**English 685: Honors Seminar**

**Reading and Writing Electronic Literature**

Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00-3:15 pm

Honors House 195

Stuart Moulthrop

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**Course Description and Objectives**

This class introduces *electronic literature*, a form of word-based art sometimes described as *born digital* – making non-trivial use of digital computing, logical processing, and the affordances of networks and other information systems. We will use electronic literature both for an inquiry into the present state of literature, and as a non-traditional approach to computational systems and their uses. By offering significant and creative engagement with coding, the course is intended to be as valuable for engineers and scientists as for writers and literary scholars. The highest aim of the class is to undermine the old but still prevalent assumption of *two cultures*, one of number and logic, the other of words and discourse. Electronic literature provides a way for these approaches (never truly distinct) to work in harmony.

**Assigned Texts**

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus*. 1818 Text, Ed. Marilyn Butler. Oxford World’s Classics, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-953715-0. [Other editions may be substituted, though you are responsible for differences in pagination and contents. Note there are significant differences between the 1818 and 1831 texts.]

Reed, Aaron. *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*. Addison Wesley, 2011. ISBN 1-4354-5506-1.

Emerson, Lori. *Reading Writing Interfaces*. U. Minnesota Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8166-9126-5.

Goldsmith, Kenneth. *Uncreative Writing*. Columbia UP, 2011. ISBN 978-0-231-14991-4.

Joyce, Michael. *Was: annales nomadiques*. Fiction Collective 2, 2007. ISBN 978-1-57366-137-9.

Additional articles and excerpts are available in Portable Document Format (PDF) from the D2L site.

You will also be asked to encounter various works of electronic literature online -- see notations on the syllabus such as “play [with]” or “read around in.” For these examples, spend enough time with the text to form an impression of its identity and procedures. Complete or exhaustive reading is not required, and in many cases may be impossible.

Shelley Jackson’s hypertext fiction *Patchwork Girl* will be presented through reading logs and recorded author performance. You are not required to purchase the work. If you wish to purchase, *Patchwork Girl* is available from Eastgate Systems ([www.eastgate.com](http://www.eastgate.com)). At present it is only supported on recent versions of the Macintosh Operating System.

**Grade Components**

Short Paper - 10%

A response to assigned reading limited to one side of a single sheet, intended to stimulate class discussion. Sign up for a response date.

Critical Essay - 25%

Critical exploration, informed by scholarly sources, of one of the assigned works or a salient issue emerging from discussion. Specific suggestions will be given in a few weeks. The paper is due March 9, our last meeting before Spring Break.

Revision of Essay - 20%

A thorough revision of the critical essay with benefit of instructor’s comments and discussion; due at end of term.

Interactive Fiction Project - 20%

A working interactive fiction produced (ideally) using Inform 7, including a walk-through document. This will be a collaborative effort of two, three, or four class members. Due for class presentation in early April.

Final Project - 25%

This may be another creative work, produced either collaboratively or solo, or an additional critical essay. It is due at the end of the term.

**Final Examination**: There is no final examination for this course. The Final Project takes its place.

**About This Syllabus**: Note the version number. I often revise the course syllabus during the term. Changes will be indicated in class and on the D2L site. They will not increase the amount of reading or the scope of assignments.

**Suggested Time Allotment**

Class meetings 45 hours

Reading and preparation 90 hours

Collaborative project work 20 hours

Papers and other projects 40 hours

TOTAL 195 hours

**Prerequisites and Skills**

Students must be members in good standing of the UWM Honors Program. No prior study of programming is required; the platforms with which we will work (Twine, Inform 7, Javascript) are easily accessible to beginners. Likewise, no particular background in literary history or theory is assumed.

**Technology**

Access to a personal computer is highly important. Tablets and smart phones may be used in class for note taking and Internet access, but a laptop or desktop machine is required for the group project. A computer manufactured within the last five years should be adequate. All software planned for use is available at no charge from the Internet and is compatible with both Windows and Macintosh OS.

**Late Work**

All work is due by the deadline indicated on the assignment document distributed through D2L. Response papers are due at the beginning of the assigned class meeting. Group presentations must be made as scheduled. I reserve the right to reduce grades for late submissions. However, I will excuse lateness in cases of legitimate emergency and need. Talk to me if you foresee or encounter deadline trouble.

**Program and University Policies**

All relevant policies of the Honors Program apply to this syllabus. The same goes for standard University policies, detailed at <http://www4.uwm.edu/secu/SyllabusLinks.pdf>.

**Contacting Me**

I check e-mail several times daily every weekday during the term except when traveling. Current students are my top priority for response. If for some reason you are unable to reach me at my UWM address ([moulthro@uwm.edu](mailto:moulthro@uwm.edu)), try Google Mail: [smoulthrop@gmail.com](mailto:smoulthrop@gmail.com). My office hours are Tuesday 11-2 and Wednesday 3:30-5:00 (after class). I’ll be in my Curtin Hall office Tuesdays (#596) and in Honors House Wednesdays. Since committee work and other obligations frequently intrude on my schedule, I strongly advise making an appointment via e-mail.

