

# Quality in Digital Fiction

The readings of five works

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this master thesis is to explore the qualities of the new way for creating literature which is termed digital fiction. This literature is created with the computer and has to be read through the computer. The affordances of this medium are essential to experiencing digital fiction works. What makes this literature interesting is that it uses print literature techniques, but by "refreshing" them puts forward unique writing and reading strategies which could not have been readily realized with the print medium.

The manner in which I have approached this fiction has been through the analysis of five digital fiction works by focusing on the techniques and characteristics which make them qualitative works. Due to the fact that these works are diverse, I have employed various theories from print literature to those theories that account for the medium which has been utilized, the most important one being hypertext. The reader/viewer has to understand the medium in order to get an overall picture of the work and be able to interpret and enjoy it.

My readings have lead me to the following conclusions. It is not of importance whether the latest technology has been used, but the manner in which it has been used. For example, the best digital fiction works are those that manage to use their medium in a metaphorical manner in order to present the subject matter of the work. Moreover, in works that use pictures, animations, sounds and music in combination with words, it has been important to see the manner in which these modes fulfill, contradict or challenge one another while at the same time all of them together contribute to creating a coherent work of fiction. One important aspect has been to see the various manners in which each digital fiction involved me as a reader/viewer. In some occasions I had to choose which path to follow in the story. Sometimes I had to type answers in the screen and sometimes my breath was needed to assist the narrator in uncovering the story. I could even go the website that was created for the work and write my story or comment. There were also occasions in which I could just sit back and the story would unfold before my eyes without any effort from my part. These diverse strategies for creating fiction retain an element of surprise which can attract more readers and can increase the influence of digital fiction in the field of literature.

## Sammendrag

Formålet med denne oppgaven er å utforske kvaliteten av den nye måten å skape litteratur på som betegnes som digital fiksjon. Denne litteraturen er skapt ved bruk av datamaskin og må leses på en datamaskin. Mulighetene og begrensningene av dette mediet er viktig for å oppleve digitale fiksjonstekstene. Det som gjør denne litteraturen interessant, er at den bruker litterære teknikker fra bokmediet, samtidig som disse fornyes eller forhandles i møte med digital teknologi.

Måten jeg har nærmet meg dette feltet på, har vært gjennom analysen av fem digitale fiksjonstekster ved å fokusere på teknikker og egenskaper som gir dem bestemte kvaliteter. På grunn av at disse tekstene er så mangfoldige, har jeg tatt i betraktning forskjellige teorier fra trykt litteraturtradisjon til teorier som fokuserer på nye digitale medier, særlig hypertext som er det viktigste mediet. Leseren/seeren må forstå mediet for å få et helhetlig bilde av verket og for å kunne tolke og nyte det.

Mine observasjoner har ført meg til følgende konklusjoner. Det er ikke så mye av betydning om den nyeste teknologien blir brukt, men heller måten den blir brukt på. De beste digitale fiksjonstekstene er for eksempel de som klarer å bruke det digitale mediet på en metaforisk måte for å presentere temaet. Dessuten, i tekster som bruker bilder, animasjoner, lyder og musikk i kombinasjon med ord, har det vært viktig å se på hvilken måte disse oppfyller, motsier eller utfordrer hverandre, mens de sammen bidrar til å skape et sammenhengende verk av fiksjon. Det mest interessante har vært å se de ulike måtene digital fiksjon involverte meg som en leser/seer, bl.a. ved å måtte velge hvilke lesetier jeg ønsket å følge gjennom teksten. Noen ganger måtte jeg skrive svar på skjermen, og andre ganger var det nødvendig å puste for å bistå fortelleren i å avdekke historien. Jeg kunne selv gå til nettstedet som ble opprettet for verket og skrive min historie eller kommentar. Det var også anledninger hvor jeg bare kunne lene meg tilbake og la historien utfolde seg foran øynene mine uten noen innsats fra min side. Disse ulike strategiene for å skape digital fiksjon beholder et element av overraskelse som kan tiltrekke seg flere lesere og øke innflytelsen av digital fiksjon i litteraturen generelt.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Defining digital fiction

Digital fiction, even though has been around for more than twenty years now, is a relatively new kind of literature. This newness can serve as an allure for some readers but at the same time it can estrange other more traditional readers. The first ones are like adventurers who are always in search of new areas to explore. On the other hand, the latter might be more sceptic to the literary qualities of such works. I find myself to be in between, I enjoy challenges and new things but at the same time it is difficult to break away from the more “traditional” views about what literature is or should be like. Therefore, this master thesis seemed like a good opportunity to challenge some of those views and explore digital fiction which I will begin by presenting definitions of what it is, and then continue by explaining what is the main focus of this master thesis and why I have become interested in this field. As we will see from the definitions, digital fiction comprises works that are diverse which creates challenges when trying to interpret and analyse them and this is something that will need to be taken into consideration from the beginning.

Electronic literature, network fiction, literary hypertext, hypertext fiction, digital fiction are just some of the terms used to describe what N. Katherine Hayles (2008) calls “digital born” objects which she defines as: “...digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read in a computer” (p.3). This is a more general definition that can cover many different works like for example video games and works which contain only visual elements. David Ciccoricco (2007) uses the term “network fiction“ which he defines as the kind of fiction that uses hypertext in order to create narratives that can be read in different manners (p.4). He explains that: “Hypertext technology is a tool that allows users to create digitally mediated links between lexias of information; when I refer to hypertext, I am referring to the technology” (p.4). He also maintains that the reason why he uses the term network fiction and not hypertext is that he thinks that the latter cannot cover all the different kinds of works that have been created with the advancement of the new media (p.1). Astrid Ensslin (2007) on the other hand uses the term literary hypertext “as it may be considered *the* digital poetic form most akin to the book” (p.3). The same is maintained by Jane Yellowlees Douglas (2000) who

prefers using “hypertext fiction” instead of “digital narrative” because the former accentuates the nature of these works as continuations of the movement of “avant garde literature” (pp.6-7). Using the terms like “literary hypertext” or “hypertext fiction” stresses the similarity of digital fiction with print novels, something which can create obstacles when analysing works that have moved beyond the usage of words as the main mode, and which use images, audio files and animations and do not resemble books to the same degree as the first literary hypertexts. Due to the the fact that the works analysed in this master thesis use a wide array of different modes and techniques to tell stories, I found terms like hypertext fiction or literary hypertext constraining and descriptive of only few of them. Therefore I have used the term “digital fiction”, as it is a more encompassing and precise term. Digital fiction is defined by Alice Bell et.al (2010) as:

... fiction written for and read on a computer screen that pursues its verbal, discursive and/or conceptual complexity through the digital medium, and would lose something of its aesthetic and semiotic function if it were removed from that medium (para.13).

Ensslin (2007) clarifies in her book *Canonizing hypertext: Explorations and Constructions* that she will focus upon works that are viewed as “[literature] in its traditional sense of writing or script (litteratura)” (p.5). Defining literature even in the traditional sense is not simple, according to Terry Eagleton (2008) describing literature from the point of whether it is “fiction” or “fact” is not particularly enlightening. He agrees with the Russian Formalists and defines literature as a special manner of using language which elevates it from the ordinariness of everyday life (p.2). Like Ensslin, I will also focus upon works that are “literary”. But in digital fiction paying attention only to language like in print literature is not enough, we need to analyse and interpret the usage of other modes and the manner they integrate with words in presenting the world in a new light. Therefore we can use Eagleton's definition and broaden language to include the other modes that are used in digital fiction. It is worth mentioning that I will not include installation pieces, locative narratives, or generative art.

The first work of digital fiction is considered to be Michael Joyce's *Afternoon: a story* (1990) which started circulating in 1987 but was not published in its entirety until 1990. This work is what is known as hypertext fiction (or literary hypertext) in the beginnings of digital fiction.

This field has undergone changes with the development of the internet and thus the terminology which has been used for analysing and interpreting hypertext fiction does not cover every aspect of this new literature. This move has not been undergone without criticism, among others Robert Coover (1999) has voiced his doubts about the existence of “serious” literature in the domain of the internet.

In terms of new serious literature, the Web has not been very hospitable. It tends to be a noisy, restless, opportunistic, superficial, e-commerce-driven, chaotic realm, dominated by hacks, pitchmen and pretenders, in which the quiet voice of literature cannot easily be heard or, if heard by chance, attended to for more than a moment or two. Literature is meditative and the Net is riven by ceaseless hype and chatter. Literature has a shape, and the Net is shapeless (para.22).

Despite the scepticism voiced by Coover, we can see that field has been expanding and moving beyond the hypertext to explore new techniques and new ways of telling stories by using the affordances of the internet. Many critics now don't complain about this change which happened around 1995 (Hayles, 2008, p.7), but about the fact that digital fiction is still a hidden road that is known only by a certain class of academics and in certain circles. Markku Eskelinen (2008) in his paper *Electronic literature without a map* laments the lack of influence that this literature has and the lack of interest for this field.

Compared to many other cultural niches, there are neither crossover successes attracting wider audiences, nor popular forms and genres of electronic literature. This condition situates electronic literature in a position similar to various avant-garde movements, although without the latter's cultural impact and influence (para.3).

According to Ciccoricco (2007) writing about the field of “network fiction” is followed by a certain insecurity due to the fact that is considered as new by critics of print literature and if I may also add by readers of fiction. Whereas for people that have been studying and researching in this field it is not new and futuristic since it has been developing for more than two decades. He maintains that “on a metacritical level network fictions exploit the digital environment to reanimate certain aspects of reading and writing” (p.191). It is particularly this activation of the traditional literary aspects which makes this fiction fascinating to explore.

## 1.2 Research questions

In this master thesis I will explore the aspect of quality in digital fiction. Special attention needs to be paid to the literariness of these works, the manner in which technology has been used and how the different elements communicate and work together in creating works as complex and diverse as the ones included in this master thesis. By looking at the works that are considered as the masterpieces of digital fiction, I will try to do this by “showing, not telling”. This principle that is given as advice to fiction writers is very useful here because it would be difficult to show quality on a purely theoretical level by making lists of characteristics or techniques which a good work needs to possess. On the other hand by analysing and interpreting these works I can show with examples why they are worthy of our attention.

Electronic Literature Organization in 2001 when giving the award for the best works in this field have put forward some criteria that had to be fulfilled and these will be of help as orientation points when answering the questions about quality.

- Innovative use of electronic techniques and enhancements;
- Literary quality, understood as being related to print and electronic traditions of fiction and poetry, respectively;
- Quality and accessibility of interface design;

(Electronic Literature Organization, 2001)

While trying to answer the question about what is quality when we talk about the specific works I anticipate that there will be other issues that will have to be addressed, some of which are the manner in which the new technology uses the old techniques of storytelling, whether these works have developed a new type of literariness, what role does the medium play in the manner in which it presents the content. How are images, sounds and other modes used to accentuate the story. Other questions regarding difficulties and gratifications that the reader might encounter en route will be of interest because a good digital work is supposed to be both challenging and at the same time pleasing, otherwise the reader might not continue reading it. This is a particular challenge in digital fiction because many of these works have unique

navigational strategies which the reader needs to get acquainted with before starting the actual reading and despite the fact that some works might share certain elements they still have to be innovative in order to stand out (and fulfil one of the ELO criteria). The best level of complexity is the one that we as readers can cope with, as Willie van Peer (2008a) has put it when he wrote about print literature.

