ENGL 631: Literature of 9/11

University of Maryland
Spring 2014

Monday, 3:30-6:00 (Tawes 3136)

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Course Description

This seminar will examine the literary response to the events of September 11th, 2001 and their aftermath, certainly the defining event of the 21st century to date for a Western audience. We will take a close look at a number of exemplars from the rapidly expanding canon of 9/11 novels. We will also examine selected work in other genres and media, including the graphic arts, sound, film, poetry, memoir, critical theory, architecture and design, even a game. Finally we will consider the citizen narration of 9/11 through the fugitive and ephemeral texts collected in the September 11th Digital Archive, as well as the phenomenon of the conspiracy narrative. Throughout, we will seek to consider the events of the day as a focalizer for the project of constructing a distinctive identity for a 21st century literature, both “American” and trans-national.

This class will be different from many others because of the topicality of the material. Though they will inevitably include matters of contemporary politics and policy I will expect them to be conducted with mutual sensitivity and respect to all. The class will also be different in at least one other respect: it will function, through both the nature of the work we produce and the platform by which we distribute it, as an instance of what is increasingly termed the public humanities, or sometimes citizen humanities.
Practically speaking this means we will seek to create work that is of interest not only within the walls of Tawes or perhaps (one day) inside a conference room or between the pages of an academic journal, but work that is immediately accessible and relevant to a wider public audience. To that end most of the assignments will consist of contributions to a Web-based platform (using a content management system called Omeka) that will host your writing, as well as videos and other course materials that you produce. This work is in lieu of the traditional long paper assignment. No prior experience with Omeka or Web publishing is expected or assumed.

**Texts**

All of the following are required, and may be sourced from the bookseller of your choice. You may opt for either print or ebook editions as you like, with the exception of Spiegelman, which should be purchased as print.


There is also one optional text, David Wyatt’s *And the War Came* (Wisconsin, 2004).

**Course Grading**

Final course grades will be calculated as follows, on a 4.0 scale:

- 10% Presentation+
- 15% Publication and Reception Report [txt]+
- 15% Close Reading [txt or vid]*
- 15% Character Study [txt or vid]*
- 15% Mapping or Image Curation [img/viz]
- 10% Interview [vid]*
- 20% Final Exam

Items marked + will be due on the date you have been assigned at the start of the semester.

Items marked * will be due on a rolling basis (see Schedule, below). You are responsible for completing each of them, but you may choose the sequence. Both the Close Reading and the Character Study may be done as either a text or video assignment, but you must deliver one
of each. In other words, if you do a video for the Character Study then the close reading must be done as a text assignment (and vice versa).

Items not otherwise marked are due on a set date, as per the Schedule (below).

The presentation will take the form of a substantial oral presentation, lasting 15-20 minutes. It is intended to be organized and structured in its delivery and communication, and not just an off-the-cuff exercise. The presentation will cover: the author’s career to date (including interviews with the author about the work we’re reading); the publication history of the work we’re reading (editions, translations, other pertinent bibliographical facts); the reception history of the work we’re reading (reviews, both critical and popular via Web sites like Amazon and GoodReads); and finally, questions for discussion. Concurrent with the in-class presentation, this material will also be published to the Omeka site in written form as the “Publication and Reception Report” assignment above. More information about the presentation and report will be distributed in a separate document.

Text (txt) assignments will be written and published on the Omeka platform. Details for each will be provided separately. They will average around 1500 words.

Video (vid) assignments will take the form of short video segments that you will be responsible for scripting, shooting, editing, and posting. They will not be longer than 3 minutes. Scripting the video means thinking very carefully about what you want to communicate in a radically compressed time frame, and then writing the text ahead of time (not speaking extemporaneously); shooting the video may be done with your own hardware such as a Web cam or using equipment in the English Department’s Instructional Design Lab (Tawes 2105); editing the video means simply ensuring that it has a clean start and finish; effects and embellishments are not required; posting the video means uploading it to a class channel on Vimeo or YouTube as well as embedding it on the Omeka site for publication. Details about each video assignment will be provided separately.

The interview assignment will entail a short video interview with someone outside the class who has read one of the books on our syllabus (or, alternately, some other piece of 9/11 fiction). Details will be provided separately.

The mapping/image curation assignment (img/viz) will use Google Maps, Neatline, or other tools and services to create a visual or spatial interpretation of one or more of the works we’ve read. Details will be provided separately; an introduction to the tools will be offered; group work is permissible.

The final exam will consist of identifications and short essay questions.

**Omeka and Other Technology:** Omeka is a Content Management System, similar to Wordpress, Tumblr, and Drupal. It is no more difficult to use than a blog, but more versatile. The class’s Omeka site is located here:
Each of you will receive a login so you can upload your writing and images. We will cover some basics in class, but lots more additional information, including some excellent tutorials, is available at Omeka.org.

Video will not be hosted on the Omeka site, though you will still create postings there to embed your video for users. The actual video files, however, will be uploaded to the class Vimeo account: Lit9-11_UMD. You will receive a group login to the channel. Please be careful and respectful, and ensure that you never, ever inadvertently delete someone else’s content.

