dalloway*
MAR 16–20, 2020: SPRING BREAK

Week 9—MAR 23: ANALYSIS
Scorza: *Drums for Rancas*

Week 10—MAR 30: ANALYSIS 2020
Highsmith: *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

Week 11—APR 6: ANALYSIS
Updike: *Terrorist*

Week 12—APR 13: ANALYSIS
Oates: *The Tattooed Girl* • RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL

Week 13—APR 20: ANALYSIS
Wachowskis: *Matrix* • Cameron: *Avatar* • Pfister: *Transcendence* • FICTION PIECE

Week 14—APR 27: WORKSHOP

Week 15—MAY 4: WORKSHOP
RESEARCH PROJECT



“Any kind of creative activity is likely to be stressful. Easiness, relaxation, comfort—these are not conditions that usually accompany serious work.”

Grading Policy

- Creative & Critical Responses . . . 30%
- Discussion Board 30%
- Research Project Proposal 10%
- Research Project 30%



“The fiction writer is the ombudsman who argues our humble, dubious case in the halls of eternal record.”

University Policy Statements

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC DISHONESTY STATEMENT: Cheating is unethical and not acceptable. Plagiarism is using information or original wording in a paper without giving credit to the source of that information or wording, and it is also not acceptable. Do not submit work under your name that you did not do yourself. You may not submit work for this class that you did for another class. If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing, you will be subject to disciplinary action, per UTEP catalog policy. Refer to <http://www.utep.edu/dos/acadintg.htm> for further information.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT: I will make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. Please, e-mail me during the first two weeks or make an appointment to discuss any special needs you might have. If you have a documented disability and require specific accommodations, you will need to contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services in the East Union Building, Room 106 within the first two weeks of classes. The Center for Accommodations and Support Services can also be reached in the following ways:

WEB: <http://www.sa.utep.edu/cass>
PHONE: (915)747-5148 VOICE or TTY
FAX: (915)747-8712
EMAIL: cass@utep.edu