...we are cognitively wired to enjoy modest levels of complexity. Too little complexity leaves us bored, whereas too much complexity will baffle us. Therefore complexity is not just a subjective choice of a few critics or scholars, but is a part of our cognitive emotional make-up (pp.10-11)

Digital fiction poses other challenges when it comes to studying and analysing it and these are connected with finding a theoretical body that takes into consideration its various aspects. Since this kind of literature combines many fields within itself, we cannot expect to have a clearly stated set of theories ready for use. Therefore this thesis is more of an adventure than a mapped out journey and this is the reason that it is at the same time exciting and daunting.

### **1.3 The background for choosing this topic**

“For those of us interested in the present state of literature and where it might be going, electronic literature raises complex, diverse and compelling issues” (Hayles, 2008, p.43).

I have always been interested in literature, particularly English literature since I have studied it in the bachelor level. I think that this new manner of creating fiction works is something that I would like to explore by both reading/viewing and trying to explore the techniques and characteristics that make them unique. The World Wide Web creates an opportunity for everybody to express their creativity in different ways, so it is important to start a discussion on the aspect of quality of these works and be able to talk about why some works are better than others and what makes them better. While print literature has an established history and its classics have withstood the test of time, digital fiction lacks this and therefore to try to explore the issue of quality and to try to answer questions about it seems a practical and an interesting endeavour.

## **2. Presentation of the three generations of digital fiction and an outline of means of analysis**

“...while it may be difficult to define literary quality in principle, it is not so difficult to demonstrate it in practice” (van Peer, 2008b, p.25).

As mentioned previously, the question about quality in digital fiction will be tackled from a practical point of view by using specific works as examples. The theory will be used as a tool for analysing and interpreting these works in order to reach to conclusions about the quality of each separate work chosen to be included in this thesis. Interpretation according to van Peer (2008a) is closely related to evaluation (p.7).

I will use the views and analysis of some of the most famous critics such as Jane Yellowlees Douglas (1994; 2000), Espen Aarseth (1997), Michael Joyce (1997), Jill Walker (1999), Marie-Laure Ryan (2001; 2006), Jay David Bolter (2001) Scott Rettberg (2001; 2005), Anja Rau (2001), Raine Koskimaa (2004), N. Katherine Hayles (2005; 2008), George P. Landow (2006), Astrid Ensslin (2007), David Ciccoricco (2007), Alice Bell (2010) among others as groundwork for my analysis.

The practice of analysing individual works that is applied in this thesis is done in order to capture the various elements, techniques and aspects of the particular works and therefore my critical analysis is built upon different approaches for studying literature. This is done because criticism cannot be built completely upon theory, as Ann Jefferson and David Robey (1986) claim: “The machinery of theory cannot be wheeled on as a substitute for criticism, which alone is capable of picking up the nuances and the particular idiom of the work of a given writer (p.21). I have used concepts developed by the Russian formalists who have contributed in the field of “narrative techniques” with terms such as “defamiliarization” which plays an important role in determining what the concept “literary” means (Hawthorne, 2005, p.171). The question regarding literary and non-literary “nature” of works is a much debated one, but one which I will not go into here because it is not the scope of this thesis to answer it. The close reading method of the New Critics who have focused on particular passages of novels and have analysed them in detail by taking into considerations things like narrative technique,

characterisation, theme, symbolism (Hawthorne, 2005, p.171) has also been applied. Moreover, the manner in which I have approached the study of digital fictions goes well with their claim that evaluation and interpretation should be used together when we study literature (Robey, 1986, p.90). I have also used approaches which take into consideration the extrinsic elements such as the socio-cultural approach which places importance in the understanding of sociological and cultural background of the writer and his/her time in order to understand and interpret the subject matter of the work (Hawthorne, 2005, p.174). The feminist and queer theories which have focused upon the interpretation of works of literature from their specific points of view. Feminist critics have lamented the domination of literary works by white male writers who represent women as subordinate to men. While the queer theorists have focused upon challenging the presentation of sexual orientation and “gender divisions” in writings of famous authors and in the interpretations of literary works by white male critics (Hawthorne, 2005, pp.180-182). The “nature” of the work determined the literary approach to be used, for example in the analysis of Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork girl*, it is important to stress the specific feminism which is put forward by Jackson. Whereas in *These waves of girls* the queer theory plays a role in the interpretation of the work. The interpretations and evaluations of digital fiction presented in this thesis, despite being built upon theories and other critics' views are also marked sometimes by subjective and personal opinions which of course can be challenged and contradicted by other people, but which nevertheless I have tried to exemplify and elaborate as extensively as I was able to.

In addition to literary theories and approaches, in digital fiction it is important to account for the technology that is used in creating these works and accounting to what degree the medium is incorporated as an indispensable part of the narrative. These are the hypertext theories which account for the structure of works built upon the hypertext technology. A theory that is useful for the close reading of the multimodal works is Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's (2006) semiotic approach to multimodality. Despite the fact that their multimodal theory is not directly connected to literature, they offer ways of interpreting images and other modes of communication of texts in general and these can be used as tools in the interpretation, analysis and evaluation of the formal and semantic values of images, sounds and other modes used in digital fiction.

Ensslin (2007) and Hayles (2008) have divided literary hypertexts or electronic literature in three generations: the first generation which is called the hypertext generation (uses mostly words), the second generation, hypermedia or multimodal works (which make extensive use of multimodality of the internet) and the third generation (which is put forward by Ensslin), the cybertext generation (which is comprised of works which use the latest technology) (Ensslin, 2007, p.21-24; Hayles, 2008, p.7). I have chosen two works for the first two generations and one for the third generations which I will present more extensively below.

## **2.1 The first generation**

### **Hypertext fiction**

The works that have received most attention are the works of the first generation, also known as the hypertext generation. Michael Joyce's *Afternoon: a story* (1990) and Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork girl or, a modern monster* (1995) are the two works that will be used as representatives of this generation. The former is considered to be the first work and the latter the epitome of hypertext fiction. Many critics have written about these two works and in addition there are numerous books about hypertext theory in general and hypertext fiction in particular which will be used to try and find out the characteristics of these masterpieces and what makes them such. Taking into consideration the attention that these works have received it is not so difficult to find analysis and appraisals written about them. One of the main means of analysis is going to be describing their hypertext structure and establishing the manner in which the medium is used and how the form, content and medium are integrated into one coherent fiction work.

In a broader sense the term hypertext is used to describe a text which is comprised of small chunks of text which are called lexias or nodes (terms which are going to be used interchangeably throughout this thesis) interconnected by links which the reader visits by clicking on them. This type of text is not an innovation that came with the development of the modern technology, books, articles, essays have always used annotations, footnotes which the reader has to read in order to get fuller understanding of the main text (Landow, 2006, p.3).

According to Landow (2006), the technology has enabled these elements of a text to become more compact and part of the same space, thus creating a more unified text (p.4). Hypertext fiction, on the other hand presents a way of using this technology in order to create works of fiction (Bell, 2010, p.1). Links are the most important element of the hypertext which play a more important role than moving from one node to another. Jeff Parker (2001) calls links “from the reader's perspective, a whole new literary joy” whereas from the writer's point of view a link is a tool that is used in the same manner as “other stylistic and formal tools” (para.2). While reading a book most often the turning of pages has no meaning, when reading a hypertext the clicking and the act of traversing from one lexia to another is more than “merely a connector, a glorified page to turn” (Parker, 2001, para.4). According to Parker the link is “an empty node” which we must traverse in between two “full nodes” and the reader must fill this empty space by reflecting upon its meaning: “When a reader clicks/interacts with a hypertext and thus moves through that landscape, that reader, if only for a second, is forced to consider his teleportation” (para.7). Scott Rettberg (2001) on the other hand maintains that the link is not merely a “joy” as Parker maintains but it is also a divide between the “writer's intention” and “the reader's experience” which is marked by what he calls “blind negotiation” (p.7). This means that the reader has to trust the writer and understand his intentions, and in return the writer has to believe that the reader will be able to make sense of the gap between the nodes. This process according to him can be a source of “frustration as well as one of play” (p.7). Rettberg further claims that the link rewards the reader who is not afraid to take risks and at the same time it can upset the reader who is more “traditional” who does not want to be distracted from the contemplative process of reading a work of fiction (p.13). Therefore since contemplation is a very important aspect of literature in both print and digital form, the writer needs to find a middle ground and offer the pleasure of linking together with the possibility of experiencing a text which gives the reader the pleasures of “‘immersive' reading experience” (p.14).

A completely successful hypertext would appeal both to readers interested in the intentional puzzles of linkage, the pleasures of transaction, as well as to readers for whom the link is secondary to the pleasures of the text as a holistic contemplative experience. (Rettberg, 2001, p.14).

Hypertext fiction works have been described and interpreted varyingly by different critics and

they are divided into two waves. I will try to briefly present the main claims of both waves in order to consider their advantages and drawbacks and the manner in which these views can help us in reading and interpreting the works presented in this thesis.

The first wave theorists viewed hypertext as a liberation of the reader: “...hypertext does not permit a tyrannical, univocal voice” (Landow, 2006, p.36). Landow views hypertext as the realization of the text that was imagined by poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida, who wrote about textual openness, intertextuality, the loss of writer's authority and the empowerment of the reader (p.53). The same line of thought was developed by Coover (1992) who maintained that in hypertext the writer and reader work together in weaving the story.

Hypertext reader and writer are said to become co-learners or co-writers, as it were, fellow-travellers in the mapping and remapping of textual (and visual, kinetic and aural) components, not all of which are provided by what used to be called the author (para.4).

Hypertext fiction is termed as “interactive fiction” by critics such as Bolter (2001) who asserted that hypertext questions print forms and our understanding of the concept of literature (p.122). This is done according to him by offering the reader different points of view on a limited number of events and by giving the reader the choice of which narrator he or she wants to follow and which path of the story he/she is more interested in (p.123). This is why Douglas (2000) calls hypertexts “fluid” because the reader every time he/she is reading a hypertext can interpret events and episodes on a different manner depending on the path followed (p.16).

The first wave was marked by an overly enthusiastic view on hypertext which has emphasised the fact that the reader can choose any path he/she desires and thus feel that he/she has a higher degree of control compared to reading a book. This view has been widely criticized by Aarseth (1997), who maintained that the hypertext actually confines the reader more than the book itself. While with the book we can open whichever page we want and skip paragraphs, when reading hypertext we need to follow links that the writer has organized and we can only read what the author wants to show us (pp.77-78). He also rejects Landow and the first-generation's “poor translation” of poststructuralists terms such as “links”, “network” because according to him they do not translate accurately in hypertext: “...identical signifiers do not

guarantee identical meanings” (p.84).

Ilana Snyder (1998) also contradicts what she calls “grandiose claims” about hypertext and how it has changed the way we read and communicate. To her these claims are exaggerated and make it seem like technology by itself can influence society and culture, this is what critics refer to as “technological determinism (p.133): “No technology...can guarantee any particular change in cultural practises simply by its 'nature' “ (p.140). Snyder (1997) sees the reader of a hypertext as moving inside a “predefined matrix of possibilities” and she does not see in principle a big difference between reading a hypertext and reading a book because we are still faced with one screen (node) at a time (p.95). On the other hand, she does not deny that the reader has some degree of freedom which stretches not only to creating meaning from the text, but also to the form of the text. The latter is supplied by the writer so we are still to a certain degree under his/her grip (p.97). Snyder presents a more balanced view on hypertext, while she does not deny its “powers”, she is careful not to inflate them with claims which strike us as unrealistic or as exaggerations.

