



## ENGL 399Y: Technologies of Literature/Literatures of Technology Fall 2005

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B0131 McKeldin Library (MITH)

Office Hours: 3:15-4:00 Monday and Wednesday are my dedicated office hours for this class. But I'm generally in my MITH office throughout the day on Mondays and Wednesdays, and you should feel welcome to drop by to see if I'm available. I'm also happy to make appointments.

Please note that after the first day we will meet in the MITH conference room, located on the basement level of McKeldin Library (room # B0135).

### Description

Not just literature *about* technology, though we will read some of that; but what are the technologies *of* literature, the actual *stuff* that embodies a written text in the form of a book or other media? And more interestingly, how have writers and artists learned to manipulate the physical materials of their work, and make the technologies of literature part of their literary practice? In this seminar we will take nothing for granted, starting with the book we hold in our hands. We will imagine otherwise, asking why books have historically taken the shapes they have, and what future forms of the book, including electronic books, might be. While most of our reading will be concentrated in the late 20<sup>th</sup> (and 21<sup>st</sup>) century, we will consider early on the illuminated printing of William Blake, a consummate artisan and trained engraver as well as renowned poet. While we will be spending most of our time with fiction and prose, we will also listen to songs by Neil Young and explore a narrative evenly distributed among music, images, text, and other, less tangible media. We will read a novel about a manuscript about a film that doesn't exist, and a contemporary graphic novel that's (at least partly) about classic comic books. While we will do a lot of reading from the printed page, we will also do significant reading from screens, and not only computer screens at that—we'll be experimenting with a story designed to be transmitted via cell phone text messaging, for example;

There will be field trips to the Pyramid Atlantic book arts center in downtown Silver Spring and the University of Maryland's Human Computer Interaction Lab, where the technologies of tomorrow's literature are being invented today. We'll also have one or more visiting speakers, and your attendance at lectures and other outside events will be periodically requested.

### Texts

All of the following are available for purchase at the University Book Center. Most of them should also be easy to find from other quality booksellers, including online vendors. Note that they are *not* on order at the Maryland Book Exchange.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Dover edition only please.  
ISBN: 0486281221

Neil Young, *Greendale* (Audio CD/DVD extras).  
ISBN: ASIN B0000AI44Q

Daniel Clowes, *David Boring*.  
ISBN: 0375714529

Neil Young, *Greendale* (Novel).  
ISBN: 1860746225

Mark Danielewski, *House of Leaves*.  
ISBN: 0375703764

Ellen Ullman, *The Bug*.  
ISBN: 0385508603

Hari Kunzru, *Transmission*.  
ISBN: 0452286514

### Requirements, Policies, and Grading

All grading will use the plus/minus system. The requirements for the course, and their weight in determining your final semester grade, are as follows:

- Close Reading. 10%
- Annotated Bibliography. 10%
- Final Paper/Project. 30%
- IVANHOE Game. 20%
- Presentation. 10%
- Participation (including attendance) **or** Quizzes. 20%

The paper or project, which will have a separate handout describing the requirement in more detail, will be either a 10-12 page essay (requiring secondary research), or a digital project comprising an equivalent amount of written content and intellectual substance. You will choose the specific argument and texts, but I will give you some topical guidelines. The annotated bibliography will be part of this process, as will the close reading (a 3-4 page exercise focusing tightly on the language or visual imagery of one of the texts to be featured in your paper). The presentation will be a 10-minute oral overview of a topic I assign (related to the day's reading), followed by questions from myself and other members of the class. The IVANHOE Game is an electronic literary role-playing environment in which you will

make moves by creating and manipulating texts in a virtual discourse field. We will probably play it using E. T. W. Hoffman's "The Sand-man" as our base text.

This is an honors seminar and I intend to treat it as such, meaning my working assumption will be that you are approaching the material with a level of seriousness and commitment appropriate to advanced students participating in one of the major's capstone experiences. However, if the class dynamic suggests otherwise—including signs that a majority, or even a significant *minority* of people are either not doing the reading or are not prepared to talk about it in a lively and intelligent manner—then I reserve the right to revert to a quiz system in which the participation portion of your grade will be determined by an unrelenting blizzard of pop quizzes.

Daily attendance is expected of everyone, and an excess of absences—more than one or two for the semester would certainly draw my attention—is grounds for failing this portion of the grade regardless of your contributions when you are here. Understand that there may be perfectly legitimate reasons—a conflicting personal obligation, for example—to miss a class; but that does not mean the absence will be excused. Generally I will only excuse absences that arise out of religious or cultural observation, participation in university-sanctioned athletics, or documented and *dire* personal emergency (most medical visits won't count as excused—that's part of why I look the other way the first couple of absences).

You are responsible for all material you miss if you are absent. Please do not send me "what did I miss" queries via email—I do not answer them. Ask a friend in the class or come see me during office hours instead.

All assigned work is due on the date given on the Course Calendar below, unless you have made a specific prior arrangement with me. Late work without any prior arrangement will be demoted up to one full letter grade (or not accepted at all if more than a week overdue).

If you require accommodation for any physical or learning disability or any other individual circumstance it is your responsibility to discuss the particulars with me at the start of the semester.

My policy is never to discuss grades via email. Please do not hesitate to see me during office hours if you have a question about a grade you have received.

