Books beware: Hypertext fiction is taking over. Or is it?

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Tyra D. Goodwin-Pickering

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Daryl Adrian

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Purpose of Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the validity of the arguments set forth by the proponents of hypertext fiction that indicate that we are in the late age of print and that the new form of writing, hypertextual fiction, will soon replace the printed text. The beginning of the thesis deals with the ideas behind hypertext fiction by determining, through the use of Lloyd Bitzer's notion of the Rhetorical Situation, the situation, audience, and constraints. This process aids in determining the likelihood that the hypertext fiction will prosper. The final section focuses on a particular piece of hypertext fiction, Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, a story*, and, through the application of narrative criticism, determines what the author's worldviews are and whether or not the story form will be accepted within our culture.
Hypertext fiction is a new form of literature in which the author utilizes the hyperlink in an effort to provide the reader with the freedom to roam about the story, create his or her own paths, and thus present the world as he or she experiences it, in bits and pieces. The printed text as we know it, according to the proponents of hypertext fiction, is caught in a web that is constantly referring to other references: books, text, sentence. It is, in essence, a "node within a network . . . [a] network of references." The hypertext fiction, then, is the ideal text for it provides the reader with the networks rather than the nodes, giving the reader an infinite number of entrances into and paths within it. There exists within this network, no main text but a series of signifiers that can extend as far as the reader wishes (Landow online). This process provides an experience that is close to "real-life," observes Charles Deemer in "What is Hypertext?" We live our lives moment by moment and make choices as we go. "Imagine that you are walking down the aisle in a grocery store, looking for your favorite box of cereal. You find it – and next to it another brand that you like is on sale. You have to decide which to buy and move on. Readers of hypertext make similar choices"(online).

However, hypertext fiction contends to do more than just provide the reader with choices made in every day life. The program itself is "designed to work associatively, as the human brain does" asserts Carolyn Guyer ("Along the Estuary" online). She explains this notion further in the essay:

I see it in the form of a quotation stream. The gossip, family discussions, letters, passing fancies, and daydreams that we tell ourselves every day in
order to make sense of things. The unconscious rhythms we incorporate – literally embody – as a reliable backbeat to our self-narratives provide familiar comfort as well as essential contrast for the changing turns of disjuncture. We live and make our stories in a line of time that wraps and loops on itself, trying to contend with the geometries of space we also inhabit. Affected by nearby hues we cannot or will not understand, we follow our influences, oppose, match, and continue, even in an electronic milieu, to measure with our bodies” (online).

In essence, what she contends is that hypertext provides all of the components of real life experiences for the reader to take in and add to the pre-existing ideas or beliefs within the body and then to come to a unique and individual experience of the narrative.

Guyer provides a fitting metaphor for hypertext in another essay entitled, “Fretwork: Reforming Me,” in which she tells the story of creating a quilt for her daughter from molas purchased at an antique store. She tells how she questioned every stain and stitch of each piece as she sewed the pieces together, contributing her own story as she continued (online).

Hypertext provides the reader with the opportunity to look beyond the main story and into the components that made up the story itself. Rather than just seeing the quilt for what it is and knowing the story of the making of the quilt, hypertext goes a step further by letting us into the stories behind the stories, given to us in pieces to put together as we wish, establishing, in a sense, a quilt of our own.
Michael Joyce, writer-in-residence at Brown University, has created the novel *Afternoon, a Story* in hypertext format. Robert Kendall praises Joyce’s work in “Writing for the Millennium”:

Completed in 1987, this hypertext novel requires the reader to unravel interwoven strands of narrative to make sense of the story. The reader’s efforts parallel the struggle of the story’s main character to learn whether his son and estranged wife have been killed in a car accident. The Washington Post Book World described this work as “an arresting, intricate, delicately contoured prose sculpture, and a noteworthy piece of American fiction” (online).

Upon beginning this particular piece, the reader is shown an initial screen:

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FILE    EDIT    STORYSPACE    NAVIGATE    BOOKMARK
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I try to recall winter. *< As if it were yesterday? >* she says, but I do not signify one way or another.

By five the sun sets and the afternoon melt freezes again across the blacktop into crystal octopi and palms of ice—rivers and continents beset by fear, and we walk out to the car, the snow moaning beneath our boots and the oaks exploding in series along the fenceline on the horizon, the shrapnel settling like relics, the echoing thundering off far ice. This was the essence of wood, these fragments say. And this darkness is air.

*< Poetry >* she says, without emotion, one way or another.

Do you want to hear about it?
From this point, the reader has several options. The first option is to hit the space bar and follow the pre-set order. This method, although it would seem to provide linearity, more often than not still produces bits and pieces of stories that loop back on themselves. This tendency to revisit previous lexias, according to Joyce in Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics, provides that:

each iteration “breathes life into a narrative of possibilities,” as Jane Yellowless Douglas says of hypertext fiction, so that, in the “third or fourth encounter with the same place, the immediate encounter remains the same as the first, [but] what changes is [our] understanding.” The text becomes a present tense palimpsest where what shines through are not past versions but potential, alternate views (online).