Hypertext with its many possible readings (paths) challenges the reader who tries to build a plot and challenges endings in the text. For example open-ending is a feature of both modern and postmodern literature, but in hypertext it is taken further because we as readers are not able to tell whether we have read all the nodes: “It is up to the reader to decide how, when and why the narrative finishes (Snyder, 1997, p.100). This is easier said than done because sometimes readers do not make conscious choices due to lack of information about how to proceed or which links to follow (Bell, 2010, p.12). Sometimes readers feel lost and can't make sense of the text due to intricate navigational structures and when it comes to agency Anja Rau (2001a) maintains that some hypertexts intentionally decline the reader's attempt to make sense of the text and she calls this “death of the reader” (para.21). This is a twisting of what was maintained by first wave critics of hypertexts and opens up for different interpretations of the “freedoms” offered by hypertexts. Nevertheless, this is not to say that Rau thinks that reading hypertext fiction is worthless, on the contrary she maintains that:

If you want to enjoy reading a text that deals smartly with life in a modern computerized world as well as with possibilities and limitations of writing and reading in the digital medium, reading or re-reading a hyperfiction promises to be as entertaining as it is

enlightening (Rau, 2001a, para.46).

While I can agree that the claims of the first-wave hypertext critics sound pompous, they do open up for a new way of thinking about hypertexts in general which cannot be dismissed completely and which were probably developed in order to attract attention to these new texts. On the other hand, the second-wave critics make us more critical to such texts, thus making it possible to develop a more balanced position. Some of the questions which are worth exploring when analysing hypertext fictions are: how does hypertext use print literature qualities and how does it modify them? Do we experience an empowerment of the reader, or the further empowerment of the author? Is there an intervention of the reader on the text or the frustration of the reader by the text? Do we have freedom of choice or do we just follow a default reading?

## **2.2 The second generation**

### **Multimodal works**

In comparison to the first generation of digital fiction, the second has a less developed body of theoretical work dedicated specifically to it. While the first generation is mainly comprised of words, the second generation in addition to words uses other modes such as sounds, music image and videos. The level of multimodality varies from one work to another and even though some of them might be organized by using hyperlinks, there are others that are more linear and resemble more videos that can be viewed with minimum intervention from the reader. The two works that have been chosen to be analysed for this generation are Caitlin Fisher's *These waves of girls* (2001) which is a hypermedia fiction and Kate Pullinger, Chris Joseph and participants' *Flight Paths* (2007-2009) called "a networked novel".

*These waves of girls* has won the Electronic Literature Organization Award of 2001 for best fiction and this is the main reason for including it here. Two articles which have opposing views whether this work deserved this prize are going to be used as building blocks for my critical analysis and by contrasting them I will try to see which aspects of the work they point out as qualitative and which ones as less valuable and the reasons for doing this. These two

articles are: Anja Rau's (2001b) article *Web/Fiction/Design: A brief beta-test of this year's winner of the ELO Awards*, Caitlin Fisher's *These Waves of Girls* and Raine Koskimaa's (2004) *These waves of memories: A hyperfiction by Caitlin Fisher*. While Rau maintains that the weak points of this fiction are its limited use of technological affordances and its deficient programming, Koskimaa defends the shabby interface by claiming that it should be interpreted as a meaning making strategy. These are interesting points which could be useful in the discussion of quality not only about this particular work but also digital fiction in general. One important issue is what do we put more weight into, the literary or the technological aspect in the evaluation of the works of digital fiction? Since it is literature we are talking about, should we place more importance on the literary than on the technological aspect?

*Flight paths* on the other hand was created as a collaborative project which deals with the subject matter of a stowaway who dies while trying to reach the West. The reason for choosing this work is that is very different from the ones mentioned so far in that its reading path is linear and simple. The work combines words, sounds, music, videos, images in a very haunting way to presents us with the characters and draw us into their stories. One of the dangers of choosing a work like this is that it hasn't been as widely analysed by critics as the previous ones and this makes it harder to call it a masterpiece on the same level. On the other hand it will open up for new horizons of analysis because it is a collaboration project, it involves a different reading strategy than the ones mentioned above and also it has a higher degree of multimodality.

One of the main theories that I will use in the analysis of these works is the multimodal theory for analysing texts as developed by Theo van Leeuwen (2005), Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006), Gunther Kress (2010) and David Machin (2007). As Ruth Page (2010) puts it this is done because “we need to reconfigure narrative theory and analysis in such a way that the verbal resources are understood as only one of many semiotic elements integrated together in the process of storytelling” (p.3). The use of many modalities makes the works more complex not only for the readers but also for the critics and therefore quality in digital fictions cannot be determined by focusing only upon their usage of language because there are other elements which are essential to it: “Expressing something verbally or visually makes a

difference” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.2). It is not the scope of this section to account for all the aspects of multimodal analysis, I will present the main points and then use and elaborate those that are more relevant in each analysis.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have built up their theory of multimodality by placing it in the tradition of social semiotics, focusing especially on the linguist Michael Halliday. Semiotics, a field developed in linguistics, has been appropriated by other fields in order to account for structure and meaning. Its focus is upon “signs” and how they are created: “We will be discussing forms ('signifiers') such as colour, perspective and line, as well as the way in which these forms are used to realize meanings ('signifieds') in the making of signs” (p.6). According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) the making of signs is a motivated process and that each “sign-maker” relates particular forms with particular meanings by focusing on the message that he/she wants to put forward (p.8). van Leeuwen (2005) prefers the term “resource” to signs because with the former it is emphasised that meaning depends on the context and it is not determined beforehand (p.4). According to Kress (2010), “the social-semiotic theory of multimodality” offers explanations for both the process of sign making and of the materiality of the modes (p.105). He points out that while previously the word was the main mode of expression, it is now the image that has become more integrated in the text and gained more importance. Therefore according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory we need to pay equal attention to all the modes.

In the analysis of a composite or multimodal texts (and any text whose meanings are realized through more than one semiotic code is multimodal), the question arises whether the products of the various modes should be analysed separately or in an integrated way: whether the meaning of the whole should be treated as the sum of the meanings of the parts or whether the parts should be looked upon as interacting with and affecting one another (p.177).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) wanted to create a framework in which we can speak of words and images (and other modes) as “an integrated text” and not separate them as distinct and unconnected elements (p.177). And when we talk about such composites, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) point out to three important features: informational value, salience and framing. Informational value explains the organization of elements and the meaning of the different organization patterns. Salience points out to the characteristics of emphasising one

or more elements which accounts for their importance. The last one accounts for the usage of frames in order to present certain elements as connected to one another if put within the same frame and others as disconnected if they are represented as being outside the frame (p.177).

When we talk about placement of different modes, Kress and van Leeuwen have provided us with the formula left-right, top-bottom, centre-margin. Each of these positions endows an element with meaning: for example those that are placed on the left are given (something familiar, something we know), whereas the elements placed on the right are new (something we are not familiar with) (pp.180-181). Top-bottom: this means that the element placed on the top is “ideal” whereas the element placed on the bottom is “real” (p.186). Centre-margin: the elements placed on the centre are more important than the ones placed on the margin (p.196). Digital fiction works do not follow these organizational structure as much as the multimodal texts analysed by Kress and van Leeuwen and therefore the information value based upon the placement of modes is of little importance in digital fiction analysis.

On the other hand, salience will influence how we view elements, because those that are more salient will draw more attention and therefore will “create hierarchy of importance among elements, selecting some as more worthy than others” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.201).

The last element is framing which is used to point out that the elements that are put in a frame are presented as “a single unit of information” (p.204). van Leeuwen (2005) has developed a terminology for the different degrees of framing that can be found in multimodal texts: “segregation” (the text and the image are separated and should be interpreted as different); “separation” (two elements are separated by a space but still should be seen as having something in common while also having differences among each other); “integration” (elements are integrated with one another); “overlap” (the frames can be penetrated so the elements can occupy each other's space); “rhyme” (the elements have certain features in common); “contrast” (the elements have different features) (p.13).

In their analysis of images, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) place importance on the participants that are presented in the images which are called “represented participants” and those which view or create the image which are called “interactive participants” (p.48). The manner in which the represented participants communicate with the viewer depends from many aspects. One of these aspects is the gaze, whether the represented participant is looking

directly at the viewer or not is interpreted following the linguist Halliday as “demanding” (if the participant is looking at the viewer) and “offering” (if he/she is not). In the “demanding” pictures the participant is attempting to establish a relationship with the viewer, whereas in the offering the participant does not have a relationship with the viewer and the latter is invited in the participant's life as an observer (pp. 116-119). Another aspect is whether the “represented participants” are presented in close shot, medium or long shot and this can be interpreted in the same manner we interpret the social relations, the closer we stand to someone the more intimate the relationship and the farther the participant is presented, the less intimate is the relationship (p.124). Also the angle from which the viewer is presented in relation to the represented participant is of importance. If we are presented as looking directly at the participants, then we are more “involved” with them, whereas if we are looking at them from an angle, then we are “detached” from what is represented (p.136).

Another important aspect is “modality” or the degree in which the images have been changed or manipulated in order to represent the reality as seen by the creator of the image (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.158). The manipulation can be done through many different elements like colour, depth, illumination, presenting all the details or lack of such presentation (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, pp.160-162).

Literature by trying to make us see the world around us in a new light might use different techniques than advertisements and movie posters which make up most the material of Kress and van Leeuwen's examples. Machin (2007) stresses that we read images based upon other knowledge and not so much on the internal characteristics of images (p.172). This is not to say that this theory is not useful to a certain degree, but only that it must be used critically and bearing in mind that while language has “constructed meaning” which is created through grammar, and “composite meaning” based on our experiences and interpretations of the world (Sacs as cited in Machin 2007, p.185). In pictures we can maintain that we have only “composite meaning” which means that we read pictures based upon connotations that the specific image awakens in us (Machin, 2007, p.185).

Connotation and denotation are important in the reading of images also according to the famous semiotician Roland Barthes (1977). Just like words have denotative and connotative meanings, Barthes thinks that we should look at the image in the same way. On the first level

the image is seen only for what is presented in it (pp.39-40) and on the other hand connotation is what kind of idea the specific image is projecting (p.42). He makes it clear that the first level can never be reached in a pure manner because when interpreting images we always project our ideas and the ideas imposed to us by our culture (p.42). Machin (2007) by using Barthes maintains that image makers should use “carriers of connotation” (p.26) if they want to bring forward a particular meaning and these are: poses, objects, settings and photogenia (photographic style) (p.27). Each of these elements and the combination of them can put forward a specific meaning which was in some way intended by the person who made the image.

While Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) have focused mostly on images, words, colour, typography and their relations, they maintain that some of the same models of analysis can also be applied to moving images (p.258) which are actually quite common in the second and third generation of digital fiction. Moreover, the multimodal theory that has been presented here needs to be supplemented with theories on music and sounds and other modes depending on the work we are analysing. Despite its limited usage for digital fiction, it is still an important tool for analysing these works because it makes us more aware of the elements presented with the images and provides us with a terminology for discussing and interpreting them.

