

# ENGL 871 DIGITAL LITERATURE

Topics in Postmodern Lit – 23112/23142

ENGL 771 – 001/871 – 001

Leo 202; Office: Sutton 347

For times and appointments, see [www.sherwoodweb.org](http://www.sherwoodweb.org)



## DESCRIPTION

When one first encounters digital literature, getting one's bearing in this new and contested zone can be a challenge. Katherine Hayles' introductory piece should help us to start off on the right foot. The creative work that goes on under the labels of e-poetry, hypertext fiction, digital literature, netart, new media etc. is varied. One way to think about the adventure of this course is to imagine that your task is to create a map of an emerging field (or a map of several, overlapping and contested fields) for yourself.

Literature has been directly engaged with technological change and its mediation of language for at least the duration of the modernist period—from telegraph, radio, magazine, newspaper and book typesetting, to the fax, tv, personal computer, desktop publishing, networking, and digital multi-media production. If we remember that alphabetic writing and the printing press are themselves technologies, then this engagement with change dates back even further. This semester, we will consider the poetics of what has been variously called digital, code, electronic or new-media literature from experiential, aesthetic, theoretical, and historical perspectives.

I hope to acquaint you with current digital practices, leading you toward becoming a fluent reader/viewer/user, while buttressing these engagements with research into the development of new media as a textual art. Our foci will oscillate between close encounters with new media artifacts and more distanced reflections on theoretical and historical issues--supported by assigned critical readings, student presentations, and collaboration. We will communally work through a number emerging E-lit "classics" and "foundational" critical texts with the aim of enabling you to develop a conceptual framework for producing review-quality critical writing about digital literature and sufficient expertise to introduce it into your teaching.

## BOOKS

Morris and Swiss, eds. New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories. MIT, 2009. 0262513382

Hayles, N. Katherine. Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary. Notre Dame, 2008. 0268030855

Fruin and Harrigan, eds. First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game. MIT, 2006. 0262731754

## PRIMARY DIGITAL SOURCES

Hayles, N. Katherine. Electronic Literature: What Is it? January, 2007.

<http://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html#sec1>

Electronic Literature Collection. Volume One, October 2006. College Park, Maryland: Electronic

## REQUIREMENTS/ ASSIGNMENTS

### *ORAL, IN-CLASS DISCUSSION 20%*

Graduate seminars are the most productive when all students arrive to class prepared, having completed and reflected upon the reading. I look for your active, engaged, and generously community-minded dialogue with classmates. We will discuss, explore, even articulate our differences in a spirit of respectful inquiry. I do not require that you be an expert or that you pontificate! I do expect you to contribute every class meeting. If you are shy about speaking or intimidated by some of your classmates: write down questions, bring in a copy of your post to the forum.

### *FORUM DISCUSSION (MOODLE) 20%*

Please prepare for class by sharing reflections, questions and comments on the assigned literary work of the week in a thoughtful post of 150-300 words. You may also choose to offer a separate post on the critical readings of the week or responding to your classmates.

### *CRITICAL WRITING/ PRESENTATIONS 20%*

Each student will sign up for one CAP and one MAP. (\* If you would like to form a group of 2 or 3 students to jointly present, you may do so; but you will need to each do it 2 or 3 times).

1. *Critical Article Presentation (CAP)* : prepare a summary (2-3 paragraphs), commentary, and discussion question for the **primary critical reading** of the day (500 word maximum). You may choose to limit your presentation to the assigned article, or you may address broader issues if warranted. (Some classes there may be additional readings assigned; you are not required to include them.) The format should probably include: a summary overview; commentary or analysis; and discussion questions. This should be posted to the wiki at least two days prior to class. \*
2. *Media Specific Analysis (MAP)*: choose a digital literary work from ELC Vol 2 and prepare a 5-10 minute presentation (and associated wiki page) to share with the class, reflecting upon the digital artwork assigned for the day. Your aim is to situate the work (providing a context in relation to key issues in digital literature and theory), demonstrate selected dimensions, and provide a brief analysis or interpretation. You should conclude with a discussion question for the class. When possible, you should also seek to connect your presentation with ongoing class discussion and gesture towards how it might be taught in a H.S. or college classroom.
  - You will sign up well in advance of your presentation date;
  - You must select the work and post the title and link to the wiki **at least one week in advance**; are first come, first served.
  - You should post it to the wiki prior to class.

## *FINAL/FORMAL PROJECTS 40%*

### Either

1. A 5-7 pp. review essay of publishable quality discussing a recent new-media artwork (2009-present) and drawing on theoretical/conceptual materials from the class. (See EBR)

AND

a digital literary project of your own creation, exhibiting a critical intelligence, verbal innovation, and thoughtful exploration of the chosen media;

### OR

2. A critical essay (12-20pp.) that explores a key issue, offering interpretation of at least one literary work, contextualized in relation to the discourse of new media poetics. The essay should be theorized and aspire to intervene in the discourse of electronic literature. Bibliography should include course works and additional research. You MAY choose to treat digital literary works that are on the syllabus, but if you focus on such a work, you must significantly develop an analysis beyond what we cover in class.

### OR

3. Pedagogy Project. A Teachers Guide that presents at least four literary examples, with appropriate lesson plan: activities, concept definitions, discussion questions, bibliography of links, etc. The guide should be equivalent in work and length to option 2 above. This should be a practical, web-executed resource that could reasonably serve teachers of advanced, high school or introductory, college classes.

**Be prepared to share your work with the class during one of the last two meetings.**

## MEDIA IN THE COURSE

Interested and capable students are encouraged to explore and integrate non-print media into their coursework. Of course, beyond contributing to the class wiki and blog, technology use is not required. I recognize that students may bring varied media and technology skills to the class, and do not want to disadvantage those who are new-media "freshman" even as I regret the schedule and scope of this course do not allow us to schedule class studio time. However, I would still like to emphasize the value of applied investigation of new media. You may find that even the most primitive experiment will provide you with a learning experience!

## RULES

People get sick, automobiles break down, etc. However, since we meet only once a week, you will be allowed only one absence. Additional absences will result in a 5% deduction from your final average. There are few deadlines in this course; you must meet them or lose 5% per day late.

Academic Dishonesty is a serious matter. I am savvy and vigilant in detecting students who use unattributed web sources, "collaborate" with fellows students, or utilize other "clever" methods to enhance their grades. Take the grade you honestly earn on an assignment. Should a classmate attempt to use your work, refuse; I make no distinction between cheaters and those who aid them. A plagiarized assignment will earn you a zero for the assignment.