The second choice is to answer the question by hitting either yes or no. The lexia (page) that is given is a response to your answer. In this instance, the experience is similar to a conversation. The last option is to click on words that yield within the text. To find out which words yield, one must either take a guess, or click on the links menu that provides a list of all linking words within the text. (The linking words are highlighted in the example above). One of the most important aspects of hypertext fiction is the ability to see behind the words. The text then becomes interactive.

This proposed freedom to choose and create infinite pathways throughout a network of information has led proponents of hypertext fiction to come to some
staggering conclusions. "We are in the late age of print," announces Michael Joyce. He suggests that a revolution has begun where video and e-mail have placed print in the category of obscure pleasures like opera or cigarettes. This shift, he insists, will be "as radical as the shift from print to tube and surely will be as swift as the transition in the audio world from LP to CD". He insists that this change has come and the evidence is clearly seen in the mausoleum of books that offer 80 percent off of publisher's prices, where tables are piled high with remnants of fads of times, opinions and histories gone by (So Much Time).

From a historical, technological, personal, and academic perspective however, it is evident that this medium will not replace the written text that have withstood the passage of time. Instead, it will have its fifteen minutes of fame before falling from its pedestal to join its other fallen friends, the commodore 64, Atari, and eight track tapes. Still, the purpose here is not to discount this writing medium as a significant contribution to the literary world. On the contrary, this form of writing will indeed become an important part of our culture. However, it does not have the potential to take the place of a medium that has become so embedded in our culture—books.

Any system that devises a plan to take over a rudimentary part of society deserves to be studied. As critics, teachers, students, and book lovers, we need to educate ourselves about this new medium in order to protect what we have grown to love. We cannot sit back and wait, hoping that the new hypertext novel is, in fact, as Jurgen Fauth proclaims in "Poles in your Face: The Promises and Pitfalls of Hyperfiction", an obsession unlike that of 3-D movies (online), that will
eventually burn itself out. We must explore it, grow to understand it, perhaps learn to appreciate it as a literary form, find its faults, discover its power, and learn from it, if only, as John Barth indicates in "The State of the Art," to "expose ourselves to the virus . . . to build up our antibodies" (online). Without this research, we leave our literary world to fate.

There is an enormous amount of information regarding hypertextual novels on the Internet, ranging from articles praising its accomplishments and contributions to the modern world, to negative reviews of its coherence and functionality as a story. Writers of hypertext fiction, such as Carolyn Guyer, author the hyperfiction *Quibbling*, praise the medium for its ability to "reflect a more complicated human experience" (online), while literary scholars such as John Barth, denounce this medium, stating that many of his students feel the "reading the normal way . . . is interactivity enough. When we're being writers, we'll set the course for you; when we're being readers, leave us alone and steer for yourself" (online). None of the articles deny that our society is moving into a new millennium full of promises of change. Barth admits that he and his colleagues will inevitably face a time when there are no longer replacement parts or people to fix their manual typewriters (online). David Miall, in an essay denouncing the hypertext fiction, also admits that the prophecy of the computer age carries some weight (online). However, many aspects of the hypertextual novel are debated. For example, critics such as the author of "But is it Storytelling?" question whether the hypertext novel functions as a story (online). Also in question, as Fault explains, is the extent of control that the author actually gives up when supposedly
providing the reader with the freedom to choose (online). The proposed freedom itself is often explored as an option that many readers do not necessarily want. David Brittain, in “You too can be a Genius,” addresses this concern: “In divvying up the work of the world there is a simple wisdom of assigning tasks to those who are best at them. When a pipe burst, I might try to fix it myself, but I am seldom so satisfied with the result as when I call a plumber” (online). In a recent article in Time magazine, Joshua Quittner also addresses this issue, “Some people like just watching . . . Who wants to cook when you can eat at a restaurant” (online)?

By applying the information gained through reading these articles to Lloyd Bitzer’s notion of the rhetorical situation, a process that determines the situation, exigencies, audiences and constraints, it becomes obvious that the medium does not function as a story, but ends up being, as Fauth suggests, incomplete (online). The freedom supposedly provided by this medium is replaced by confusion. This leads one to conclude that the hypertextual novel will not replace the written novels.

Lloyd Bitzer’s notion of the rhetorical situation goes deeper than just the context in which rhetoric arises. It calls for the understanding of the nature of the context, their descriptions, characteristics, and power to call forth rhetoric. He explains that not all rhetorical situations lead to the creation of discourse. There are many times in life where a situation occurs that may call for us to speak and we refuse to respond, sometimes asking ourselves why we chose to remain silent. Rhetoric is “pragmatic, it comes into existence for the sake of something
beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world: it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality"(3-4). Bitzer thus argues that there are three constituents to the rhetorical situation: exigence, audience, and constraints.

What is meant here by **exigence** is "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be"(6). Only those things that can be changed through discourse are rhetorical exigencies. By responding to the exigence through the creation of rhetoric, the rhetor hopes to modify the exigence.

The second constituent of the rhetorical situation is the **audience**. Although, realistically, all persons exposed to the rhetoric are members of the audience, Bitzer recognizes only a portion of those. In his notion, "only those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" should to be taken into consideration(8).

The final constituent of Bitzer's notion is the **constraint**. These constraints are "made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence"(8). These include constraints on the rhetor as well as the audience, such as beliefs, traditions, motives, and character each can aid in or inhibit the modification of the exigence.