## **2.3 The third generation**

### **The cybertext generation**

The third generation is the one that is the most recent and therefore there are fewer works to choose from. It is characterised as the fiction that uses the latest technological achievements and in which the technology takes control of the reading process by limiting the amount of time we have before the text changes and morphs before our eyes. The term “cybertext” which Ensslin (2007) uses to name the third generation of hypertext fiction is coined by Aarseth (1997) who is interested in the technological aspect of texts and describes the manner in which “dynamic texts” are shaped by their medium (p.5). According to him: “The concept of cybertext focuses on the mechanical organization of the text, by positing the intricacies of the

medium as an integral part of the literary exchange” (p.1). According to Aarseth's point of view even the first and the second generations of digital fiction could be described by this term. On the other hand Ensslin (2007) puts in this category works which are characterised by “autonomously moving text, which appears, disappears, vanishes, expands, diminishes and wanders across a highly interactive user interface” (p.110).

The work that I will use as illustrative of this generation is Kate Pullinger, Stefan Schemat and Babel's (a.k.a Chris Joseph) *Breathing wall* (2004). The reason for choosing this work is its peculiar usage of technology due to the fact that the parts of this work entitled “Night-dreams” are controlled by the rate of the reader's breathing measured by a microphone. The “Day-dreams” once started cannot be stopped, the words and sounds continue changing without a possibility for us to control them in any way. It is possible for us to read the same node by clicking on the numbers below the screen which represent the number of screen changes but we cannot pause or stop them. Due to this characteristic and its usage of the experimental software Hyper Trans Fiction Matrix which enables the work to measure the “readers respiratory mechanism” (p.112), Ensslin (2007) calls this work an example of “physio-cybertext” (p.111). It is interesting to analyse these aspects and the manner in which they influence the content of the story.

## **2.4 “Extended analytical criteria”**

...for those of us who have a keen interest in the nature of literary texts themselves, the question in what way formal and semantic elements of the text may contribute to positive or negative evaluation in an intriguing one (van Peer, 2008a, p.3).

van Peer (2008a) maintains that we can create an objective canon of best works and describe criteria that are extensive, but which also take into consideration the historical and cultural circumstances (p.12). Print literature has shown this is possible because we can clearly talk about works that are masterpieces and to a certain degree account for the aspects which make them such. Even though van Peer writes about print literature it is not difficult to understand that the same can be achieved in digital fiction. Nevertheless, the latter posits us with issues such as the role of the medium and its affordances in the overall evaluation of the works.

Ensslin (2007) when writing about the canon of literary hypertext disagrees with such critics

that maintain that we need a completely new theory and criticism in order to deal with the growing body of works in literary hypertext: "... I take the view that hypertext does not require a new form of criticism, but rather an extended set of analytical criteria, which result from its augmented sense of mediality" (p.26). When it comes to creating the canon she presents the categories by which we can determine whether a work belongs to the canon or not. These categories are not very different from the quality requirements that were put forward by the Electronic Literature Organization, nevertheless they are more extended and more detailed. She places importance on how easily accessible the hypertext is and the time it takes to load, moreover she claims that the medium should be used in an innovative manner and not as an accessory. Two other important aspects are: interesting characters that develop and change and are psychologically complex and a narrative which challenges our beliefs or that defamiliarizes and "deconstructs" the way we view the world (pp.67-68).

The categories are: (1) production (relating to circumstances of authorship); (2) object (relating to the subject matter); (3) form (linguistic and structural devices, including navigational strategies); and (4) reception (relating to the reader in the widest sense, which includes lay readers, critics, editors and pedagogues alike) (p.63)

When it comes to production she places importance on "innovation and originality" (p.63) and the usage of the technological affordances:

Evidently, the mere ability to use sophisticated hypermedia software and mark-up language does not necessarily result in a literary or multimodal masterpiece. Instead, a central formal concern will be transmedialization, i.e. the meaningful combination of hypermedia (in the case of second- and third generation hypertext mainly), and more generally, the implementation of intertextuality in the sense of textual and semiotic interplay (p.63).

In the analysis chapter on *Afternoon: a story* intertextuality will be explored as a feature which can tell us something about how originality is viewed in literature, especially in postmodern fiction. When it comes to the subject matter, this is not different from print literary works. These works should contribute to expanding the reader's world view and understanding of life and human emotions through the development of complex and interesting characters. When it comes to form, Ensslin (2007) talks about the navigational

structures and how they are used by the authors for aesthetic purposes (p.63). This is especially important for the first generation of digital fiction since they have complex navigational structures. Reception is quite important in my thesis because as mentioned earlier I will be basing the evaluation criteria upon the readings of the most prolific critics in this field and combine them with my own point of view.

The works from these three generations have been chosen both for their renowned reputations and also because they brought something new to the field of digital fiction but both of these reasons are of course intertwined: they are famous because they are innovative and creative. *Flight paths* and *The Breathing wall* are the ones that have not been read as widely as the others but they are technologically innovative and thus exemplify the diversity within digital fiction.

To summarize briefly, the main approach applied in this thesis is going to be interpreting the aspects of these five digital fiction works that account for their quality. Even though it may seem as a very difficult issue we must bear in mind that evaluation is something that we engage in whenever we read a book, hear a song, watch a play or film, eat at a restaurant. The critics when reading works, or writing reviews always engage implicitly or explicitly in evaluation. This is what I want to do in this master thesis: put forward and emphasise the traits that make these digital fictions good and this will be done by combining theories and criticism from many different fields in order to capture the multiplicity and uniqueness of these works. The challenges are many but by focusing on particular works I will have a more tangible approach than attempting a purely theoretical one which would be more abstract and difficult.

There can't be denied that there are other works that would be worth looking into when talking about digital fiction and among these are Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* (1991), J. Yellowlees Douglas *I have said nothing* (1994), Michael Joyce's *Twilight: a symphony* (1996), Judd Morrissey's *The jew's daughter* (2000), M. D. Coverley's *Califia* (2000), but due to limitations that had to be imposed on the master thesis not all works that are worthwhile have been included because the scope was not the creation of a canon of digital fiction.

Ensslin (2007) and Bell (2010) comfort the reader of digital fiction when they maintain that we do not need a completely new set of theories, approaches in order to understand, and appreciate it. We only need to extend our view and take into consideration the new elements and try to fit them in our readings and analysis. The foundation is there, now we only need to continue building.

## **3. Michael Joyce**

### ***Afternoon: a story* (1990)**

#### **3.1 Multiple readings of a story**

This is the first influential hypertext fiction which was published by Eastgate systems. The author Michael Joyce is also famous for print fiction, and in the digital fiction field he is known for writing theory on hypertext but also as a co-creator of Storyspace which is the software for writing fiction and non fiction hypertexts developed together with Jay David Bolter and John B. Smith. Storyspace is the software that was used by Joyce in creating this work and also by Shelley Jackson in creating her masterpiece *Patchwork Girl* which is the second work to be considered in this thesis. Therefore it is not a coincidence that Michael Joyce is considered as the father of hypertext fiction.

This work has been analysed by the most influential critics such as Jane Yellowlees Douglas (1994), Espen Aarseth (1997), Janet Murray (1997), Jill Walker (1999), Jay David Bolter (2001), George P. Landow (2006), Astrid Ensslin (2007) and Alice Bell (2010) among others. Moreover, excerpts of it were included in the *Norton Anthology of Postmodern Literature* (Ensslin, 2007, p.69) thus establishing its position as one of the best fiction works written in hypertext. Most of the points made by the critics' analysis will be summarized here by focusing on claims about the characteristics and techniques which make this work a unique piece of hypertext fiction.

*Afternoon* has had a trendsetting impact in that it features the complexities of digital, non linear text organisation in an unprecedented way. As a matter of fact, the sheer infinity of possible readings makes it virtually impossible to summarize the “story” in a comprehensive, all encompassing way (Ensslin, 2007, p.70).

My critical analysis will focus on form and literary techniques but also more closely on content by presenting an analysis of the language of the work. Theories on hypertext which have been presented earlier in the thesis will be used as a means of analysing *Afternoon: a story*. This

will be done by testing many claims that have been made about hypertext against this particular work in order to see the degree to which they describe its structure and characteristics. This is a work which also uses many of the techniques of print fiction like unreliable narrator, different points of view, intertextuality, interior monologue, stream of consciousness, open-ending which will be analysed by looking at how they are used in the digital environment and their significance and effect in such works.

The combination of new and old technologies in creating a new kind of text was termed “intermediation” and its effects on literature in general is dealt by Hayles (2008) in her influential book *Electronic literature: New horizons for the literary* and it is an important feature for both works of the first generation of digital fiction included in this thesis. “Intermediation” in a more subtle manner points out the newness of these texts while at the same time showing how these texts have appropriated the “old” literary techniques because as Hayles points out: “electronic literature was not born *ex nihilo*” (p. 60). Moreover even though we read *Afternoon* in a digital medium she calls it “printcentric” because of its similarities with the old medium (p.62).

### **3.2 The multiplicities of *Afternoon: a story***

This work is comprised of 538 lexias and there are many ways in which readers can visit them but not all of them are available at every point of reading the work. The feature which allows a hypertext to keep certain lexias hidden until specific parts of the work have been read is called “guard fields” (Ryan, 2006, p.138). When we read *Afternoon: a story* we can choose to read the work by using the default pattern by pressing the return button which provides us with the main information needed, but does not take us deeper into the work. Walker (1999) calls this reading “the minimal version of the story” (para.7). The default story centres around Peter who is one of the narrators and whether he has seen his ex-wife Lisa and son die in an accident. Other narrators are Wert, his boss with whom Lisa might be having an affair, Lolly who is Wert's wife and a psychologist, and Peter's co-worker Nausicaa with whom Peter and Wert are having an affair. There are a few disparities that arise during the first reading, the main one is trying to figure out what has happened to Peter's wife and son and why is Peter avoiding this issue. In order to solve the “mystery” we must take risks and explore links by

clicking on “words that yield” and then fit these new nodes to the background information we have established by the default reading by striving to fill in the gaps and inconsistencies presented to us.

The default sequence is for the most part chronologically narrated - so this gentle entrance to *afternoon* uses time as it is used most often in story telling. There are many chronological sequences in *afternoon*, where node follows upon node with no more feeling of jumps than paragraphs in a traditional novel (Walker, 1999, para.6).

“Words that yield” are not clearly marked in the text and this posits challenges for the reader but Joyce (1990) maintains that this was not done to distress the reader. On the contrary this is a technique that was applied in order to encourage the reader to read more deeply and pay more attention to individual words by clicking on those that make an impression on him or her: “The lack of clear signals isn't an attempt to vex you, rather an invitation to read either inquisitively or playfully and also at depth. Click on the words that interest or invite you” (“Read at depth”).

What Walker is making clear in the quote above and what I have tried to point out previously is that *Afternoon* is not a work which has sprung from nothing, which has invented a brand new manner of telling a story. It is actually built upon those techniques which were first developed in modernist and postmodernist literary works of print fiction. Nevertheless, it is not simply a presentation of a postmodern novel in a digital format, the affordances of hypertext provide it with an environment for creating a work which would not have the same effect if presented in print form: “... to force a hypertext like *afternoon* into ready-made moulds is to overlook the difference of hypertext, the new qualities which hypertext gives literature” (Walker, 1999, para.36). Below we will analyse some of the qualities of hypertext which enrich the field of literature in general.

