“Patchwork Girl”

A Brief Overview of Hypertext Literature by Barbara Chin

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What is Hypertext Literature?

- an interactive literature
  - *pop-up books*
  - *The Jolly Postman*
- an interactive electronic literature
  - old text-based games
  - video or computer games
- particular and effective use of hypertext*
  - text that “links” in multiple ways to other text
- general non-linearity
  - “Choose Your Own Adventure” novels
- ergodic literature (non-trivial effort to read)
History of Hypertext Literature

- Introduced and popularized around the late 1980s, through mid-1990s
  - pre-dates the World Wide Web
- Published using special software
  - Storyspace (Eastgate Systems)
  - Hypercard
- Michael Joyce, *Afternoon, a Story*
- Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*
Afternoon, A Story

- Created as part of a demonstration of Storyspace software at a conference.
- Consists of 539 interconnected lexias.
- Plot:
  - "... the story of Peter, a technical writer who (in one reading) begins his afternoon with a terrible suspicion that the wrecked car he saw hours earlier might have belonged to his former wife."
  - "I want to say I may have seen my son die this morning."
Afternoon, A Story

- Some interesting characteristics
  - Changes in narrator, narrative loops
  - Invisible links, difficult to track user interaction
  - Time collapse: reality/memory confusion
  - Emphasis on traditional text, not images

- Critical reception
  - **Pro:** transcends normal reader experience - postmodern
  - **Pro:** Reveals what the reader “takes for granted” in print
  - **Con:** limited user access (requires computer)
  - **Con:** relies on technology that is quickly outmoded
Patchwork Girl

- Sometimes called a “new standard” in hypertext fiction
- Consists of 323 lexias, 462 links
- Inspirations
  - Novels
    - *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* (L. Frank Baum, 1913)
    - *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley, 1818)
  - Current literary and cultural criticism
    - “The Cyborg Manifesto,” Donna Haraway
Patchwork Girl

Plot:

- **What did you think it was about?**
- Basic premise
  - “...Mary Shelley's second monster, the *female companion* that Victor Frankenstein began creating but then *destroyed*, was secretly finished by Mary Shelley herself.”
  - “The monster becomes MS's *lover*, then travels to *America*, where it goes through interesting adventures until its final *dispersal into its component parts* in the early 1990s.”

Critical Reception

- **Pro:** Emphasis on both image and text, interrelated
- **Pro:** powerful *meta-commentary on the nature of all hypertext fiction*
- **Con:** Similar problems to *Afternoon, A Story*
  - **YET** - this time the “*cons*” are utilized in the text’s meaning

I moved quickly to the next shelf, where the tag read "Blue in the Title," and sure enough, as I flipped through the rows of books, everyone had the word "Blue" in the title. It was quite simple and clever: by flinging these books at her, she had left open the distinction between fiction and mystery.

I dived around a few of the shelves, straining my neck to gaze at the top rows of books and bending to look at the bottom ones, but I couldn't seem to find the romance section. As a matter of fact, I began to become incredibly irritated and frustrated when I was, after making a confused and near-amygdaloid dicta tour of the room, still unable to locate a distinguishable fiction section.

"In a minute," I cried.

"Yes," I answered, "fine." I would take a better look around the place until the woman had finished whatever it was she was doing, perhaps finding a nice, conventional hero for my girl and leaving without even requiring the lady's assistance.
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Shelley Jackson Quotes:

"On the body
The original body is dissociated, porous and unbiased … The mind, on the other hand … [has an] obsession with stasis, centrality, and unity.

The project of writing … is to interrupt, unhinge, disable the processes by which the mind, glorying in its own firm grip on what it wishes to include in reality, gradually shuts out more and more of it, and substitutes an effigy for that complicated machine for inclusion and effusion that is the self.

On hypertext
In hypertext, everything is there at once and equally weighted. It is a body whose brain is dispersed throughout the cells … It is always at its end and always at its beginning, the birth and the death are simultaneous and reflect each other harmoniously.
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- One more Shelley Jackson quote:
  - On hypertext’s difficulty
    - There's no question that hypertext will lose or never acquire those readers for whom a fated slalom toward the finish line is the defining literary experience; hypertext's not built for that. Probably it is because linear text's so well-built for it that it has become the dominant narrative style in the novel. **But there are other reasons to read.**

Patchwork Girl

- Some issues
  - Collage, links, narrative, and intertextuality
  - Reproduction, (re)birth and creation
  - Destruction, fragmentation, and dissemination
  - Gender and sexuality
    - Bodies and embodiments
    - Female gender, quilting, patchwork
    - Queer sexuality
    - Gender, sexuality and “monstrosity”
Other Hypertext Literature

- Online
  - “My Boyfriend Came Back from the War”
  - Originally created by Olia Lialina in 1996
  - [http://www.teleportacia.org/war/](http://www.teleportacia.org/war/)
  - [http://myboyfriendcamebackfromth.ewar.ru/](http://myboyfriendcamebackfromth.ewar.ru/)