The rhetorical situation for hypertext fiction is a time of great technological advancement. It is a time when "Every eye reflects the light of a computer screen seen through a window of a darkened house . . . "(Joyce Leo Tolstoy and
Mankind, online). Where we ration out hours to our student on expensive machines that neither our students nor we can afford (Joyce So Much Time online). It is a time of a sudden influx of language (often referred to as computer jargon) into our society. In his article, Barth demonstrates the confusion that is cause by the incoming words by quoting an article in the American Book Review written by Mark Amerika:

"The zine scene is alive and well.... Offhand, I can think of a dozen zines that are doing wonderful stuff: Further State(s) of the Art, Puck, Sensitive Skin, Red Tape, Taproot Reviews, Dissonance, bOING bOING, Frightening the Horses, Central Park, Nobodaddies, Science Fiction Eye, MAXIMUMROCKNROLL, just to name the first dozen that come to mind" (online).

If absolutely none of this makes sense to the reader, do not worry, you are not alone, Barth himself confesses that he does not have a clue what Mr. Amerika (name "too good to be true" (online)) is talking about, but it is proof of the fast-changing technological world in which we live. Barth goes on to say, "If among the intentions of such in-your-face lists is to make us dinosaurs from the 'late age of print feel our dinosaurity, then they quite succeed" (online). As Barth suggests, we live in a world in which constant learning is needed to keep up with the incoming technology.

We live in a time that has seen many changes in composition, (i.e., how we write, what means we use to create it, and how we present it). Michael Joyce discusses these changes by predicting what coming generations will view our
present bodies of research as being "written in a curiously nervous style". He indicates that the growing bodies of research comparing the acts of reading and writing in the electronic age to the same acts in the print age are examples of this nervous style. He goes on to establish this further, "What is it but longing in an age when more and more writers at work do so electronically? When print is increasingly a fetish reserved for drafts, while the real writing is transmitted electronically? When few ever plan, revise, or author the whole of a document individually?" He explains this cultural shift and the changes it calls for by stating:

It is important to realize that, as we virtualized both ownership of information and access to knowledge in our classrooms and laboratories, we move closer to a truly electronic, digital culture. When print removed knowledge from the temporality, as Walter Ong reminds us, it interiorized the idea of discrete authorship and hierarchy (1982). Now, forced by circumstance to relocate the locus of information and knowledge from the object to the hour, we re-externalize ideas and make them continuous rather than discrete, reciprocal rather than empowered, contextual rather than hierarchical (So Much Time online).

There is no denying that what Joyce states has some merit. We are surrounded by new-found forms of communication in which the written letter is replaced by e-mail, where, instead of going to the library to find a books about Singapore or Ireland, we can visit the actual places on the web. These are the times we are living in. This is the context of the rhetorical situation at hand.
The deeper meaning behind this context is the persons caught up in the constantly spinning technology at hand. It is the feeling, or mood, that responds to the context. Individuals are struggling to understand the bits and pieces of technology and technological terms they encounter. When faced with an article such as Mark Amerika’s, the reader must decipher what is important and try to understand the meaning behind it. It is a time when few things seem clear cut, and so experience becomes, in essence, a node within a network where the individual must decide what direction to go: follow the path that is most familiar, or venture into the unknown territory of cyberspace.

The exigencies of this situation stem from the constantly changing environment in which we live. Michael Joyce strives to create a story that changes every time you experience it, to write of the mind rather than experience in linear fashion, to produce something not fixed but representative of life as we experience it (Of Two Minds online). His purpose here seems to be to change the way we look at the world, to cause a change in how we experience literature, to mirror the workings of the mind. In his statement for the “Leo Tolstoy and Mankind at the Boundary of Millennia” conference, Joyce stated that we have made “enormous progress at the cost of our individual humanity . . . [thus] a writer’s hopes must reside in the continuity and variety of individual lives”(online). Carolyn Guyer suggests similar exigencies in “Along the Estuary” when she talks about how we come to coherence through the meshings of differences. She suggests that the ability to come to some kind of coherence when faced with such diversity is the most creative thing humans do (online). Her goal seems to
be to induce a change in the way we write, to be more representative of how the mind makes sense of and comes to some sort of coherence about all of the things we experience. In other words, she seems to want writing to be about the process of a story and to include everything leading up to the telling of the linear narrative. The underlying exigence that nearly all of the proponents of hypertext refer to is that of Roland Barthes' idea of the “pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user . . . the reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness” (S/Z 4). George Landow supports another exigence in his article "Hypertext and Intertextuality" when he suggests that the effect of this change is to “free the literary text from psychological, sociological, and historical determinisms, opening it up to an apparently infinite play of relationships” (online). All proponents hope to unite the reader and writer by allowing the reader to become an active participant.

