

# Digital Literature

**Professor Jessica Pressman**  
**English 560 | Spring 2020**

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

We live in a digital age, and literature is now created and read on computers as much as in books. This course provides an introduction to born-digital literature— literature created on the computer and read on the computer, wherein computational practices are part of literary poetics— from the 1990s to today. We explore a wide range of genres in a historical lineage, including hypertext, interactive fiction, kinetic poetry, augmented reality, VR, and games. We consider how contemporary literature and reading practices have changed, and why the study of these changes matters.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

This is a literature course: it focuses on analyzing literary works. This is also a writing-intensive course. You will sharpen your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills by applying them to multimodal, multimedia literature. The result will, hopefully, be an expansion of these abilities as well as your appreciation of literature as an evolving, emergent cultural form.

- To understand born-digital literature as part of literary history
- To be able to apply traditional (print-based) close reading practices to digital, multimodal, screen-based works
- To practice medium-specific analysis of digital literature in the form of a final, critical, and web-based essay

*\*No programming knowledge is required for the class; however, all students should be advised that they will be required to engage with new media technologies.*

## **Administrative Information**

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| Class Meetings:<br>T/Th 12:30-1:45pm,<br>EBA-341  | Course Website:<br><a href="http://jessicapressman.com/spring2020-eng560">http://jessicapressman.com/spring2020-eng560</a> |
| Office hours: Available for appointment on<br>T, W, Th; email to schedule an<br>appointment<br>Professor's Office: AL 261 | Email: <a href="mailto:jpressman@sdsu.edu">jpressman@sdsu.edu</a>  |

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***NOTE: This syllabus is subject to change... and probably will change!***

## ASSIGNMENTS

Participation in class: 20%

Weekly Blog Responses: 25%

Midterm Essay (Close Reading Electronic Literature): 25%

Final Project proposal: 5%

Final Web-based Essay Project: 25%

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### **Participation 20%**

This is *your* class, and your active participation is vital to its success.

- You must attend *all* class meetings in order to receive full credit for participation.
- You must also engage—*talk* and listen—in class. Come to class prepared to discuss the text in depth; this means having read the *entire* text *before* class. I expect you to speak and listen.
- **Your participation grade includes engaging in dialogue in class.** This means speaking and listening actively, attentively, and respectfully. (If you have fear of speaking in public, this seminar is a good place to learn to address that fear. Please come see me early in the term to discuss strategies for dealing with this fear).
- **Your participation grade includes an in-person meeting with the professor.**
- **You will give a 5-minute presentation on one of the texts.** This presentation should serve to start the class's conversation for the day. You will point us to a question from the day's reading and to the specific passage in the text that sparked that inquiry for you. You will get the discussion rolling. You should be able to direct the class to a passage for close reading and/or a series of questions for discussion.

### **Weekly Blog Responses 25%:**

As this is a class on digital literature and media, we will employ the technology of the Web to stimulate and extend our in-class discussions. You will be required to post short (300-500 word) thoughtful, analytical, and grammatically correct responses about the weekly reading to your blog.

**--Blog posts are due on Monday at 6pm weekly; late posts will not receive credit.**

The goal of the blog posts is to extend the conversation and coverage of the course by allowing you to 1) express, share, and comment upon interests, questions, and concerns related to the readings and also to 2) enable the professor to address and incorporate these topics in that week's meeting. It is also a place to draft ideas and text for use in your essays.

**-You must also read and comment on at least one classmate's blog each week, before Thursday's class meeting.**

-Individual blog posts will *not* receive grades, but a holistic grade for completion *and* content will be presented at midterm and, again, at the end of the term. It will be determined based on the following:

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| <b>Blog Grading Rubric</b>  |   |
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| <p><b>Completion</b><br/> A= 11-13 posts<br/> B= 8-10 posts<br/> C= 6-7 posts<br/> D= 4-5 posts<br/> F= 3 or less</p> <hr/> | <p><b>Content</b><br/> A= Post contains a focused thesis or question and close reading of a passage,<br/> B= Post contains a close reading of content but no focused question or thesis<br/> C= Post contains no analysis of text (no close reading), just summary and undirected ideas<br/> D=Post contains little substantive thinking as content</p> <hr/> |

**Midterm Essay (Close reading of a work of digital literature) 25%:**

This short essay (1,500 words= 5-6 pages) is an opportunity to explore a single work of digital literature from our syllabus through an in-depth analysis and to practice multimodal explication. This essay will be posted to your blog.

**Final Digital Proposal 5%:**

This blog post contains a thesis statement for your final essay, a short description of its form and format, and the scholarly sources you plan to use (if you are using any). The purpose of this assignment is to get you thinking about your final project in advance and also provide an opportunity for you to receive feedback on your ideas before you starting writing/building.