Joyce builds up multiple reading paths by adding new nodes to be read in between those which have already been read, therefore the reader has to constantly make room for new episodes, new points of view while trying to build up a plot and make sense of the overall work: “The text presents itself as a cycle, which becomes more adamant as the reading process advances” (Ensslin, 2007, p.70). Repetition plays a very important role in this hypertext, there

are some nodes that are repeated many times, while on the other hand new ones are added in between the familiar ones. Therefore we must pay close attention to all of them so that we make sure we are not missing any important details or revelations. Joyce (1997) sees hypertext as a medium in which the choice of path plays the most important part in understanding the work and provides the reader with the opportunity of building up his/her own version of the story: “Hypertext is reading and writing in an order you choose where your choices change the nature of what you read” (pp.580-581). The choices we make in *Afternoon: a story* also determine the story we get to read and who we get as narrator. If we follow the default route, it stops quite soon, leaving many lexias undiscovered. Sometimes we might get stuck on the same path which goes around in circle by repeating the same lexias without adding anything new and therefore confusing us. This is a sign that we have to follow another route and try to discover new nodes and new aspects. So the manner we understand the story depends from the manner we read it. By making us aware of the reading process, we as readers become more active mentally trying to “piece together” seemingly unyielding parts. This confuses us but at the same time intrigues us into reading more because there is always something new to find and whatever we find shapes and re-shapes the story: “...an ethos apparent in digital art is to 'make it loop'” (Ciccoricco, 2007, p.23).

What hypertext fiction can do that the print novel can't, is to unmoor scraps and fragments of dialogue from any notion of a fixed context or a set sequence, creating the effect for the reader of being “stuck in a loop” where the “same” utterances recur, but mean something quite different because of where and when they are encountered (Thomas, 2007, p.358)

In hypertext fictions the “recycling of nodes” (Ciccoricco, 2007, p.23) is used to keep our attention alive, we have to be alert to the appearance of new nodes and new information but at the same time orient us in the seemingly indefinite number of nodes in a hypertext fiction. This is especially true for a work like *Afternoon*: “When nodes start to repeat in a reading of network fiction, it is like suddenly finding a wall after wandering with arms outstretched in a darkened room” (Ciccoricco, 2007, p.49). Nevertheless, sometimes the repeating of nodes in a circle is a clear sign that another reading path must be pursued in order to find new nodes and gain new perspective. Douglas (1994) proves this in her second reading of the work, in which she encounters “a relentless loop that pushes me repeatedly through the same sequence of places without offering any chance of escaping it - thus spelling the end of my second reading”

(p. 166). Thus repetition can also be a warning sign that we are going round in a circle unable to find new angles to explore.

In addition to the multiple paths and different reading techniques which have to be explored in order to go deeper into this work, there are also two other interconnected aspects which challenge our attempts to make sense of the plot: the unreliable narrator and the multiple narrators. The unreliable narrator is Peter who is confused about what he may have seen that morning: “The point of using an unreliable narrator is indeed to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter” (Lodge, 1992, p. 155). This is exactly what Peter does, by not being completely able to face reality, he formulates sentences like this one: “I want to say I might have seen my son die this morning” (“I want to say”). By using this sentence structure “want+ to say” he appears to be insecure about how to express what he saw, it's like he wants to say something but thinks he shouldn't, readers need to find out what this is. Moreover by using the “stream of consciousness” as a technique of narration, Michael Joyce wants us to feel empathy for Peter who appears to be insecure, vain and afraid of himself. Since he is a character that is not easily likeable at first, giving us access to his thoughts brings him closer to us and we become more sympathetic to his suffering: “Undoubtedly this kind of novel tends to generate sympathy for the characters whose inner lives are exposed to view, however vain, selfish or ignoble their thoughts may occasionally be...” (Lodge, 1992, p.42). Truth always depends upon the point of view which we have, therefore using multiple narrators makes the reader more aware of other vantage points. The other narrators cast a new light on Peter's character and their thoughts on what may have happened to his ex-wife. Nausicaa says it herself: “Poor Peter, he believed in everything too much really to ever understand. It was as if he were always in someone else's story and yet so certain it was about him that he anguished for all the characters” (“Negative values”). Moreover, their characters and experiences are also important in themselves, they make the work more complex and interesting to read, as Peter says: “... I am not sure that everything isn't my story, or that, whatever is my story, is anything more than pieces of other's stories” (“me\*”).

The difficulty in identifying between the different narrators is also noticeable when reading the different critics that have analysed this work. For example Ensslin (2007) writes that Lolly

is “a secretary and a prostitute” (p. 70) while Walker (1999) and others assert that Lolly is a psychologist and Wert's wife, and that Nausicaa was a drug addict and a prostitute (p.7). Lolly is mentioned in the end of the default reading when Peter instead of calling the hospital calls a woman named Lolly and in order to know more about her we need to explore other reading paths, which talk about her and her patients who are Lisa, Nausicaa and Peter. But still there are ways that we can know who is talking, for example by knowing some background information about each of them helps inferring who is talking, another more obvious way is by paying attention to the titles of nodes, for example “Lolly's monologue” makes it quite obvious who is narrating. By combining different narrating voices, challenging us in finding out who is speaking by forcing us to pay more attention to the details which the characters/narrators are recounting, the work tests and vexes us while building up a narrative: “The glue that holds the texts together is the readers' ability to perceive references and casual connections linking phrases, sentences and paragraphs” (Douglas, 1994, p.175).

In all literary works, print or digital readers need to infer certain things from a story, this technique can be employed by the writer either in a subconscious or deliberate manner as “conscious artistic strategy” (Lodge, 1992, p.190). The latter is the case in this work which by employing strategies of both hypertext and postmodern print fiction presents a level of complexity that captures the intricacies of the human brain and human experiences.

### **3.3 The intensity of language**

An important aspect which is worth emphasising and looking deeper into is the poetic language of this work. The main narrator Peter is a poet who has left his poetic career and in order to earn a living has joined Wert's insurance company. It is not unusual for novels to have writers as their narrators because it gives the writer the possibility to use poetic language without sounding “artificial”. In this work the poetics of the language is noticeable especially when Peter describes the natural surroundings such as the winter scene with which the work begins. This focus on the surroundings fills the events recounted “with intensity at moments of uncertainty and difficulty” (Mullan, 2006, p.270) which this work is abounding with:

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 (“begin”).

From the beginning the language sets the tone of the work, not only the words “fear” “moaning”, “thundering off far ice” but also the metaphor of ice shaped as octopi and palm gives us the sense of coldness and sadness which overwhelm the first-person narrator: “The winter landscape seems animate with powerful personifications, animal and botanic metaphors...” (Ensslin, 2007, p.71). By focusing on the natural surrounding the narrator is trying to get out of his head and focus on something else (Mullan, 2006, p. 270). These are the moments in which Peter instead of dealing with what is bothering him, he focuses upon what is around him. For example in a scene in which he is having lunch with Wert he notices that the restaurant has the same hard candies that Wert keeps in his office and even though he should be more worried about what has happened to his son and ex-wife, he is surprised that he hadn't noticed the candies before since according to him he is very good at noticing details: “I have an appalling attention to such details” (“He, he says”). If he has such a good eye for details why is he so uncertain about what he has seen in the morning? We start understanding that he might be hiding something not only from us but also from himself.

Even when he writes about his marriage with Lisa when he is looking at their pictures, what captures his attention are the surroundings. There is always the sea in the background, which can symbolise many different things, its vastness might symbolize lonesomeness and melancholy. The sea can also connote a certain feeling of inevitability of life, that our fates are not in our hands, like Peter's marriage dissolved and there was nothing he could do about it. He is always looking for answers outside of himself because he is too afraid to look inside, scared of what he may discover.

No matter how I scrutinize these pictures now I cannot find the truth. I know our marriage had its place in some society, in some economy, in some idea of love, but always there is the sea behind, sometimes brilliant, sometimes adipose (“Doing things together”).

Another aspect of describing the nature around him is that it symbolizes his own mental state as in the node in which he goes back to the scene of the accident trying to figure out what may have happened. At first he is looking for some sign that there had been bodies laying there or signs of blood, however he finds the marks of the gurney, which he assumes was used to carry the bodies. He is looking at the surrounding lawn, fungus, plants with sharp points which he associates with the horns of a dead deer. Everything he sees symbolizes death to him. These plants are also “witnesses” of what has happened and Peter identifies with them: “...hard and bitter and solitary with age; dry things, witnesses” (“staghorn and starthistle”).

### **3.4 Intertextuality and originality**

This work has been chosen because of its magnificent combination of print and digital fiction techniques. It is exemplary of the first works that have begun the development of digital fiction which started with more “printcentric” works like *Afternoon* and moved on to more multimodal works like *These waves of girls*, with *Patchwork girl* in between. In this part of the analysis I will focus upon a technique used widely in literature, that is intertextuality and the light it casts upon issues of originality and newness in literature.

*Afternoon: a story* directly quotes or draws on works such as: James Joyce *Ulysses*, Vladimir Nabokov *Lolita*, Edward Albee *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf*, John Barth *Lost in the funhouse* and others. As David Lodge (1992) maintains: “Some theorists believe that intertextuality is the very condition of literature, that all the texts are woven from the tissues of other texts, whether their authors know it or not” (pp.98-99). A hypertext fiction like *Afternoon: a story* and as we will see *Patchwork girl* embraces intertextuality by quoting directly from other works. There is no inhibition about using ideas and components from other works in a more explicit manner. Harold Bloom (1995) maintains that there are no more works, only relations between the works (p.7). This is not to say that literary works have no existence of their own, but that they cannot be understood any longer in themselves as self-contained. They are related and dependent upon one another and can only be understood in reference to each other. Therefore, as readers of *Afternoon: a story* we must be aware of the intricacies of the relationship between print and digital fiction and what effects does the adaptation of the former have for the digital medium.

Postmodern literature uses intertextuality to shatter our genre expectations because the writers of this type of literature deconstruct the work they have quoted from in order to use it for their own purposes. The function of this borrowing is to present us with a different point of view, make us interpret the world in a different manner than the work from which they have initially borrowed (Broich, 1997, p.253). Intertextuality can also contribute to the work being perceived as less original because it is a reflection or better said a distortion of another work. Lack of this type of originality is not seen as lack of literary quality in postmodernism. This issue was dealt by John Barth (1984), a famous American writer in his essay *The Literature of Exhaustion*. Barth does not view lack of this type of originality in literature as a negative development or as a reason to think that literature is ending because it has nothing “new” to contribute to the world.

By 'exhaustion' I don't mean anything so tired as the subject of physical, moral, or intellectual decadence, only the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities - by no means necessarily a cause for despair (p.64).

He is describing an exhaustion of new ways for creating literature and not exhaustion of literature per se and thinks that this can be used as a creative force. For example *Afternoon* uses direct quotes from many different works and also there have been drawn similarities of techniques with James Joyce's *Ulysses*, especially its usage of stream of consciousness and multiple narrators. But as Bloom (1995) claims, strong works benefit from influence whereas the weak ones are “crippled” by it (p.11). Moreover hypertext offers an environment for realizing new techniques of narration which would be difficult, if not impossible for print. Bolter (2001) maintains that while exhaustion describes print literature, it is not applicable for electronic texts since they are “anything but exhausted” (p.147). He thinks that while writers like Jorge Luis Borges could experiment and imagine a literature that develops in front of the reader's eyes and could never be exhausted, writers of digital fiction can actually accomplish it.

For Borges literature is exhausted because it is committed to a conclusive ending, to a single storyline and denouement. To renew literature one would have to write multiply, in a way that embraced possibilities rather than closed them off. Borges can imagine such a fiction, but he cannot produce it... Borges himself never had available an electronic space, in which a text

can comprise a network of diverging, converging and parallel times (Bolter, 2001, p.147).