The participants (or audiences) that need to be considered are only those capable of modifying the exigencies such as scholars, critics, and individuals that have the power to increase demand. However, for the most part, the true audiences are, as Roger Ridley suggest in “Books on the Web”, those individuals who have access to the fiction via the web. Another large portion of the audience is made up of those individuals who purchase the software out of curiosity. For the most part, however, the individuals needed to make the change, university professors, have had very little, if any experience with the computers outside word processing (Miall online).
This flows into Bitzer's idea of constraints on both the rhetor and the audience. The writers of hypertext have within their grasps the means necessary to produce the medium that they desire, however, this technology proves to be both a positive and a negative constraint. Through the use of hypertext, one can easily create links from one page to another, constantly changing the experience of the story through the click of a mouse. The problem is the advancement in technology. Many times, just when a writer has conquered one medium and produced a viable example of his new form of literature, a new way of doing things is introduced, and the old way is obsolete. Jeff Rothenberg, senior computer scientist at the RRAND Corporation discusses this problem: "the contents of most digital media evaporate long before words written on high-quality paper. And they often become unusably obsolete even sooner, as media are superseded by new, incompatible formats (how many readers remember eight-inch floppy discs?) (qt. Barth online). Many of the earlier versions of hypertext were produced on floppy discs that are, at the present time, still compatible with most computers. However, the preferred medium for those who are on the cutting edge is the zip disc. In the future, perhaps by next month, the floppy disc on which this novel exists may become obsolete. Robert Kendall, in "The Hypertext of Yesterday", discusses this issue in more detail,

Literary works often disappear without a trace, and preserving any text can be complicated by conflicting, incomplete, or inaccurate sources, not to mention the nuances lost as language and cultural context change over the years. Overall, however, posterity has been well served by the
medium of print and the institution of the library. With hypertext, the rapid encroachment of software obsolescence exacerbates traditional archival problems and poses some new ones. Can a hypertext endure indefinitely in a readable form while remaining faithful to the original work (online)?

Kendall goes on in his essay to discuss the steps that would need to be taken in order to ensure that the format could be transferred to the new technologies. He suggests that the new methods of hypertext using the Web form will aid in the ability to maintain the hypertext medium. However, in Joshua Quittner's article, Michael Joyce refers to the Web as a constraint to the writers of hypertext fiction in that: "the regrettable rump faction says we lost the hypertext movement when the web came along . . . No one knows yet how to make this popular medium . . . The Web is all edges and without much depth, and for a writer that is trouble" (online). These constraints can greatly hinder the modifications that the writers are trying to induce.

One of the most prevalent constraints for current writers of hypertext fiction is the newness of the programs designed to create the fiction. Technologically, the programs allow for endless links and therefore, the authors might feel compelled to provide what they propose at the cost of a consistent story by placing links that do not flow or that are placed within the story space to ensure the never ending story. This can cloud the meaning of the story by forcing the reader to distinguish between what lexias are of significance to the story line and what lexias have been placed in the network as fillers. As Joshua Quittner, in TIME
100: *Future Shocks Move Over* asks, "And who wants to wade through all the awful stuff that's certain to crowd out the brilliance?"

One of the principal constraints on the reader is the equipment itself. The advocates of hypertext fiction, including Robert Kendall and George Landow, admit in their essays that the computer puts a strain on the reader and that the printed text is more convenient (Writing for the New Millennium, The Definition of Hypertext online). It is hard to refute the hard fact that you can't curl up with a good computer.

Outside of the realm of technology lie the primary constraints on the reader. Among these constraints is that the linear story is embedded deep within our culture. As a culture, we have grown accustomed to the linear plot. We expect it, and we do not necessarily want the freedom to create our own story. If we wanted that kind of freedom, more of us would become writers ourselves. The issue of entertainment comes into play here and Quittner confronts this issue when he writes, "Entertainment should be . . . entertaining! Not work" (online). To many readers of hyperfiction, the process becomes more of a challenge to decipher the meaning than it is an entertaining experience. The author of "But is it Storytelling?" discusses the problems with trying to unite the reader with the tale: "[the act] usually leads to the same blighted spot: where all plot is lost and the only satisfying end is the off-switch" (online). This constraint is caused by the "poles-in-your-face" effect that Fauth refers to in his article.

While the hypertext format provides the reader with choices, these choices often become a constraint rather than an opportunity to explore. The constraint
on the reader, Fauth explains, is that “she is bound to have insufficient information to make a selection. She will be continuously wondering which link to choose, which link is the ‘right one’”. This, he says, “results in confusion” for the reader (online). Without the influence of the audience, the creators will not be able to modify the exigencies that they have alluded to.

The writers of hypertext have, however, created a system capable of producing the kind of literature they feel is imminent. The lexias (pages) are pieces of life that change with the readers choices. The hyperfiction does provide an endless story with no beginning, middle or end, thus making it virtually impossible for the reader to understand the ideas or realities of the original writer. Unfortunately, readers appear to have difficulty pinpointing even their own realities within the network. It is partially because of the negative reactions of a majority of the readers that the hypertext fiction will not bring about the end of books. The audience is not ready to give up books; it has been embedded within our culture for far too long. Nor is it likely that they will ever entirely desire the freedom hyperfiction supposedly allows to the reader to create his or her own path. John Barth states it best in the conclusion of his essay:

> Give us acid-free paper, a source of light, and a familiarity with our language, and we are in business for the long haul. Digitalized information, by contrast (including e-fiction), turns out to be only theoretically invulnerable to the ravages of time. The alarming fact is that the physical media on which it is stored, not to mention the software and hardware required to get at it, are far from eternal, either as items in
themselves or as modes of access...It is only slightly facetious to say that
digital information lasts forever – or for five years, whichever comes first
(online).

