HS 2021 – M.A. Seminar
Writing in the Face of Death
Prof. Elisabeth Bronfen
Thursday 16.15 – 18.00

Texts marked with an * will be made available on OLAT.

(1) Sept 23   **Meet and Greet on Zoom**

THE TEXTUALITY OF DEATH

(2) Oct 14   William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*
Michel de Montaigne, "That to Philosophize Is to Learn How to Die"*

(3) Oct 21   E.A. Poe. "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"*, "The Black Cat"*, "Ligeia"*
Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov"*

(4) Oct 28   Vladimir Nabokov. *Pale Fire*

CINEMATIC DEATH NARRATIVES

(5) Nov 4   Orson Welles. CITIZEN KANE

(6) Nov 11   Billy Wilder. SUNSET BOULEVARD

AUTOFICTIONS

(7) Nov 18   Sylvia Plath. *The Bell Jar*

(8) Nov 25   Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida*

(9) Dec 2   Joan Didion. *The Year of Magical Thinking*

SPECTRAL REVISITATIONS

(10) Dec 9   Sigrid Nunez. *What Are You Going Through*

(11) Dec 16   Nicole Krauss. *Forest Dark*

(12) Dec 23   Maggie O'Farrell. *Hamnet*

Preparatory Materials

Paul Auster. *The Invention of Solitude*. Faber and Faber, 1982.

Walter Benjamin. "Der Erzähler"/"The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai
Leskov" (1936). *Illuminationen*. Suhrkamp, 1977.

Maurice Blanchot. "Literature and the Right to Death", "Two Versions of the Imaginary",
The Gaze of Orpheus". *The Gaze of Orpheus*. Station Hill Press, 1981.

Elisabeth Bronfen. *Over Her Dead Body. Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*. Manchester University
Press, 1992.

Sigmund Freud. "Zeitgemässes über Krieg und Tod"(1915). *Gesammelte Werke X*. S. Fischer
Verlag.

— "Jenseits des Lustprinzips" (1920). *Gesammelte Werke XIII*. S. Fischer Verlag.

Stephen Greenblatt and Peter G. Platt. *Shakespeare's Montaigne. The Florio Translation of the Essays*.
New York Review of Books, 2014.

Course Requirements

Portfolio (40% of final grade)
Students are required to complete the following tasks as part of the portfolio:

Forum Posts: All students must write a forum post for 10 of the seminar sessions (approx. 400 words),
to be posted on the course's OLAT forum by 9 a.m. on Thursday of the respective week.
Contributions should entail a thesis, but could also contain a series of questions, comments, or
associations. This should not only help you practice your argumentative skills, but also facilitates
class discussion by allowing us to see in what directions you have been thinking while preparing for
each session. The point is not to read out what you have written but, using what you have developed
in writing, to engage in a dialogue with the other members of the class. Please note that thesis papers
that are not posted on time will not be counted towards your portfolio grade.

Short Research Paper or Visual Research Essay: Students will do background research on the subject of the
session assigned to them and compile this research in a short essay (1250-2000 words). This can also
be a visual essay (max. 5 min.). You will be asked to speak to the content of your research in the
corresponding session. A final version of the research paper should be sent as a PDF/transfer link
for the visual essay to morgane.ghilardi@es.uzh.ch one week after the session.

Handing in your portfolio: At the end of the semester, please compile the thesis statements you have
posted and short research paper/visual essay using the template provided on OLAT. Upload the
complete portfolio as a PDF using the Portfolio Drop Box on OLAT by **December 23, 2021**.

Final Essay (60% of final grade)
All students must hand in an essay (approx. 8000 words) which should evolve from the materials
read and viewed in this research seminar, while taking the class discussion into an original
direction. The paper must be handed in by **March 1, 2022.** The essay should comply with the
MLA format (i.e. be typed in a 12p serif font, 1.5-spaced, ample margins for comments by the
instructor, and have a title page). Hand in your essay as a PDF (incl. *Selbstständigkeitserklärung*) to
morgane.ghilardi@es.uzh.ch as well as a hardcopy in the pigeon hole at the secretary's office.