A final word on my grading standards: an "A" grade must be earned, even in an honors class. Merely fulfilling the terms of an assignment and doing so in a competent and reasonable manner is generally only enough for a grade in the B-range. Weaker work will receive grades in the C-range or below. "A" grades will only be awarded (and should only be expected) if your work rises above and beyond non-pejorative but uninspired terms like "good," "solid," and "acceptable" to reveal notable depths of creativity, insight, and excellence.

### **Electronic Resources**

The class has an electronic mailing list: [engl399yf05@listserv.umd.edu](mailto:engl399yf05@listserv.umd.edu) . Subscription is mandatory (please make sure you have given me your preferred email address during the first

class meeting). You should get into the habit of checking your email at least once a day if you do not already. You will be held responsible for the content of all email announcements 24 hours after they have been posted.

Class Web space, which may take the form of a blog or other resources, is reserved here: <http://www.otal.umd.edu/~mgk/courses/fall2005/engl399y/>

### **Academic Integrity**

All students are expected to abide by the University's code of academic integrity: <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/code.html>. Students are also required to sign the Honor Pledge to all written work: "I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment/examination." Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Honor Council.

### **Course Calendar**

Assigned pages are due on the date given. Always bring your books to class. There will be an electronic version of this syllabus (in PDF format) at the link listed above in Electronic Resources, which will allow you to click on links to open them.

#### Week One

M 8.31: Introduction: the book as technology.

#### Week Two

M 9.5: Labor Day, no class.

W 9.7: Google for "william gibson agrippa" and read the text(s) you find; try to learn as much as you can about the history of the work from its online documentation.

#### Week Three

M 9.12: Nancy Mayer. "Reclaiming Our History: The Mysterious Birth of Art and Design": [http://futurehistory.aiga.org/resources/content/2/2/6/8/documents/n\\_mayer.pdf](http://futurehistory.aiga.org/resources/content/2/2/6/8/documents/n_mayer.pdf); Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (all of it, plates as well as the text).

W 9.14: Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; and also [www.blakearchive.org](http://www.blakearchive.org).

#### Week Four

M 9.19: Introduction to IVANHOE: read Hoffman, "The Sand-man": <http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/sandman.htm>; Rob Pope, from "Textual Interventions" (to be distributed); work through the tutorial here: <http://www.patacriticism.org/ivanhoe/demo.html>.

W 9.21: Clowes, *David Boring* (Act 1); selections from Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (to be distributed).

#### Week Five

M 9.26: IVANHOE, discussion of game in progress; material to be assigned from here: <http://www.patacriticism.org/ivanhoe/links.html> .

W 9.28: Clowes, *David Boring* (Acts 2 and 3).

Th. 9.29: The Library in Bits and Bytes:  
<http://www.lib.umd.edu/dcr/events/symposium/index.html> .

#### Week Six

M 10.3: Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (introduction xi-xxiii, 3-40); **IVANHOE game concludes.**

W 10.5: Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (41-106).

#### Week Seven

M 10.10: Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (107-245, browse rest of book).

W 10.12: Young, *Greendale*; listen to CD—more than once please—and explore Web site: [http://www.neilyoung.com/greendale\\_frames.html](http://www.neilyoung.com/greendale_frames.html) .

#### Week Eight

M 10.17: Young, *Greendale* (browse the book).

W 10.19: Young, *Greendale*; guest lecturer: Marc Ruppel, “Cross-Sited Narratives.”

#### Week Nine

M 10.24: Ullman, *The Bug* (1-153).

W 10.26: Ullman, *The Bug* (154-257).

Sat., 10.29: Visit to Pyramid Atlantic, <http://www.pyramidatlanticartcenter.org/> .

#### Week Ten

M 10.31: Ullman, *The Bug* (261-end); Geoffrey Rockwell and Steve Ramsay: “Writing as Programming as Writing.”

W 11.2: Ullman, *The Bug*; **Close Reading** due.

Week Eleven

M 11. 7: Kunzru, *Transmission* (1-99).

W 11.9: Kunzru, *Transmission* (100-180).

Week Twelve

M 11.14: Kunzru, *Transmission* (181-end).

W 11.16: Visit to UMD's Human-Computer Interaction Lab, <a href="http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil">http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil</a> .
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Week Thirteen

M 11.21: The Seminar Paper—an Introduction to the Genre; MLA Citation Guidelines.

W 11.23: TBA.

Week Fourteen

M 11.28: Olia Lialina, “My boyfriend came back from the war . . .”:  
<http://www.teleportacia.org/war/> ; Jason Nelson, Flash poetry:  
<http://www.heliozoa.com/> .

W 11.30: Andrew Plotkin, “Shade”: <http://www.eblong.com/zarf/zplet/shade.html> ;  
 Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern, *Façade*: <http://www.interactivestory.net/> ;  
**Annotated Bibliography** due.

Week Fifteen

M 12.5: Nick Montfort and Scott Rettberg, “Implementation”:  
<http://nickm.com/implementation/> ; Shelley Jackson, “Skin”:  
<http://ineradicablestain.com/skin.html> ; guest lecturer: Jess Henig, “Emergent  
 Literature.”

W 12.7: Email narratives, <http://jilltxt.net/txt/emailnarratives.html> ; Richard Powers, “They  
 Come in Steady Streams Now”: <http://ninthletter.art.uiuc.edu/FA/FA05/> ; The  
 Phone Book, <http://www.the-phone-book.com/version13/winners.php> ; Sixty  
 Second Story Competition: <http://60secondstory.contagiousmedia.org/> .

Week Sixteen

M 12.12: Conclusions.

<b>Paper Due, 12:00 noon, December 15th. No extensions.</b>
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