**Final Digital Project 25%:**

The course culminates in a final essay which is presented as an electronic text--a website whose interface, aesthetic, and navigational elements *support* the intellectual claims of the argument. To repeat, as this is the main point of the assignment (for all 3 options listed below) and the grading of it: **the form and format of the essay must support the argument (content)**. This final essay will push you to implement your learned critical methodology of medium-specific analysis in a creative-critical way.

\*You *must* meet with me, in person or by skype, to receive full credit on this project.

Options for Final Project:

**1) A thesis-driven close reading at least two creative works of digital literature (at least one from our syllabus, and not examined in your midterm) that uses at least 2 critical sources. (6-8 pages, 2000+ words)**

- The essay builds upon the skills, guidelines, and goals of the midterm essay assignment but allows you more flexibility to explore a topic of your choosing and to engage with scholarship in addition to a primary text.
- Like the midterm essay, this final essay needs a strong thesis (a debatable argument) that is proved using the content of work, through explication.
- The grading rubrics for this critical, scholarly essay are similar to those for the midterm grading rubrics. However, this is a digital project, so a great part of the grade will be how form and format support argument.

**2) A creative work of digital literature accompanied by a short (5 pg.) critical analysis of your composition. You must use *at least 2 critical sources* to situate and explain your work.**

-The creative work should be grounded in the course; it should pursue an idea, argument, or aesthetic aspect explored in class.

-The critical analysis should not describe your creative work but present an argument (thesis) about *what* the work attempts to achieve and *why* it matters (the So What).

**3) A curated exhibition of electronic literature that includes an analytical introduction and rationale (5 pgs.) in the form of an overview or viewing guide for the collection you create. You must use *at least 2 critical sources* to situate your exhibition.**

-The exhibition must include at least 4 works of literature and be viewable online AND/OR in the Electronic Literature Studio in the DH Center

-The analytical introduction should present a argument/thesis (rationale) for *what* the exhibition contains and *why* it matters (the So What).

**\*\*Project Due, posted to blog: May 13 at midnight\*\***

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#### **Extra Credit: Total of 1%**

-Attend the campus lecture “The Future of the Humanities in a Digital Age” on January 26 and write a blog post that situates that event in the context of our class.

-Attend Electronic Literature Reading Event on February 17 and write a blog post that situates that event (the reading, the literature, the discussion) in the context of our class.

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#### **NOTE: Late work**

--Blog posts receive *no credit* if turned in late.

--Midterm, Final Project Proposal, and Final Project are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late (for example, an A becomes an A- if turned in one day late).

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#### **RESOURCES**

-DH@SDSU: [dh.sdsu.edu](mailto:dh.sdsu.edu)

-Digital Humanities Center

-Elit Studio in the Digital Humanities Center: You are the first class to get to use our newest addition to the Digital Humanities Center: the Electronic Literature Studio.

<https://calendly.com/dhcenter/e-lit-studio>

-Electronic Literature Organization: [eliterature.org](http://eliterature.org)

-“Teaching Electronic Literature” website with resources: [eliterature.org/teach](http://eliterature.org/teach).

## **REQUIRED READING**

Available in the SDSU Bookstore (and on reserve in Library)

Borsuk, Amaranth and Brad Bouse. *Between Page and Screen* [AR book]  
Jackson, Shelley. *Patchwork Girl* [mac-based program]  
Rettberg, Scott. *Electronic Literature* [book]  
Tender Claws, *Pry* [app for tablet, available at iTunes]

### Suggested, Additional Reading:

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Pressman, Marino, and Douglass, *Reading Project: A Collaborative Analysis of William Poundstone's Project for Tachistoscope {Bottomless Pit}* (2015)  
Ryan, Marie-Laure, Lori Emerson, and Benjamin J. Robertson, eds. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media* (2014)

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## **READING SCHEDULE**

### **Week 1: Introductions**

January 23: Introduction to the class

### **Week 2: What is Elit?**

January 28: N. Katherine Hayles, [Electronic Literature: What is it?](#) (pgs. 1-19) [online]

January 30: Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* (1995)

### Additional Reading for Grad Students:

N. Katherine Hayles, "Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis" (2000) [online]

### **Week 3: Hypertext**

January 28: Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* (1995)  
-Scott Rettberg, *Electronic Literature*, pgs. 54-74

January 30: Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* (1995)

### **Week 4: Hypertext**

February 4: Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* (1995)

February 6: Mark Marino Workshop on E-Lit making in DH Center

### **Week 5: Flash Poetics**

February 11: Brian Kim Stefans, "The Dreamlife of Letters" (2000) [online]  
Scott Rettberg, *Electronic Literature*, pgs. 118-132

February 13: William Poundstone's *Project for Tachistoscope {Bottomless Pit}* (2005) [online]

### **Week 6: Flash-ing Narrative**

February 18: Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, *Dakota* (2002) [online]

