Course Description

Is there a fundamental difference between literature on the page and literature on the screen? This online course will help you to answer that question by introducing you to the emergent literary genre of electronic literature. Strictly speaking, e-literature must be created on a computer (born-digital), and readable only on a computer. This is because e-literature tends to employ hyperlinks, interactive virtual environments, and/or multimedia. In its innovative understanding of what a “text” can be, e-literature offers a unique set of problems for readers. For example, some e-literature can only be viewed on certain platforms, e-literature often does not exist in a static form, and it is often necessary to examine code in order to fully understand a work. This course seeks to demystify the genre of e-literature by introducing you to a range of e-literatures, including hypertext fiction, interactive literature, screen literature and computer-generated texts. To help us understand these texts, we will read works by media theorists such as N. Katherine Hayles and Lev Manovich. No prior knowledge of electronic literature is required and all course materials will be made available online.

Course Objectives

By the end of term, students will be able to:
1) Define electronic literature and its sub-genres.
2) Articulate how and why electronic literature differs from print-based literature.
3) Define media studies, and discuss its main topics and key tenets.
4) Employ advanced reading and analysis strategies unique to electronic literature.
5) Develop skills necessary to advance nuanced arguments about works of electronic literature.

Required Material

All course materials will be made available online. You are, however, required to have (1) a working webcam and (2) a microphone headset for online meetings. You are also responsible for equipping your computer to facilitate viewing of assigned works of electronic literature. This may require downloading applets, emulators, or other software and programs.
Grading

Participation: 25%
Quizzes: 25%
Short Essay: 10%
Final Exam: 10%
Final Essay: 30%

Description of Assignments

Participation — Participation in this class consists of active involvement on the discussion board, attendance at our virtual classroom sessions, and an oral presentation on your final paper. For each class day, our course site has a discussion thread. I expect you to post one quality response responding to the reading material for that day, and at least two substantial comments to your peer’s responses. Your primary responses are due before our scheduled class time. Your comments are due before our next class session. You are also expected to attend all scheduled virtual classroom sessions prepared and willing to share and discuss your best ideas about the texts you’ve read. For additional information, refer to the handouts DISCUSSION BOARD and ORAL PRESENTATION on our Canvas site.

Quizzes & Exam — You will have five quizzes throughout the semester, and one final exam. Each quiz will consist of ten questions and be worth 5% of your final grade. These quizzes must be submitted before midnight on the Friday of each week. The quizzes will consist of multiple choice, short answer, fill-in-the-blank, and identification questions. The quizzes will not be comprehensive (except for the final exam, which will consist of a selection of questions from the previous quizzes), meaning that they will only cover the material assigned for that week.

Short Paper — You will write one short paper for this course. This essay will allow you to practice your critical writing and prepare you to write your final paper. The essay should be 2-3 double spaced pages in length and follow MLA format. For additional information, refer to SHORT PAPER on our Canvas site.

Final Paper — For your final paper, you will be asked to analyze a work of electronic literature. The paper should focus on one or two primary texts and cite two or three secondary sources. The paper must be 6-8 double spaced pages in length and follow MLA format. For additional information, refer to FINAL PAPER on our Canvas site. Note: this document also includes information about your final paper proposal and in-class presentation.

Course Policies

Absences — There are no excused absences in this course. Any and all absences will impact your participation grade, though one absence will not impact your final grade. If you cannot attend a session, then you cannot participate. All of our course sessions will be recorded. If you must miss a session, you are still responsible for the material covered in class. It is your responsibility to listen to the course session on your own time.
Late Work — No late work will be accepted. It is your responsibility to complete your work on time. Technological difficulty is not an excuse for late work. If you anticipate technological difficulty, then be responsible and complete assignments early. I recommend using Dropbox or a similar service that allows you to save all your documents remotely so that they can be accessed from any computer.

Office Hours — My office hours will be held via Skype. During the hours outlined above, please feel free to initiate a Skype session with me. I will always be available during these hours, so you do not need to make prior arrangements. All other meetings—whether in person or online—are by appointment only. Feel free to email me at anytime; I try to respond to emails within 48 hours. If I do not respond to your email within 48 hours, please send me a reminder.

This course complies with all of the University of Pennsylvania’s policies as outlined in the PennBook, which is available online at http://provost.upenn.edu/policies/pennbook.

Please note: This syllabus is subject to change. As we continue throughout the semester, I might find it prudent—due to your interests, general comprehension of course materials, or other unforeseeable circumstances—to change the assigned course readings. I will not, however, change the requirements for the course or the due dates for quizzes and papers. For the most accurate and up-to-date information, please refer to the course modules on our Canvas site.

