Appraisal of Reader's Role in Revolutionary Potential of Hypertext Fiction

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Abstract: One of the outstanding effects of development in technology is on literature; times when novels were read just through printed books have passed. By introducing electronic literature readers can experience a virtual reality and additional aesthetic pleasure in compare to printed texts. This paper puts forward that electronic literature and specifically hypertext fiction encourages readers to see writing in a radical sense as connecting one text to another and form a new composite. The cybernetic environment endows readers different roles to engage in a story and incorporate their identities toward fictional characters. Literary creativity needs to converge with computer and through by this way readers encounter various layers of meaning and can interpret a story without the author's interference. However, the problem is that with this structure, it is impossible for the readers to respond in a realistic normal way as they did in print technology because, the electronic authors create several paths to be followed. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how hypertext novel has empowered readers to take some of the roles historically played by authors. Recognition that modern ways of reading caused by introduction of the Internet and also connection between literature and science illuminate literary texts, make this paper an inevitable area of research.

1. Introduction

Readers are undergoing subtle, but important changes during postmodern digital literary era. These changes are directly related to the nature of hypertext and other electronic texts. Readers seem initially confused by the choices they are asked to make when they read hypertext literature, but their confusion quickly gives way to more animated mode of reading, where they read chunks of text for pleasure and seek links that would take them to explore much information. Thereby, this study has confronted the distinguishing position of the traditional and the contemporary reader in novels, which is a quite fresh argument. What is significant in this study is to provide the answer that the digital reader concretizes and reifies the story in a different manner from a traditional reader with the opportunity to enjoy multimedia elements in a hypertext fiction.

2. Hypertext fiction and readers' interactivity

Hypertext, especially hypertext fictions place readers in an environment where they have to read differently and perhaps more actively, than many of them have read before. It also permits levels of authorship without suggesting that one level is more important or worthy than others. Apparently, there seems to be a kind of inevitable change in the author's and reader's function and as Janet Murray points out that with electronic text, the "author" is procedural, like a choreographer, "who supplies the rhythms, the context, and the set of steps that will be performed" (Murray, 1997: 153). Therefore, it is considered that the reader alters the environment of the text through his or her participation by entering a digital environment and this kind of intervention in the reading of hypertext fiction is rather rare in more traditional narrative forms or printed novels. However, it is noteworthy that this study agrees with Murray's view that the reader of electronic text, and especially hypertext, is not experiencing authorship but the reader is experiencing agency (Murray, 1997: 126), and this is an intriguing point which shouldn't be ignored.

In fact, the tradition of printed novel privileges the author but the role of the reader is stronger in the majority of digital novels than it is in conventional fiction. The actualization of the work and utilizing the multimedia elements change the position of a reader to a role of a participant.

George Landow claims that in hypertext fiction, the functions of the reader and the writer become more deeply entwined with each other than ever before (Landow, 2006: 125). This is because this cyber genre promises a greater sense of "agency" and it allows the reader to challenge or contest the authorial role in a more immediate sense (Patterson, 2000: 76). Davis Bolter also asserts that hypertext fiction offers "a new literary experience in which the reader can share control of the text with the author" (Bolter, 2001: 122). This merging of the reader and the author effect on the

reader's response, and consequently, on a text. Furthermore, Stuart Moulthrop postulates that such texts create or at least aim for discursive intimacy and engagement, rather than the more traditional, modernist, mode of textual impersonality and entrancement (Moulthrop, 1997: 661).

Therefore, hypertext readers' experience a story of a novel differently as their fluidity in navigating events changes from reading to reading, from reader to reader. The hypertext novelists impulse readers to be independent users. Richard Lanham also has observed that digital media such as digitized novels and interactive narratives have no "final cut" (Lanham, 1989: 269). This indicates they have no singular, definitive beginnings, middles or endings, and no single, definite reading order is given priority over the others which exist alongside it. Contrary to our expectations based on reading print narratives, there is no single story and readings do not provide varying versions of this story or collection of stories. Similarly, Bolter has argued each reading generates or determines the story as it proceeds and there is no story at all but there are only readings, and the story is the sum of all its readings. Further, he states that each reading is a different turning within a universe of paths set up by the author (Bolter, 1991: 124-5).

2.1 Reader's response

In fact, what it means by analyzing the reader's role is to study how open to negotiation is reader's responses because hypertext fiction allows its readers moral and emotional judgments on the action of characters through their collaboration and thus offers a reader a particular pleasure. In addition, different genres result in different modes of text-reader interaction, and may result in different types of reader's involvement. In this regard, Louise Rosenblatt proposes, "Literature equals book plus reader" (Rosenblatt, 1960: 304). He adds that the reader, and the text are more analogous to a pianist and a musical score. But the instrument that the reader plays upon is he himself. His keyboard is the range of his own past experiences with life and literature, his own present concerns, anxieties, and aspirations. Under the stimulus and guidance of the text, the reader seeks to strike the appropriate key, to bring the relevant responses into consciousness. Out of the particular sensations, images, feelings, and ideas which have become linked for him with the verbal symbols, he creates a new organization. This is for him the story (Rosenblatt, 1960: 305). Therefore, readers are seen as breathing life into the texts they read in a creative effort nearly comparable with its author. The digital reader concretizes and reifies the story in a different manner from a traditional readers with the opportunity to enjoy multimedia elements in a hypertext fiction.