I have a speaking engagement in February and a research trip in April, both noted on the syllabus. I will not be available during those times except by e-mail.

**Meetings, Readings, Activities**

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| Jan. 25 | Introduction to the class, electronic literature, and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* |
| Jan. 27 | Read *Frankenstein* pp. 1-68 (Volume I)  Demo Inkle Books *Frankenstein* app (in class) |
| Feb. 1 | Read *Frankenstein* pp. 69-123 (Volume II)  Read N. K. Hayles, “Electronic Literature: What Is It?”  https://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html |
| Feb. 3 | Read *Frankenstein* pp. 124-197 (Volume III and Appendix A)  Read *Patchwork Girl* Readings 1,2, and 3 (PDF) |
| Feb. 8 | Read Shelley Jackson, “Stitch Bitch: the patchwork girl”  <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers/jackson.html>  View Jackson’s traversal of *Patchwork Girl*  http://scalar.usc.edu/works/pathfinders/traversals |
| Feb. 10 | View Jackson’s interview on *Patchwork Girl*  http://scalar.usc.edu/works/pathfinders/jacksons-interview?path=shelley-jackson  Read about Twine at [www.twinery.org](http://www.twinery.org); Twine introduction in class |
| Feb. 15 | Read N.K. Hayles, “Hyper and Deep Attention” (PDF)  Play [with] Porpentine, *Ultra Business Tycoon III*  http://aliendovecote.com/uploads/twine/tycoon/crime.html |
| Feb. 17 | Read Laura Hudson, “Twine: The Video-Game Technology for All” (PDF)  Twine hands-on (in class) |
| Feb. 22 | Read Nick Montfort, “Toward a Theory of Interactive Fiction” (PDF)  Play (with) Adam Cadre’s *Photopia*  http://adamcadre.ac/if/photopia.html |
| Feb. 24 | NO MEETING (Speaking engagement) |
| Feb. 29 | Read Emerson Chapter 1, “Indistinguishable from Magic”  Play [with] Daly and Short’s *First Draft of the Revolution*  http://lizadaly.com/first-draft/ |
| Mar. 2 | Read Reed chapters 1,2, and 3  Introduction to I.F. authoring and Inform 7 (in class) |
| Mar. 7 | Read Emerson Chapter 2, “From the Philosophy of the Open to the Ideology of the User-Friendly”  Play [with] Nick Montfort’s *Book and Volume*  http://nickm.com/if/book\_and\_volume.html |
| Mar. 9 | Read Reed Chapters 4,5 and 6  *Inform 7* hands-on  >> CRITICAL PAPER DUE |
| Mar. 14 | SPRING BREAK |
| Mar. 16 | SPRING BREAK |
| Mar. 21 | Read Emerson Chapter 4, “The Fascicle as Process and Product”  Play [with] Adams and Meretzky’s *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*  http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1g84m0sXpnNCv84GpN2PLZG/the-hitchhikers-guide-to-the-galaxy-game-30th-anniversary-edition |
| Mar. 23 | Read Reed Chapters 7 and 8  Inform 7 hands-on |

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| Mar. 28 | Read Emerson’s Postscript, “The Googlization of Literature”  Play [with] Mark Marino’s *Living Will*  <http://markcmarino.com/tales/livingwill.html> |
| Mar. 30 | Read Reed Chapter 9  Inform 7 hands-on |
| Apr. 4 | Read Goldsmith Chapters 1 and 4, “Revenge of the Text” and “Toward a Poetics of Hyperrealism”  *>> Presentation of IF projects* |
| Apr. 6 | Read Goldsmith Chapters 5 and 8, “Why Appropriation” and “Parsing the New Illegibility”  Read around in *Issue 1* (PDF) |
| Apr. 11 | Read Michael Joyce’s *Was* to page 77  K.S. Mohammad, excerpts from *The Front* (PDF) |
| Apr. 13 | Read the second half of Michael Joyce’s *Was*  Play [with] *Nineteen Floor TV*  https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/moulthro/dev/R/wiseMarx/ |
| Apr. 18 | NO MEETING (Research workshop) |
| Apr. 20 | NO MEETING (Research workshop) |
| Apr. 25 | Read Goldsmith Chapter 10, “The Inventory and the Ambient”  Read around in Montfort’s *World Clock* (PDF) |
| Apr. 27 | Read around in Montfort’s *Taroko Gorge* and related projects  <http://nickm.com/poems/taroko_gorge.html>  Javascript text generation hands-on |
| May 2 | Read Ian Bogost, “Carpentry,” from *Alien Phenomenology* (PDF)  Play [with] “End of the White Subway”  http://pantherfile.uwm.edu/moulthro/dev/eows/index.htm |
| May 4 | Demo of *Device 6* videogame  Javascript text generation hands-on |

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| May 9 | Read John Cayley, “Weapons of the Deconstructive Masses” (PDF)  Demo of *PRY* (in class) |