Although this form of narration is an important contribution to the literary world,
by no means does it have the power to replace the book as we have always
known in. In fact, herein is where the major conflict has occurred. When
advocates for the demise of the printed text began announcing the end of books,
they made a fatal mistake in assuming that the two mediums were intertwined in
some way that both could not flourish. They began playing king of the mountain
instead of proposing that hypertext fiction as a form of expression presented to
the world as a new way of looking at things. Assuming that the “new way of
expression” will cause the end of the old, is as obscure as saying that sculpture
will replace painting. Charles Deemer, refers to Sarah Smith’s essay in The New
York Review of Science Fiction in which she discusses the emergence of a new
form of expression: “It resembles those other strange places of narrative
beginnings: the play around 1585, the novel around 1735, the film around 1900.
The poets of virtuality, its playwrights and filmmakers, its readers, are emerging
now” (online). This quote suggests that hypertext fiction will have its place, not
as the king of the mountain, but along side the other mediums of expression.

It is necessary then, to distinguish between hyperfiction and what is
commonly referred to as “flatland text.” One of the biggest arguments set forth
by the authors of hypertext is the assertion that with this medium, it is possible to
break through the boundries inherent in the printed text. Among these is the
assumption that the authors of the flatland texts are pushing on the readers a set of values or beliefs that the reader has to accept. However, when we encounter a printed novel, we bring to it a set of beliefs and values that we will ultimately use to interpret the text. Barth discusses what readers are given by the authors of flatland text:

An accomplished artist is giving us his or her best shots, in what he or she regards as the most effective sequence – of words, of actions, of foreshadowings and plot twists and insights and carefully prepared dramatic moments. It's up to us to respond to those best shots with our minds and hearts and spirits and our accumulated experience of life and of art . . . the text before us is not a provisional version, up for grabs, the way texts in the cyberspace of a computer memory are, but rather the author's very best, what he or she is ready to be judged by for keeps (online).

Finding a concrete meaning within hyperfiction is virtually impossible. The author's views are not meant to be known, and the experience becomes completely different from the reading of someone's "best shot". The obvious differences of purpose are relevant in distinguishing these two mediums as different categories of expression.

Hypertext fiction also presents itself as allowing the reader to interact with the story, insinuating that the linear text does not allow for this interaction. However, it is apparent that all readers interact with the written text, to some extent more, or at least differently than they interact with the hyperfiction. Guyer, creator of
hyperfiction admits in an essay published in feed magazine on the web that to some extent, all readers interact with everything they read (online): however, it is apparent that she does not understand the extent to which the reader actually interacts and establishes his or her own perception of a work. Fauth expresses the extent of the interaction in his essay by admitting that the reader has to “accept the choices the writer made, like a visitor in an art gallery has to accept the painters’ choices of color, tone, perspective, motive, etc.” However, he goes on to explain the relationship that is established between the reader and the text: “lingering over certain sentences, rushing over others. Some images might resonate in his mind, triggering further images and memories that are the reader’s own. A complex relationship forms: the reader produces a reading, a version, a personal production of the text in her mind.” In this sense, all readings are individual and three-dimensional (online).

It seems that the advocates of hypertext fiction have forgotten the experience of returning to a book read previously in life and, having grown into, in a sense, a different person, ending the book with an entirely new interpretation. Miall discusses how language allows readers to form from the linear text, a multitude of experiences:

Forming a provisional interpretive schema, for example, then putting it on hold while other pathways are explored, only to be prompted later to return and revise it, or create a new schema that serves to reinterpret all that has been read so far. Moreover, the feeling, images, ideas, and memories that a reader brings to a text to aid in its interpretation are not
progressively absorbed or discarded; they remain active, informing the process of reading, and being in turn reshaped by the text (online).

The hypertext environment, he suggests, cannot replicate this natural process. On the contrary, hypertext fiction may hinder this process. Henry Joyce, when describing his writing strategy for *The Turn of the Screw*, offered advice on providing details, "Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough . . . and his own experience, his own imagination . . . will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars" (qt. Miall online). Given the necessity of the reader's imagination and input into creation of the narrative, hypertext fiction would not allow for the "progressive development of a specific mood and a set of issues personal to some degree to the reader" and would "undermine the reader's engagement with the primary text" (online). In this sense, the reader is not given the proper amount of time within a particular text to establish a relationship with its contents. The experience of hyperfiction, then, becomes quite different than that of a linear text, and so, should not be considered a substitute for it. They are two different entities, as Miall suggests: "Text as object (a pattern of words) . . . [and] text as communication (a reader's interaction with a text" (online). By establishing the similarities and differences in the forms of narrative in question, it is possible to deduce that the hyperfiction does not have the power to replace the printed narrative.