Moreover, Barth (1984) elaborates his views on exhaustion of literature in another essay *The Literature of Replenishment* in which he addresses the question of what postmodernism is in a more direct manner. While he says that “exhaustion” of literature means that the time of 'high modernism' has been done with, the time is for “literature of replenishment” for which he uses the term postmodern (a term which he wasn't familiar with when he wrote the previous essay). He expresses the view of what a postmodern writer of fiction should do and it does not involve refuting or imitating modernists, nor writing for critics and appreciators of high literature. A postmodern work of fiction should try to rise above many pre-set categories and “will not wear its heart on its sleeve, either; at least not its whole heart” (p.203). Barth explains that what he means by this is that a good work of art will be appreciated the more times you read it, by finding new elements and new things to appreciate every time you do. While print works have to be read anew if we are going to find something new or interpret them differently. In *Afternoon: a story* this quality is inherent to the work, it has rereading build within as a technique. The story presents something new to us every time we read it, new elements pop up unexpectedly and have to be re-interpreted whenever they do. This is a quality which would be difficult to realize in the print medium to the same degree. *Afternoon: a story* is an original work not because it “invents” something new, but it is the one who can present something old, something already known in a new light which changes our perceptions and awakens us from oblivion of convention, this was termed as “defamiliarization” by the Russian Formalists.

What do we mean - it is a common term of praise - when we say that a book is 'original'? Not, usually, that the writer has invented something without precedent, but that she has made us 'perceive' what we already, in a conceptual sense, 'know', by deviating from the conventional, habitual ways of representing reality. Defamiliarization, in short, is another word for 'originality'” (Lodge, 1992, p.55).

On the other hand, Aarseth (1997) does not think that *Afternoon* is very different from print or that it offers the readers the possibility to explore the writer's craft. On the contrary he thinks that hypertext technology was to used “to alienate the reader, rather than for linguistic effect” (p.91). He thinks that the repetition of nodes and the circulatory nature of this work

makes the reader feel even more confined and limited than when he/she is reading a book (p.91). Therefore, the empowerment and the freedom promised to the reader when reading hypertext fiction, remain just unrealized promises and might leave the reader feeling betrayed. This teaches us to approach this work and others like it by taking the claims of hypertext enthusiasts with a grain of salt. We can achieve this by taking into consideration Aarseth's views and other critics who were more critical to the effects and functions of this technology.

Despite the fact that Aarseth (1997) provides an interesting perspective on *Afternoon*, and the points he makes cannot be completely dismissed and despite the fact that this work might not turn us into writers when reading it, *Afternoon* presents an innovative way of telling a story. While not moving too far away from the print medium so that it risks estranging us (offering us the default path), it builds upon uncertainties of different natures, some which are connected with the technology and other with the content and style of narration. It makes us question our every move, every utterance that comes from the different narrators, makes us question the medium itself but offers us pleasure by delivering a type of denouement or revelation in the end.

### **3.5 Denouement - the pleasure of closure**

One of the most important issue with hypertexts like *Afternoon: a story* with which I will deal in this part of analysis is also the question of closure or to put it differently how to know when to stop reading it. While there are works in print literature that do not offer clear endings and leave it open for the reader to make assumptions about endings. In hypertext, depending on the path chosen and followed, a story can end at different points and we as readers sometimes do not know when the story is finished or when to stop reading. Douglas (2000) maintains that while books must have one point in which they end, the hypertext can have multiple points of ending (p.24). Ciccoricco asserts that the readers might enjoy the process of exploring the work and “locate closure(s) among its other elements, such as those generated by discrete patterns, concepts, or even discrete moods” (p.42). So in what Ciccoricco is saying is that in network fiction we can find coherence and closure in separate parts of the work and that closure of the work as a whole is not readily realized.

Hayles (2008) undermines the pleasure that the sense of closure might provide for the reader since it might leave the reader feeling sad or unsatisfied, and on the other hand those works which offer more possibilities might prolong the pleasure of reading (p.69). Douglas (2000) claims that the sense of closure is arrived by feeling satisfied with the “knowledge” we have accumulated during the process of reading.

Our sense of arriving at a closure is satisfied when we manage to resolve narrative tensions and to minimize ambiguities, to explain puzzles, and to incorporate as many of the narrative elements as possible into a coherent pattern - preferably one for which we have a schema gleaned from either life experience or from encounters with other elements (p.122).

Douglas (1994) in her reading of *Afternoon: a story* deals with the question of multiple paths and closure, their importance and what they mean for hypertext fiction in general. She presents theories of critics such as Peter Brooks, Frank Kermode and Walter Benjamin who maintain that the pleasure of reading a work of fiction is derived from arriving at an ending. According to them when we are inferring, analysing or predicting while we are reading, we are doing so because we are expecting the work to provide us with an ending in which we find out whether we were right. It is not a surprise that these critics have not dealt with modern or postmodern fiction works. Douglas (1994) by taking examples of twentieth century print works contradicts the above mentioned critics and maintains that closure and ending is not only about finding out what has happened, sometimes we already know the end before we finish reading the book and only need the ending to confirm these inferences (p. 162). On the other hand there are works which deny and disrupt our search for an ending by not revealing anything to us: “I know that the narrative physically has nothing left to reveal after I have finished my reading of it and that I am free to begin to make sense of the work as a whole” (Douglas, 1994, p.164).

She moves on to deal with “interactive fictions” which challenge us not only when it comes to finding closure, but also to know when to stop reading. The problem we face with *Afternoon: a story* has also to do with the fact that we can be reading different versions by using different reading strategies. Douglas in her analysis tries four different readings of the work in order to see if she is able to solve the “mysteries” presented in front of her. But in each reading she experiences that the text is expanding in front of her eyes, with no end in sight. She also finds

places where the narrative offers the same episode in different versions, in one place Wert knows that Peter is having an affair with Nausicaa, in another version he does not. In one conversation Wert knows what is bothering Peter (the accident) in another he has no idea (p. 166). These are clear signs that the work offers more than one version of the same story depending which path we have consciously or unconsciously decided to follow, as Bolter (2001) has put it: "...there is no story, there are only readings" (p.125). Douglas feels she can stop reading after she finds out that it was Peter who has caused the accident and that his ex-wife and son are dead. This is achieved after we arrive at a node named "white afternoon": "The investigator finds him at fault. He is shocked to see the body so beautifully there upon the wide green lawn. The boy is nearby". In order to arrive at this point there are obstacles that need to be overcome, like the fact that the default path stops at "I call" which ends with Peter calling Lolly, the psychologist. We can't move past this node but as Douglas says, we need to continue reading by following another strategy because there are questions to which we haven't received answers to and we also know that there are nodes which we have not visited yet (p.169). According to her we as readers know when we have to continue reading such texts or when we should stop based on the information we have managed to gather while reading regarding Peter's character and the weird manner in which he avoids calling the hospital himself, letting the machine do it for him (clear sign that he is afraid of what he might find out), but we as readers also know what is more likely to have happened.

Psycholinguistic models of reading posit plausibility and referentiality as the glue that holds the text together at the level of sentences and paragraphs. Plausibility and reference in the larger narrative structure, likewise, direct the focus of my attention to the interpretation that refers to the largest number of narrative episodes and constructs the model of causation that seems, according to my knowledge of human behavior to be most likely, the most plausible (p.170).

According to Murray (1997) the multiple ending offers a possibility for the narrative to capture various voices and many lines of the story, even conflicting ones. This cannot be achieved in the same manner in linear stories, which have to end at one point (p.136). This concurs with her view that the digital narratives are "kaleidoscopic", which means that these kind of stories have multiple points of view which need to be expressed and that each of them can be understood differently depending upon how we have reached them (p.160). Kress and

van Leeuwen (2006) reflected the same point of view in their multimodal theory, by maintaining that different modes are used in order to capture the multitude of meanings existing in today's societies: "Messages produced by individuals will reflect the differences, incongruities, and clashes which characterize social life" (p.20). Thus, the usage of multiple voices is reflected in using various paths, various modes of communication and it serves the function of capturing the complexities of society and to account for the complexity of the character's subconsciousness.

The kaleidoscopic power of the computer allows us to tell stories that more truly reflect our turn-of -the- century sensibility. We no longer believe in a single reality, a single integrating view of the world, or even the reliability of a single angle of perception (Murray, 1997, p.161).

Even though Joyce offers multiple points of views, a wide array of details and presents a reality which depends from the vantage point and even though he expresses the view that closure is "a suspect quality" ("closure"), he assures us that even though this work might seem endless and vast, it ends at some point. The type of "ending" is called denouement, because it reveals to us something which has been hidden or at least not explicitly told (Mullan, 2006, p. 308). This type of ending is very common in works like *Afternoon: a story*, which place an enigma which we have to solve by exploring it. The revelation to which we come in the end "has been encoded in the novel" (Mullan, 2006, p. 173) and therefore does not catch us by surprise or seem unlikely. On the contrary it provides us with a hint that we have finished reading and we are sure of something for the first time during this experience, and that is that we can hit the close button.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this analysis I have tried to focus upon elements that connect *Afternoon* to previous traditions of literature but showing at the same time the new manners in which it uses the same elements in the digital medium. I have also tried to expose the "myths" and the inaccuracies about hypertexts by presenting different views and analysis and supplementing them with my own experience of reading this work. I have attempted to show the aspects of this work which presents to us a different and new manner of telling stories which is not too

far removed from what we already know. According to Murray (1997) the organization of this work makes it the first one to present the possibility of writing qualitative literature in the new medium.

The architectural playfulness of *Afternoon*, its construction as a series of discreet lexia linked by overlapping paths, and the poetic shaping of its individual lexia mark it as the first narrative to lay claim to the digital environment as a home for serious literature in new formats (Murray, 1997, p. 58).

This work has received praises for both its intricate hypertext structure, its usage of literary devices and techniques and its poetic language which “is highly expressive and captures the reader's attention by its aesthetic impact alone” (Ensslin, 2007, p.71). The hypertextual structure of the work makes it possible for it to cycle and give us something new to read with every path, this keeps the text and the reader's attention “alive”. Contradictions and inconsistencies presented by the unreliable narrator together with the diverse paths are utilized to keep us alert and challenge our cognitive abilities in making sense of the story. It does not make this process impossible, it offers a default path which requires minimal effort and builds our background knowledge. However we have to do more than that to travel to the more remote parts of the work. Walker (1999) interprets the confusion of making sense of the story as presenting the confusion felt by Peter while trying to come to terms with what he might have done: “The confusion we feel as readers trying to piece together the story is very like Peter's frenzied hunting for his son - although the readers search isn't as self-delusory as Peter's may be” (para.79).

*Afternoon* might not be as liberating as some enthusiasts of hypertext describe it to be but it is definitely innovative in the presentation of its content and the manner which it involves us in decoding it. Even though it posits difficulties and multiplicities, it also present us with some facilitations and therefore does not risk our estrangement. It keeps our curiosity going by giving us hints and by unfolding new information step by step so that we are forced to read and re-read attentively in order to find the new nodes.

## 4. Shelley Jackson

### *Patchwork Girl or, a modern monster (1995)*

#### 4.1 The embodiment of the work

This hypertext fiction after *Afternoon: a story*, is one of the most read, discussed and praised. It has been called “the true paradigmatic work of the era” by Coover (1999)(para.5), Hayles (2005) has said that it is “one of the most interesting of hypertext fictions” (p.143), whereas Landow (2006) thinks it is “brilliant hypertext parable of writing and identity” (p.234). It is not surprising that a work that has been hailed to this degree is included in a master thesis about quality. In this chapter I will explore some similar aspects which were previously dealt with in the analysis of *Afternoon* such as its usage of the hypertext technology and postmodern literary techniques, but in addition to these I will also focus on the visual representation of its subject matter and what effect this has on the overall perception of the work. Moreover, I will deal with the metaphors which Shelley Jackson has used to present her views on writing, identity, physical appearance which are realized both on the written and on the visual plane. This visualisation marks an important differentiation from *Afternoon: a story* and creates the pre-conditions for the development of the second generation of digital fiction.