General Resources

- Electronic Literature Collection Vol. 1
- Electronic Literature Collection Vol. 2
- Electronic Poetry Center
- Brian Kim Stefans, Introduction to Electronic Literature: a freeware guide

Section 1: What is Electronic Literature?

WEEK ONE: The What, How, and Why of Electronic Literature

Consider: How do we define electronic literature? What differentiates it from other types of literature? Should electronic literature be considered a genre of literature? What are the central questions that arise when studying electronic literature? What are the key themes, issues, and debates surrounding works of electronic literature? What is media theory? Why does media matter?

Tuesday, May 27

- Katherine Hayles, “Entering the Electronic Environment”
- Adobe Connect: Introductions, Syllabus (including course policies), Discussion Board
Thursday, May 29
• Katherine Hayles, “Electronic Literature: What is it?”
• Lev Manovich, “What is New Media?”
• David Jhave Jonston, “51 Responses: What inspired you to get involved with digital literature?” (Video, 18 minutes)

Friday, May 30 — Quiz 1

Section II: The Genres of Electronic Literature

WEEK TWO — Hypertext Fiction

Consider: What is hypertext? How does it shape our reading experiences? What are its challenges and its possibilities? How does hypertext fiction relate to modernism and postmodernism? What differentiates hypertext fiction in print from digital hypertext fiction?

Tuesday, June 3
• Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths”
• Jorge Luis Borges, “The Labyrinth in ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’”
• Stuart Moulthrop, Victory Garden (excerpt)

Thursday, June 5
• Mark Amerika, GRAMMATRON
• Mark Amerika, “Expanding the Concept of Writing: Notes on Net Art, Digital Narrative and Viral Ethics”
• Karin Wenz, “Grammatron: Filling the Gap?”
• Adobe Connect: Short Paper

Friday, June 6 — Quiz 2

WEEK THREE — Interactive Literature

Consider: How does interactive literature differ from hypertext fiction? How does interactive literature alter our typical reading experience? Why might an author choose to make interactive literature? What are the social and political implications of creating a work of interactive literature?

Tuesday, June 10
• Stephanie Strickland, V: Vniverse
• Warren F. Motte Jr., Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature (selections)

Thursday, June 12
• Simon Christianson, PataNoir
• Warren F. Motte Jr., Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature (selections)
Friday, June 13 — Quiz 3

Sunday, June 15 — Short Essay Due

WEEK FOUR — Listening at the Screen: Java and Flash

Consider: What makes online video (Java, Flash, etc.) works different from cinema? How are video poems made? Does knowing the process of how these were made influence how you read them? How does this form of electronic literature relate to concrete poetry? What might it mean to “watch” a piece of literature?

Tuesday, June 17
• Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, Dakota
• Jessica Pressman: “The Strategy of Digital Modernism: Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries’s Dakota”

Thursday, June 19
• Caroline Bergvall, Say Parsley and video of Say Parsley installation (3:26 minutes)
• Brian Kim Stefans, One Letter at a Time Series
• Adobe Connect: Final Paper (including oral presentation)

Friday, June 20 — Quiz 4

WEEK FIVE — Computer-Generated Literature

Consider: Can a computer write a work of literature? Who is the author of computer-generated literature? What does it mean to close read a computer-generated work? Why would an author choose to produce a computer-generated work? Is it possible to “read” a computer program?

Tuesday, June 24
• Bill Kennedy and Darren Wershler, The Apostrophe Engine

Thursday, June 26
• Erin Mouré, Pillage Land (selections)
• Lori Emerson, “Materiality, Intentionality, and the Computer-Generated Poem: Reading Walter Benn Michaels with Erin Mouré’s Pillage Land”

Friday, June 27 — Quiz 5

Sunday, June 23 — Final Paper Proposal Due
Section III: Interpreting Electronic Literature

WEEK SIX — ELECTRONIC LITERATURE AND LITERARY CRITICISM

Consider: How does one close read a work of electronic literature? What does electronic literature have to offer to literary theory? How should one approach critical discussions of electronic literature? When making arguments about works of electronic literature, what are the most important aspects to consider? How does one interpret electronic literature? How do computing technologies change the questions we can ask of literature?

Tuesday, July 1
• Katherine Hayles, “How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine”
• Matthew Kirschenbaum, “What is Digital Humanities and What is it doing in English Departments?”
• Virtual Session: Class presentation on your final paper.

Friday, July 4 — Final Exam

Sunday, July 5 — Final Paper Due