This is not the first time a new method of expression has proclaimed its power to replace the book. In fact, throughout history many mediums have been created that at the time seemed to have the power to replace the book. In the
sixties, the novel was considered "a moderately interesting historical phenomenon, of no present importance," and still others felt that the future of the narrative was on the big screen (Barth online). The television and home videos have also provided similar responses. Still, even though history shows that many have tried before and none have succeeded, the unsubstantiated fear remains. The book as we know it, is an important part of our culture that cannot be replaced by a medium that does not have the facilities to sustain the passage of time. Toward the end of his essay Miall describes the "throw-away culture" that the proponents of hypertext fiction invite:

> Given both the current poor state of distribution for such materials, and the potential obsolescence of the machines that support them, the island [of hyperfiction] is one that few readers are likely, and which will soon disappear beneath the waves of a technical progress driven by considerations remote from the interests of literary students. While it is possible that the latest technical developments, such as CD-ROM, will provide a firm platform for the foreseeable future, the auguries are not promising: technical advances in computing currently enjoy a life cycle of ten years or less (online).

With this information in mind, it is possible to conclude that the printed text is safe. However, there are many questions that need to be considered for a better understanding of the medium itself. Because of the uniqueness of the medium and because of the negative responses from the audience, one is left wondering why the authors chose to present their ideas in a fashion that is hard to interpret.
Through the application of narrative criticism, one can answer the following questions. What does this medium tell us about the author's view of the world? And what is the likelihood that this medium will be accepted into the mainstream audience?

How the authors of hyperfiction respond to this context and whether or not the audience will accept the medium can be decided by applying narrative criticism. Narrative criticism is rooted in the notion that storytelling in all forms is a very powerful and essential element of our culture that is used to interpret our surroundings and to help us make decisions in our every-day lives.

This method is appropriate because it allows for the exploration of the narrative within hyperfiction to discover how the rhetor views the world. It is also useful in deciding to what extent the audience will accept these views. Sonja Foss, in Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice, discusses how a critic might utilize narrative criticism: "A narrative, as a frame upon experience, functions as an argument to view and understand the world in a particular way, and by analyzing that narrative, the critic can understand the argument being made and the likelihood that it will be successful in gaining adherence for the perspective it presents" (400). To achieve this understanding, it is essential to focus not on the narrative itself, but on the form of the narrative in question.

This form of criticism looks into the meaning behind narrative, which is defined by Foss as "a way of ordering and presenting a view of the world through a description of a situation involving characters, actions, and settings"(400). Once the narrative of a particular artifact is analyzed by determining the essential
elements (i.e., setting, characters, narrator, events, relations, and themes), the critic decides which elements will be helpful in determining the questions at hand.

Walter Fisher's notion of the narrative paradigm can then be applied to the information gathered. Human beings, according to Fisher, are basically storytelling creatures and human decision-making is often determined by sharing stories. We, as humans, are given a set of stories from which we all must choose. Because we are rational creatures, according to Fisher, we have the facilities to make these choices. "Rationality is thus a function of the 'narrative probability' and 'narrative fidelity' of a given story – the degree to which the stories hang together, their ability to make sense of encountered experience, and whether they corroborate previously accepted stories" (434). This theory, then, provides the perfect opportunity to discover the rhetor's interpretation of the world and the audience acceptance of this interpretation. From this information it will be possible to determine if hyperfiction as the power to replace the printed text.

All aspects of the narrative are important in understanding how the author of Afternoon, A Story interprets the world in which we live. Afternoon is an accumulation of stories surrounding six main characters and their interactions with one another. The story functions on several levels. On one level, it is the story of a recently divorced man who fears he may have seen his ex-wife and son killed in an automobile accident he himself ends up dying in an accident himself. On another level, it is the story of a small group of individuals whose lives are more closely intertwined than the characters realize. We are also given
smaller, but still significant stories surrounding each of the character's lives and interactions with others.

The setting changes throughout the work with the reader's choices. At one point, we are given the main setting of the town in which the characters currently reside. It is winter, and we get a feel for the ice and the snow. Depending on the story line, however, sometimes it is summer and the setting is depicted as very hot. In other story lines we are given the setting of the individual character's life stories through flashbacks. In one lexia, we may be in the middle of winter and when we click on something in the text, we are suddenly taken to another place.

Most paper books utilize one narrator. Although there are exceptions, it is usually possible to know exactly who is telling the story. In this particular hypertext, however, it is sometimes difficult to know from whose point of view we are getting the story. The narrator is completely dependent on the choices we make as readers. The first time through the reading, we seem to have a general idea of who is telling the story. However, when we begin again, or take a different path, the narrator changes. We see the story in its entirety from the viewpoint of all of the characters involved if we take the time to read through it enough times.

There are six main characters in Afternoon: Peter, Nausicaa, Lisa, Lolly, Wert, and Desmond. The characters are developed through several strategies. We find out about the characters through their own dialogue, by other character's talking about them and through flashbacks into their pasts.
Peter, who seems to be the main character, is new to Cape Cod. He has only been there for three years and was brought to the town by Wert. He has a wife, Lisa and a son, Andy. Since moving to Cape Cod, he and his wife have separated and he has become involved with several women within his social circle. From what Peter tells us, he is a hopeless romantic and a poet who only works to be able to write. He is confused about his separation from his wife, Lisa, and is sexually involved with Lolly, Wert's wife, and Nausicaa. Through the relationships with these two women, we are given information about his personality. Their stories tell us that Peter is a sensitive character who is essentially naïve.