In the “Title page” it says that the work was written by “Mary/Shelley and herself”, and in the node titled as “Source” the author tells us that she has used other sources in the compilation of her work and some of them are: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Jacques Derrida, Frank Baum's *Patchwork girl of Oz*, David Bolter, Helene Cixous, Elle Magazine, Donna Haraway, Jean-François Lyotard and others. She deliberately mixes her writing with others and uses direct quotes. This is a work in which collage writing is celebrated as an undeniable feature of hypertext and the intention is to break away from the linearity of the book and towards a blurring of boundaries and a redefining of the role of the author. The author is no longer an authority figure, and creating an “original” work is not the main purpose. According to Hayles (2005), Jackson in her work brings to the light of day those elements which present literary

works as collaborations and as combinations of already existing ideas and styles and that claims on originality and individuality of the author which had been considered as marks of literary value are challenged and dismissed as irrelevant.

In *Patchwork Girl*, the unconscious of eighteenth century texts becomes the ground and surface for the specificity of this electronic text, which delights in pointing out that it was created not by a fetishized unique imagination but by many actors working in collaboration, including the “vaporous machinery” of digital text (Hayles, 2005, p.147).

The collaboration process does not end here, we as readers are also invited to participate in crafting the monster. In the node entitled “Graveyard”, we are told that: “I am buried here. You can resurrect me but only by piecemeal. If you want to see the whole you will have to sew me together yourself”. This piecing together of the monster serves at the same time as a call for piecing together the story. According to Elisabeth Joyce (2003) including texts written by other authors in Jackson's work is done in order to challenge the reader and create obstacles in the piecing together the whole story (p.40). This increases the level of reader's activity and the process of reading gains new meanings, it becomes a process by which we as readers strive to see the work as a whole and not just pieces put together, even though the text itself sometimes resists this process. According to Douglas (2000) this should present no problem to readers because we are wired to understand “overall patterns” and not sequences (p.65). Moreover according to her even though in print we are presented with an ordered narrative, this does not mean that there are no other possibilities or combinations, something which hypertext emphasizes and explores (p.71). *Patchwork girl* challenges us with the multiplicity of authors, texts and points of view in order to prolong the pleasures of reading and to expand the horizon of interpretation which are some of the gratifications which hypertext writing offers to its readers.

When we open the work, we are immediately faced with the image of the monster, with scars all over her body (“her”). In the other nodes: “hercut” (crazy quilt), ”hercut2” (journal), “hercut3” (story) and “hercut 4” (graveyard), the same image is distorted where the parts of the protagonist are not stitched together something which becomes obvious from the name itself “hercut” if we separate it into “her” and “cut”. In the fifth part “phrenology” (body of text) we get a view of what looks like the Patchwork girl's head which is divided in parts which

contain women's names and other phrases. In the same manner as the creator had to stitch her monster, we have to stitch the story together and just as the monster has gaps so does the story. Gaps are very important in literature in general but specifically in the context of this work because they make us aware that there are contradictions and inconsistencies within the text which are open to many interpretations. These contradictions are manifested in the identity of Patchwork girl herself, both of which are used as metaphors for one another.



Fig. 1 A screenshot from *Patchwork girl*  
“Hercut 1”

We can start reading *Patchwork girl* from any of the five parts: “a graveyard”, “crazy quilt”, “journal”, “a story” and “& broken accents” which are presented in the “Title page”. In the “graveyard” as mentioned previously we are asked to resurrect the monster piece by piece. In “a journal” we get to know the creator of the monster Mary and the development of the relationship between her and her creation. In “crazy quilt” she writes about the making of a quilt as a metaphor for the making of the monster which Bell (2010) thinks “act as a literal embodiment of intertextual network” (pp.130-131).

In “a story” we experience the parting of the monster from her creator and we are told of her journey to America. In “& broken accents” she writes about the women whose organs were “borrowed” in order to create the monster. Their lives, characters, challenges are described individually thus emphasising how special each of them is for the monster's existence. According to Ensslin (2007) “this section forms the most thought-provoking, contemplative part of the hypertext in that the author raises and discusses the question of postmodern identity” (p.80). We can see the differences between the different parts of the text also in the patches of the monster's skin which are made up of different colours and are sewed together displaying the stitches and the scars. The story that we as readers are going to built up is going to be a story told by different voices, from magazines to philosophical thoughts, from a Gothic

writer to a postmodern one. This is done in order to point out that: “All texts are monstrous...always more chaotic and less coherent than they pretend to be...” (Jackson, 2002, para.14).

An interesting aspect to mention here is that each part has links which are organized in a more or less linear fashion, moreover it is not important which section you start reading first (E. Joyce, 2003, p.43). This is presented also in the mapping level, the five sections are presented as having no connections with one another because there are no arrows which link them (Fig. 2). Hypertext allows such texts to exist and according to Ryan (2006): “*Patchwork girl* is one of the last major hypertexts written with Storyspace, and its general design hints at a departure from the complex labyrinths for which Storyspace toolbox was conceived” (pp.146-147). As I have pointed out earlier, critics like Landow (2006), Bolter (2001) and other hypertext enthusiasts have stressed the fact that this medium offers empowerment of the reader by giving him choice and possibilities to explore intricate hypertexts. This view has been challenged by other critics such as Koskimaa (1998) who doesn't think that choosing nodes means empowerment because the reader cannot change them, he/she can only choose which ones he/she is going to read and in what order. He thinks that instead of using “reader-as-author” that we should use “reader-as-(co)narrator” but even this according to him is not completely accurate because we as readers have a limited role in the story (para.4). On the one hand, Jackson does not present us with a labyrinth text in which we can choose our own path. But on the other hand she gives us the freedom to read whichever section we want and to stop reading whenever we wish by providing us with parts that can be read separately and even independently. In contrast to books in which we are driven to read until the end because in one way or another there is an end, in this hypertext we do not await it and therefore can stop whenever we feel like there is no more left for us to explore.

## **4.2 The qualities of “feminine writing”**

The hypertextual structure is very important not only because it has offered Jackson the opportunity to present the content, but the medium itself serves as a metaphor for it. For Jackson (1997) hypertext is the only medium in which she can fit her fragmented way of

thinking and that if she was to write books, she would feel confined (para.17). She wants to write texts in which she can fit all her thoughts, no matter how disconnected or fragmented they may appear. She doesn't want to edit her ideas because to her that is the only manner she can truly express herself. She wants the reader to take what they want from her text and stop reading whenever they wish. She wants “piratical readers” who will use her ideas the way they want and she thinks that the only medium that allows such readers to exist is hypertext (Jackson, 1997, para. 17). Bolter (2001) maintains that in works in which readers are invited to recreate the work, “to read is to interpret” (p.183) and this blurring between reading and interpretation is something that some of the most famous hypertext writers Michael Joyce, Stuart Moulthrop, Jane Yellowlees Douglas have strived to achieve in their works.

How important the hypertext technology is for this work is made clear by Jackson (2002) herself in an interview with Rita Raley. She claims that she got the ideas for the metaphors in her work after she had visited Storyspace and had seen its maps (para.7). She also maintains that it was her interest in the hypertext technology which provided the inspiration and that the materiality of the medium is an essential part of the work.

I wouldn't have written *Patchwork Girl* at all if I hadn't been puzzling over hypertext in general, and I wouldn't have found the graveyard and quilt metaphors I employed in that piece nearly so ready to hand if I hadn't been using an application, Storyspace, that involved moving little rectangulars around bigger rectangulars (Jackson, 2002, para.7)

According to Hayles (2005) it is exactly the manner in which Shelley Jackson has used the technology which makes this work so unique (p.152). For example the scars can be seen as links which function as gaps between the different nodes and Erica Seidel (1996) has called this work “hypertextuality of scars”: “Just as the monster finds pleasure and identity in her scars, good hypertext works are defined and distinguished by their unique linking structures” (as quoted in Landow, 2006, p.239). Jackson views links not merely as a technology that facilitates the connection between the nodes, for her the links carry meaning which is not superfluous. Jackson thinks that for books such gaps are problematic because print works want to give the reader one reading and one story and therefore they try to hide the scars and stitches. On the other hand for hypertext these gaps symbolize the complexity of human thinking and open up a wider perspective in which we can fit contradictions and antagonisms

and our own meanings without being “stuck on one meaning like a bug on a pin” (Jackson, 1997, para.16).

Jackson (1997) sees hypertext as the best suited medium for the type of writing she calls “feminine writing”, by this she does not mean that women are the only ones that can write such works: “...hypertext is everything that for centuries has been damned by its association with the feminine...It is dispersed, languorous, flaunting its charms all over the courtyard...Hypertext then, is what literature has edited out: the feminine” (para.39). She is not the only one to have such a view, Barbara Page (1999) also maintains that even before the appearance of the hypertext as a form, women wrote in such a manner as to try to escape from linearity which they perceived as an imposition and constraint (p.112). It is obvious this is not a tendency followed only by women, but it has nevertheless been noticed that women writers wanted “ to redesign the very topography of prose” in order to challenge the discourse on gender (p.112). Just as Jackson views hypertext as “feminine writing”, also Page maintains that it is precisely women through their network writing who have tried to create new forms which are more suitable to capture the lives and experiences of women. A print writer Carole Maso even though hasn't written hypertexts, describes this kind of writing as one that can “embrace oppositional stances at the same time” (as quoted in Page, 1999, p. 117) and which does not overpower the reader but which gives him/her the space to follow their own path, she calls this a “feminine shape” (p.117). Two other women writers Caroline Guyer and Martha Petry who have explored hypertext technology and collaborative writing, have experienced that working and changing other texts made “everything more fluid” (as quoted in Page, p. 122).

Jackson and these other women writers are talking about the sort of writing that is not confined and that allows the space for the readers to follow their own desires. On the other hand working with already existing texts, by deconstructing them and presenting them so that they capture women's experiences and ideologies has been a very important postmodernist and in this case feminist endeavour (in order to challenge the writings and domination of white male authors). It is what Lubomir Doležal calls “the postmodernist rewrites of classical works” (as quoted in Bell, 2010, p.118). For example by using the style of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* in which Viktor Frankenstein creates a male monster, Shelley Jackson has

created a work in which a woman creates a female version of the monster (Hayles, 2005, p.155). The relationship between the males starts with fear and ends with animosity, the females on the other hand start with the creator fearing her creation but continues to develop into an intimate relationship which bears similarities to relationships between parents and children or between lovers, a relationship filled with passion and tenderness: “When I laid my hand flat and still for a moment on her side, the scar was burning slash across my palm, and I wondered if it hurt her. I was filled with compassion” (“Fingertips”).

### 4.3 A living amalgam

Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* or, a modern monster (PG) may be regarded as the hypertextual epitome of cyberfeminism, and is, furthermore, one of the most exhaustive and novelistic hyperfictions ever produced (Ensslin, 2007, p.78).