In this regard, Barthes also argues in *The Death of the Author*:

- a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures
- and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody,
- contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is
- focused and that place is the reader, not... the author. ...[T]o
- give writing its future... the birth of the reader must be at the
- cost of the death of the Author (Barthes, 1997: 148).

From the above discussion, this paper attains that readers of hypertext novels have an impressive story. They feel empathy for the characters, understand the causal chain they're tied, and along the reading, they tensely try to guess the next event in the novel. In fact, digital novels are more receiver-oriented. Murray defines the digital reader with ardent, or as she calls him/her, the "interactor."

The reader is a navigator, protagonist, explorer, or builder, [who] makes use of [a] repertoire of possible steps and rhythms to improvise a particular dance among the many, many possible dances the author has enabled. We could perhaps say that the interactor is the author of a particular performance within an electronic story system, or the architect of a particular part of the virtual world, but we must distinguish this derivative authorship from the original authorship of the system itself (Murray, 1997: 153).

Along these lines, Murray is reminding us that each time readers enter a hypertext Web, they create a "new" text, written by the choices they make as they travel through the Web. Landow also consistently reminds us that the text an interactor reads is not necessarily the text an author planned (Landow, 2006). This is an important concept for readers and writers because it reinforces the fact that readers and writers approach their tasks with purpose, and those purposes may not be the same. All this seems much like the ancient storyteller, who changes the text to fit the wishes of each audience. The audience and the storyteller (author) collaborate to create the narrative (Patterson, 2000: 78).

3. To be Conventional or Digital Reader

There is no clear distinction between text production and text reception in hypertext fiction, and the readers can decide where to begin their reading and where to end it. They choose their own path and thereby create their own story in the hypertext system. It should be repeated that an important functional feature of hypertext is hyper-reading with its ability to

grant reader a navigating mode and so as the name suggests the move structure of a text indicates a preferred way of organizing the text in order to realize a particular story/event in a plot. Therefore, the reader by creating a sequence of moves through which he/she read the novel will become a hyper-reader. On the contrary, readers of print narratives begin reading where the print begins on the first page of the book. Conventional readers, nonetheless, move more or less straightforwardly through printed novels like *Pride and Prejudice* or *Huckleberry Finn*. The reader's gradual progression from beginning to end follows a carefully scripted route which ensures that "the reader does indeed get from the beginning to the end in the way the writer wants him or her to get there" (Slatin, 1990: 871).

However, most hypertext narratives have no single beginning, for example, to read the hypertext novel like *10:01*, readers generally load the hypertext onto a PC or laptop and begin moving through the text by clicking on seat images or directional arrows or even by clicking on different times in the homepage which have been implemented by external links as well. Indeed, the most obvious difference between traditional reading and hyper-reading boils down to that of linearity; with hypertext reading being regarded as non-linear and traditional text reading being regarded as linear. In addition to reading mode which leaves the user in a traditional reader position with sequential reading, navigating mode allows the reader to navigate the narrative structure and actively construct his/her own reading path through one or several nodes.

Consequently, hypertext narratives encourage readers to shape the outcomes of the stories they read by the decisions they make in the reading process. Readers who read the digital narratives are totally engaged, and yet they are clicking on links and making choices as to how to proceed, and how to manipulate the story. In this way, the readers feel the power of the text. In order for that to happen, readers must write the text for them-selves, and in the reader's mind, the text shifts through previous experiences as the reader goes through the meaning-making process. In this sense, the reader is always central to the text.

As a result, this paper postulates that hypertext gives permission to readers to insert themselves into the meaning construction process and interpret or read a text in a way that is often different from what the author predicted. Readers engaging interactive narratives also have the option of limiting their textual experience to the pursuit of narrative strands, which intrigue them and the more links which each reader must confront in navigating through the narrative, the less singular and determinate the meaning of the hypertext narrative as a whole, since no single path through the text has priority over all others.

4. Conclusion:

Hypertext novel can be seen as involved in the construction of its readers. This new cyber-genre endows reader a different identity. In this position they would not accept the preferred readings which may be built into texts for them. For these readers optional ways of readings provide their responses to texts. Although readers can never hold a hypertext novel or feel its pages physically, they nonetheless, actually interact with the text far more tangibly than do readers of printed novels. By participating in the creation of the textual structure, the reader becomes both author and reader at the same time. And if the writing space is arranged in a way that the reader's choices can be fruitful, then the reader may give the new life to the text.

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