Wert, the man who hired Peter, is younger than Peter and is married to Lolly. He is having an affair with Lisa, Peter's wife, and Nausicaa, who works for him. We find out some of the information through his own dialogue. He is money hungry, he loves control and he is not afraid of anything. He is a womanizer who seems to live his life for the sole purpose of satisfying his own desires. Through the stories the other character's tell, we find out that Wert is a free spirit, constantly striving to be an individual. He has the earrings and met his wife while chasing after the flower children. He is the opposite of Peter, insensitive and hard.

Lolly, Wert's wife, is a psychiatrist who seems to always be testing the boundaries of her practice. There are many hints throughout the story that insinuate that she is bi-sexual. She was raised in Mississippi in an environment quite different from her husband. She is a very successful woman who is
independent and loyal. Although she seems to be a strong individual, we see through the stories that she and her husband have a silent understanding that involves their not acknowledging the obvious affairs that they both have. She can be nurturing at times and can turn on the men in her life in an instant.

Nausicaa is a former patient of Lolly’s who remains friends and has affairs with Wert, Peter, and Lolly. She is working for Wert on his new project, is older than they are and has led a rough life. She has been a prostitute, been arrested, and has been addicted to heroin. We see through the relationships that she has with the characters that she is a confidant to all the characters. They love her understanding and her ability to provide them with whatever it is they need sexually or mentally. However, while maintaining this level, she also seems to keep herself detached somewhat. She lets others love her but does not seem to return their love. She seems to see their affections as a game. She speaks of and is referred to as the “white tiger”.

Lisa’s character is seen primarily through the eyes of Peter. They seemed to have been in love for many years prior to their moving to Cape Cod. In his eyes, they had a perfect relationship. However, when Peter begins recalling details about their relationship, he finds that she was never really happy and that she had only conformed to the things he enjoyed to make him happy. He thinks that she hated sex, but we know that she is seeing a professor named Desmond. He thinks that she detests younger men, but we also find out that she is having an affair with Wert. She tells us that she loved the genius in Peter and that she still
loves to see parts of him in their son. Her character is never quite defined either through her dialogue or through the other characters.

Desmond is a less significant character whose involvement in the story seems minimal. Perhaps the fact that he is a professor of music lends to the attraction Lisa seems to have with genius. Peter sees Desmond as the only threat in his life.

Throughout all of the readings, the writer is always descriptive. We are given many poetic descriptions of almost every situation. The links often take the reader to a poem or metaphor that completely relates to each story as well as the hypertext itself. Many of the poems, metaphors and imagery are repeated several times, dependent on the reader, to provide insight into the true meaning of the text. For instance, when describing the character of Nausicaa, it is possible to link to a passage from “Garlands” by Adelaide Waner-Colombe. This passage sums up the character of Nausicaa:

“Though she be but a great anchor for this restless ship,
Still she probes the depths and tethers it to the slip.
Hers are the hands that grapple sand and mossy stones;
When storms howl, the long night’s vigil she stands alone” (published poet).

There are other instances of verses that seem to be representative of the work itself such as the passage from Anais Nin the novel of the future:
“There is a form of writing which is like the are of music. It can affect us through the senses directly without first Appealing to the intellect... In this it acts more like our life Experiences, which enter the body directly before we are able to Dissect them”(music).

These particular lexias are examples of the poetic qualities within the work itself. They are also indicative of the author’s need to explain his use of hypertext to present his fiction.

The main themes of the narrative are of particular importance in understanding the worldviews of the author. The first theme of this particular story is complexity of the world. Throughout history, we have been given linear stories that reflect an interpretation of the world through one person’s experience. We see only what is left after the author has made decisions as to what is needed to understand the plot. In Afternoon, A Story, the reader is given the whole experience. The setting changes dramatically from one screen to the next. This representation of setting can be interpreted as the complexity of our surroundings. Even though we may be fixed within a certain time and place, Afternoon, A Story, reminds us that at any given time, a variety of settings are possible depending on where you look.

Also lending to this theme of complexity is the extent to which the characters are explored. While reading a linear text gives the reader an idea of the main characters, hypertext goes further. Characters are seen in a variety of different
situations and are explored through all possible avenues. Not only to we get an idea of the characters' personalities through their dialogue, but we also see what other people think of them and how their pasts may have contributed to who they are. By giving the reader the whole picture, the author is showing that the individual has been misrepresented in the linear printed text and that all individuals are more complex than we originally think.

This deeper look into the characters is made possible through the use of narrators. Different narrators provide different views of the story and we choose to believe that the narrator is telling the truth. In hyperfiction we are given a variety of narrators that tell the story from various perspectives. The author's use of these narratives is his way of expressing the differences in interpretation of any given story. This lends to the idea of complexity.

The second theme of the narrative is that individual lives are intertwined to an extent far beyond what anyone imagines. In essence, this particular theme establishes that the author feels that the individual is a part of something greater. This is evident in how he establishes the relationships between his characters. The affairs and friendships within the narrative are explored to the point that the reader sees how each relationship affects the story in its own way and in turn, how it affects the other characters within the narrative. While the characters may not be aware of all of the relationships, these relationships affect their lives.