Throughout the semester, we will be working closely with Lauren Friedman in the department’s Instructional Design Studio (Tawes 2105; 5-3747). The Studio has cameras, tablets, and other devices that you may find useful; it also houses audio and video editing software; Lauren will be available to advise and consult on your work, but responsibility for producing and publishing your digital content rests with you.

**FERPA:** The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act is the federal legislation that ensures your right to privacy as a student at this institution. Practically speaking, it means that neither the institution nor its representatives (like faculty) can disclose your grades or other details of your educational records—including what courses you’re taking—without your written consent. More information about FERPA is available here: http://www.registrar.umd.edu/current/Policies/FERPA.html.

FERPA was enacted in 1974, obviously long before the era of the Web and social media. But in order to ensure that we are in compliance with both the letter and the spirit of the law you should be aware of the following options as regards this course’s requirements for public online work: 1.) You may, if you so choose, publish your work under an appropriate pseudonym known only to me; if you elect to avail yourself of this option I ask that you try to make that decision at the beginning of the semester. 2.) You may also, if you wish, opt out of the online components of the course requirements entirely; if you elect to avail yourself of that option you must make that decision at the beginning of the semester. I will assign you equivalent requirements in the form of traditional written work.

You will be provided with and asked to sign an Informed Consent form on the first day of class indicating your willingness to post your work under your own name on a public Web site. See also the University of Maryland System Policy on Student Social Media Privacy, available here: http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/V120.html.

**Academic Integrity:** The University is one of a small number of universities with a student-administered Code of Academic Integrity and an Honor Pledge. The Code prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents,
and forging signatures. You will be held to this standard at all times regardless of the presence or absence of a written pledge.

**Religious Observances:** The University of Maryland policy “Assignments and Attendance on Dates of Religious Observance” states that students should not be penalized in any way for participation in religious observances and that, whenever feasible, they be allowed to make up academic assignments that are missed due to such absences. *It is the student’s responsibility to inform* the instructor of any intended absences for religious observances *in advance* and that early prior notification is especially important in connection with final examinations, since failure to reschedule a final examination before the conclusion of the final examination period may result in loss of credits during the semester.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** The University is legally obligated to provide appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities. In order to ascertain what accommodations may need to be provided, students with disabilities should inform the instructors of their needs at the beginning of the semester. They will make arrangements with the student to determine and implement appropriate academic accommodations. Student should also register with Disability Support Services (DSS) [http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS](http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS) (301-314-7682).

**Attendance Policy:** University policy excuses the absences of students for illness (self or dependent), religious observances, participation in University activities at the request of University authorities, and extreme extenuating circumstances beyond the student’s control. If you wish to have any absence formally “excused” for one of the above reasons please supply me with full written documentation. *Multiple unexcused absences will jeopardize your ability to earn credit for the course.*

**Inclement Weather:** Official closures and delays are announced on the campus Web site and snow phone line (301-405-SNOW) as well as local radio and TV stations.

**ELMS:** The class is listed on ELMS. I will use the ELMS site primarily to distribute readings, but we may also take advantage of discussion forums and other features. Course news and announcements will be distributed through ELMS email. Please make sure you have a current address recorded there that you check regularly and that your spam filter is not blocking ELMS messages. *You will be held responsible for any electronic announcement 24 hours after it has been distributed.*

**Schedule**

The reading load will average around **250 pages per week**. We’ll be able to catch our breath at a few points during the semester, but please think carefully about whether you can commit to that quantity of reading at the thoughtful level this material will demand. **ELMS** means the text is available on ELMS in the “Files” folder, usually as a PDF. **TBA** means the specifics will be announced. For online materials, consult the service listed or use the direct link provided.
Readings and other assignments are to be completed by the date listed on the schedule below. Unless otherwise noted you are expected to read the novel by the indicated author in its entirety for day on which it is listed. The instruction to read “through” a chapter or page number means to read all pages up to and including that chapter or page; for example, “through chapter 4” means to read chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4. Assignments that are late with no prior arrangements will be docked one full letter grade, and not accepted at all if more than a week overdue. *[*][*]Due denotes due dates for the first, second, and third of the assignments with a rolling deadline.


February 3: DeLillo; Baudrillard, “Requiem for the Twin Towers” (ELMS).

February 10: Foer, through 173; DeLillo, “In the Ruins of the Future” (ELMS).

February 17: Foer, finish; Grusin, through chapter 2.

February 24: *The Space Between* (film; currently streaming on NetFlix); Eisenberg, “Twilight of the Superheroes” (ELMS); Wyatt, “September 11 and Postmodern Memory” (ELMS). *Due.

March 3: Pynchon, through 246.


March 17: SPRING BREAK.

March 24: Messud, through 250.

March 31: Messud, finish. **Due.

April 7: Spiegelman; Grusin, through chapter 3; Basinski, *Disintegration Loop* [1.1]: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qY0r8TlnqsY; play September 12th: http://www.newsgaming.com/games/index12.htm.


April 21: Wyatt, From *And the War Came* (ELMS); Weiner, “National Pastime”: http://washingtonart.com/beltway/weiner.html; David Wyatt visits class.

April 28: O’Neill. ***Due.


**Final Exam:** TBA as per Registrar’s Official Schedule.

*The syllabus and schedule may be subject to change. You will be notified in advance of important changes that could affect grading, assignments, etc. The online ELMS syllabus always takes precedence over any hard copy.*