February 20: Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, *Dakota* (2002) [online]

#### Additional Reading for Grad Students:

-Jessica Pressman, "The Strategy of Digital Modernism: Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries' *Dakota*" (2008) [PDF]

--- "Reading the Code between the Words: The Role of Translation in Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries's *Nippon*" (2007) [PDF]

### **Week 7: Interactive Fiction (IF)**

February 25: Emily Short, *Galatea* (2000) [online]

-Scott Rettberg, *Electronic Literature*, pgs. 87-102

February 27: Emily Short, *Galatea* (2000) [online]

#### Additional Reading for Grad Students:

Jeremy Douglass, "Enlightening Interactive Fiction: Andrew Plotkin's *Shade*" (2008) [online]

### **Week 8: Early Web 2.0 Innovations**

March 3: *Scalar Workshop in DH Center*

-Scott Rettberg, *Electronic Literature*, pgs. 152-182

March 5: J.R. Carpenter, "Entre Ville" (2006) [online]

-Jason Nelson, "Sydney's Siberia" (2010) [online]

### **Week 9: Tools Workshop: Twine in DH Center**

March 10: Workshop on intro to Twine

Scott Rettberg, *Electronic Literature*, pgs. 183-200

March 12: Workshop on using Twine to tell/build stories

### **Week 10: Augmented Reality**

March 17: *Between Page and Screen* (2012) [AR book and online]

March 19: *Between Page and Screen* (2012) [AR book and online]

#### Additional Reading:

Caitlin Fisher, "Circle" documentation video [online]

**\*\*Sunday, March 22: Midterm essay due: posted to blog by midnight\*\***

### **Week 11: Contemporary Elit**

March 24: Amaranth Borsuk visits class

**March 25: Amaranth Borsuk Lecture at 4pm in DH Center**

March 26: Tender Claws, *Pry* (2015) [app]

**\*\*SPRING BREAK\*\***

**Week 12: App-based Literature**

April 7: Tender Claws, *Pry* (2015) [app]

April 9: Tender Claws, *Pry* (2015) [app]

**Week 13: Electronic Literary Criticism**

April 14: Mark Marino's "Critical Code Studies" [online]

April 16: "Acid-Free Bits: Recommendations for Long-Lasting Electronic Literature" (2004) [online]

**April 17: English Graduate Symposium in DHC**

**\*\*Sunday, April 19: Final Project Proposal Due, posted to blog by midnight\*\***

**Week 14: Electronic Literary Criticism**

April 21: excerpts from Pressman, Marino, and Douglass, *Reading Project: A Collaborative Analysis of William Poundstone's Project for Tachistoscope {Bottomless Pit}* (2015), introduction and chapters 1 and 2. [PDF]

April 23: excerpts from Pressman, Marino, and Douglass, *Reading Project: A Collaborative Analysis of William Poundstone's Project for Tachistoscope {Bottomless Pit}* (2015), introduction and chapters 1 and 2. [PDF]

**April 23, 5pm Lecture: Professor D.J. Hopkins (Theater, Television, Film) "Gamification, Immersion, and other Subjective Pleasures of Performance" VR Viewing demo and lecture in Digital Humanities Center**

Additional Reading for Grad Students:

All of Pressman, Marino, and Douglass, *Reading Project: A Collaborative Analysis of William Poundstone's Project for Tachistoscope {Bottomless Pit}* (2015)

**\*\*Sunday April 26: Elit submissions for competition due\*\***

**Week 15: Workshopping final projects in DH Center**

April 28: Workshop final project

April 30: Workshop final project

**Week 16: Student Presentations of final projects & Concluding Discussion in DH Center**

May 5: Presentations

May 7: Presentations & concluding discussion

***May 8: DH Showcase & Elit Showcase***

***\*\*Final projects due, Wednesday, May 13@ midnight, posted to the course blog\*\****

**OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

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**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

I take teaching seriously, and I expect you to take seriously your work as a student. That means that academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonest includes, but is not limited to: (a) using assignments that you wrote for another class, (b) representing work done by someone else as your own (i.e., plagiarism), and (c) copying someone else's work on an assignment, basic cheating. Plagiarism and Cheating of any kind will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be referred to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities for further action. If you have questions at all, you should consult me immediately.

**SDSU as “safe space”**

The CSU has affirmed its commitment to ‘protecting access, affordability, intellectual freedom, inclusivity, and diversity for all students . . . including supporting DACA students.’ Discrimination, harassment, or retaliation against students, faculty, and staff on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, immigration status and other categories of identity is prohibited. If you have concerns about your status at the university, please visit <http://studentaffairs.sdsu.edu/EOP/> for information or contact the Dean of Students or the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs in your College.”

**DISABILITY STATEMENT**

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at [\(619\) 594-6473](tel:6195946473). To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.