This interpretation of life as a constant interweaving of complex situations is evident in the narrative. It is also reflective of the computerized world in which we live. In our time, through the use of the Internet, it is possible to be in four
places at once, to meet a variety of individuals and to contribute to the larger story we call the web. Michael Joyce sees this new-found world as a reflection of the present state of our society and uses the tools allowed by it to present his fiction.

Unfortunately, this form of narrative, as life-like as it appears, does not fulfill the requirements for a "good story" according to Walter Fisher. The story lacks narrative probability because it lacks coherence. In order for the reader to be acculturated into the story, the reader must be able to understand what the story is about. Afternoon, A Story, precisely because of its representation of a complex world with interwoven individuals, becomes in itself a complex narrative difficult to understand. Jurgen Fauth discusses this complexity thoroughly in "Poles in Your Face: The Promises and Pitfalls of Hyperfiction". In this article, Fauth states that "if everything is middle, how do you know when you are done, either as reader or writer?" He goes on to discuss how the author might feel obligated to take the story in many different directions and that this urge to "overachieve", there will be "several nodes, and this means some will be superior to others. Some nodes might have been fitted in because the structure dictated them, not narrative need." What this means to the reader is that all of the nodes will "Ultimately . . . fall into one of two groups: Either it is good and interesting and important to the story, in which case it should be required and necessary that the reader read it, or it is a filler, inferior, meaningless, and pointless, in which case the author should make sure no one ever gets to see it." He refers to this as the "poles in your face" effect and infers that this effect is the cause of the lack in
"content and quality" in hypertext fiction (online). This need to provide a plethora of choices for the reader, indicative of the complexities of life, turns the hyperfiction into a complex representation that is hard to understand.

The reader is faced with so many choices, that it is almost impossible to know which word is the right word to choose to continue on a path that is expected or at least understandable. The idea of words that yield is also misleading. What this presupposes is that that reader has the ability to know which path to take. The process that leads up to this confusion is best stated by David Charney:

First, since readers must choose what to look at, they may never see all the "right" information, either because they cannot find it or because, for some reason, they fail to select it. Second, even if they do see the "right" information, they may see it at the wrong time. ... Third, readers may see a great deal of intrusive, irrelevant information that may skew their representation. Even if they recognize that some information they have read is irrelevant, there may still be adverse consequences of having spent time reading it. Finally, readers may lose a sense of the integrity of any given text in the network, since they may be unaware of crossing from one text to another..." (qt. Fauth online).

Hypertext fiction loses its appeal when the reader tires of trying to find the linear text within the vast opportunities.

The narrative would seem to fulfill the requirements, to some extent, of narrative fidelity because the experience of hyperfiction mirrors the reader's experiences in every day life. However, it becomes a rival story to a system that
is deeply embedded within our society -- the linear story. John Barth alludes to this in his article: "While much of our experience of life is of nonlinear character, an important portion of it turns out to be of quite linear character. We live and think and perceive and act in time, and time implies sequence, and sequence is what gives rise to narrative" (online). As a society, the linear story has become an important part of our understanding the world around us. The reader [of hypertext] is constantly searching for the linear path that “thousands of years of story-telling have taught us to expect” (“But is it Storytelling?). Until the authors provide the readers with a “good reason” to abandon the linear story, the readers will continue to search out the linear story.

Although hypertext fiction is a valid representation of life as experienced by the individual, it is unlikely that it will replace the printed text because it lacks coherence and does not meet the expectations of the reader. A move to change the way writers represent the world is a move to change a fundamental part of our society that does not seem to be ready to change.

Though the study of the narrative of hypertext fiction, it is possible to understand the reasoning behind the confusion adherent in the medium. What appears to at first be a series of misplaced pieces of stories, becomes a representation of the complexities of life and the interdependence that our society has on one another. It provides insight into the changing society in which we live and gives critics a solid foundation on which to create a better method to analyze this particular form of rhetoric. While its name −hyperfiction − implies that it is a medium to be judged alongside other examples of fiction, it is, in fact,
something completely different from the linear, printed text that we are used to. By understanding that the medium in which the narrative is presented is not just a tool that is used to present ideas, but an adherent part of the presentation itself, critics can move to produce a more efficient means of interpreting the narrative.

Through the utilization of Bitzer's notion of the rhetorical situation, one finds that hypertext fiction, although it satisfies the goals of the rhetor, does not satisfy the needs of the audience. The negative constraints on both the author and reader far outweigh the positive constraints, thus hindering the progress of the medium. Further, through the application of narrative criticism to determine the fidelity and probability of a specific example of hypertext fiction – *Afternoon, a story* – one discovers that although hypertext fiction provides a real-life experience, it does not possess the narrative probability needed to succeed in replacing the book. It becomes apparent then that those of us who love to curl up with a good book; those of us who cannot resist picking up a dusty book, its pages yellowed with age, just to smell its pages as we carefully run out fingers across the delicate words, need not fear hypertext fiction. We can safely continue reading and re-reading the printed texts we love knowing that for years to come our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren will be able to participate in something so dear to us – the discovery of books.
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