While in the previous section I talked about hypertext form and feminine writing, in this section I will dig deeper into the theme of feminism and identity that Jackson takes up in building her text and the monster. It is precisely this interest in monsters which lead to the creation of a “girl” who embodies all the ambiguities linked with gender and identity. According to Landow (2006) hypertext is a medium which can be used to challenge how we think of gender and identity, because as mentioned previously hypertext allows us to include different voices, different texts in a space with no apparent closure or limits (p.241).

Jackson in her thinking about monsters was influenced by Haraway (1991/2003) whom she uses as one of the sources in *Patchwork girl*. Haraway has written about cyborgs which are presented as “machine and organism, a creature of social reality and as well as a creature of fiction” (p.516). This is a postmodern creation which incorporates traits of objects and humans and which will capture the multiplicities of the female experience which cannot be limited by boundaries and dualities but which is marked by multiplicities. Haraway (1991/2003) in her essay *The Cyborg Manifesto* calls us “chimeras” which is a mythical creature that has a lion's head, a goat's body and a serpents tail. Jackson presents *Patchwork girl* in the same manner because she is created by parts taken from different women, her liver is from a man and her gut has been filled with those of a cow so she is a mixed creature, she

blurs the boundaries between woman, man and animal: “I am made of a multiplicity of anonymous particles and have no absolute boundaries, I am a swarm” (“Self-swarm”).

With her cyborg theory Haraway (1991/2003) has tried to point out the faulty descriptions of females as a unified group, claiming that there is nothing that binds women together and that it is difficult to describe what is meant by feminism. All attempts to describe it by different feminists have tended to put constraints on any differences stemming away from their definitions and that “cyborg feminism” needs to emphasise that “ 'we' do not want any more natural matrix of unity and that no construction is whole” (p.521). Patchwork girl is an embodiment of such multiplicities and blurring of boundaries, she is a creature of mixture, of what Haraway called 'fractured identities' because according to her: “Identities seem contradictory, partial and strategic ... There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practises” (Haraway, 1991/2003, p.519). Jackson also challenges the traditional views on women, identity and body because Patchwork girl does not fit the description of a woman or man in the traditional sense of the word. She does not fit any descriptions of beauty, she is disproportionate, has too many stitches, her skin is of different colours “feminine beauty was to be perfected by a system of bandages” (“Therapies”).

Patchwork girl marks a movement away from constraints put upon women and away from the ideals of beauty to which many women succumb to. Women use make-up in order to hide the cracks on their skins, to even the different colours and lines and try to make the skin look smooth. We all try to look and behave perfectly by following the norms of society but this does not mean that we do not feel the strain of pretence inside ourselves. This is the same as the authors trying to create a coherent story while hiding all the inconsistencies. Jackson on the other hand puts them in full view by creating this “monstrous text” and this monstrous girl and by presenting the body ideals which women should follow by using a humorous quote from Klaus Theweleit: “A perfectly beautiful woman must have the voluptuous buttocks and lovely breasts of the ladies of England, the fiery glance of the women of Poland, a German body and a podex from Paris” (“beauty patches”). Mary Shelley is unable to create such an ideal and she learns to accept the monster she creates for who she really is. On the other hand Shelley Jackson is unable to create a text without gaps, without ambiguities and

inconsistencies because the only way that she knows how to create is to incorporate different ideas, different styles, different identities and different voices. At first both are startled by the monstrosity of their creations but as they become closer to them and peel off the layers they realize that there is no other way to be and that there is no other way to write. The girl herself is at first surprised at her appearance but accepts herself for who she is:

At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror, but when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am - I was glad - I am awfully glad - that I am just what I am, and nothing else (“But I am glad”).

In contrast most of us are bombarded with images of who we should be or who we should want to be and being glad of who we are is rarely mentioned. It is striving to constantly improve ourselves that we are focused upon but in this work readers are invited into a different world, one in which imperfections are not frowned upon but are accepted as “natural”.

#### 4.4 The whole of *Patchwork girl*

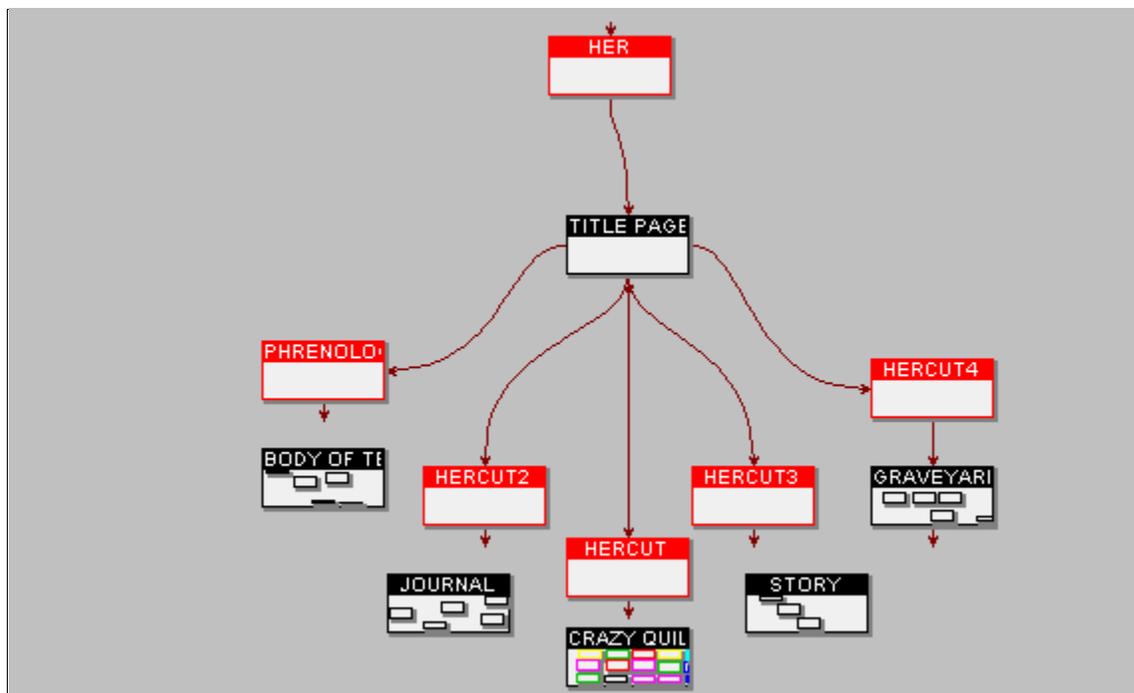


Fig. 2. A screenshot from *Patchwork girl* presenting the Storyspace map

While in *Afternoon: a story* we are not offered any maps or images, Shelley Jackson provides us with different mapping structures which both facilitate the reading of the hypertext and at the same time enable us to conceive the work as a whole, at least to a certain degree. As it was pointed out earlier, it is the mapping in the Storyspace which has inspired Jackson in creating the metaphors for her masterpiece and it is her choice to make this available to the reader which facilitates the understanding of this text. Moreover, the visual presentation of the story is not an addition to the text, it is an inseparable part of the work which can help us in interpreting the work to the same degree as the words.

Storyspace offers four different types of mapping structures: the map, the chart, the outline and the tree map all of which are presented in the interface of the work. E. Joyce (2003) claims that the usage and display of extensive mapping structures and the presentation of all the nodes in the boxes by marking the differences between them with various colours might give the impression of a work which is not problematic to conceive as a whole. Moreover, it might give the impression to the reader that if he/she follows the links from these maps, the text will be easy and linear: “Even by taking the map's indicated directions, the links from page to page disrupt the narrative, creating a text based on random interlocking fragments” (p.39). As we have mentioned early, the text invites us to build it into a whole, but on the other hand it includes other voices, ideas, authors within its space, thus making this more complicated. In addition, the different narrators are not marked clearly, is it Mary Shelley or Shelley Jackson who is speaking/writing, moreover *Patchwork girl* develops her unique voice in the story as she tries to break free from the grips of her creator and find her place and identity in the world.

According to Koskimaa (1998): “The map helps the reader to conceive of the Text as a coherent whole, with some ultimate metaphoric meaning” (Hyperfiction aesthetics, para.4). The maps in *Patchwork girl* help us conceive of the work as a whole at least on the visual level if not on the textual one. We can notice that the “metaphoric meaning” in this work operates on many planes, complementing and helping in creating one another: “Like the female monster's body, the body of this hypertext is also seamed and ruptured, composed of disparate parts and extensive links between them” (Hayles, 2005, p.147).

As Hayles says, Patchwork girl's body symbolizes the hypertext because looking at it (Fig.3) after it has been put together, we can still see the places where she is stitched together (compared to the other images where she is presented as body parts, see Fig.1). Moreover, what we also notice in Fig. 3 is line which cuts the image in two.

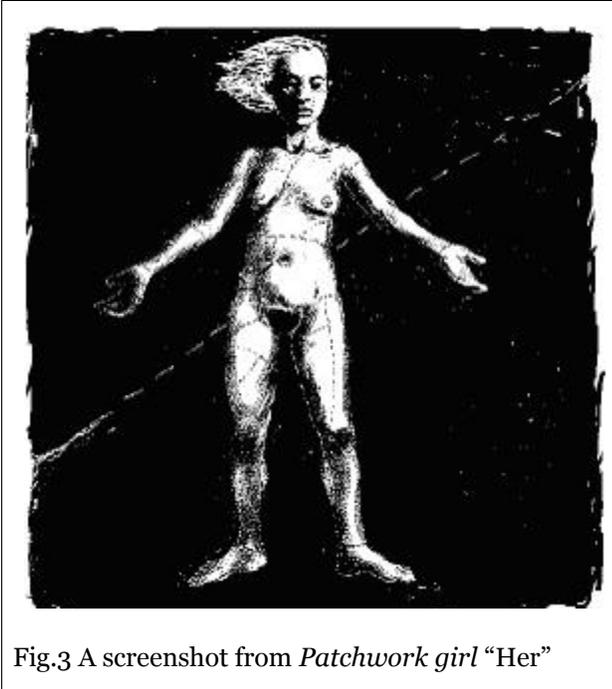


Fig.3 A screenshot from *Patchwork girl* "Her"

The dotted line is the best line: It indicates a difference without cleaving apart for good what it distinguishes ... A dotted line demonstrates: even what is discontinuous and in pieces can blaze a trail" ("dotted line").

This "dotted line" is interpreted by Hayles (2005) as a line which permits that things are different without completely separating them and according to her this means that the Patchwork girl is represented as being similar to humans but at the same time showing that there are also differences existing within her (p. 149).

Moreover, hypertext itself is also similar to print novels in some respects but it mingles and joins authors and texts of different natures, something which a print book would not be able to carry out as successfully as the hypertext.

Lying on a plane but also suggesting a fold upward, the dotted line becomes a kind of joint or scar that marks the merging of fiction and metafiction in a narrative strategy that Gerard Genette calls "metalepsis" the merging of diegetic levels that would normally be kept distinct (p.149).

To summarize briefly, by showing us the maps Jackson wanted to give a glimpse of the creation process, it is like looking into the notes of a writer while he or she is working on the draft of the novel. We can see the associations that operate in the author's mind, we are also invited to make our own by choosing which links to follow, where to begin the story and when to stop reading. We are offered to learn something new about ourselves and dispute the manner we think about texts, identity, gender and ideologies.

## 4.5 Conclusion

### “Monstrous creation”

From a literary point of view, the best hypertexts are those that manage to present the reader's activity of moving through the network and reassembling the narrative as a symbolic gesture specific to the text, a gesture whose interpretation cannot be predicted by reading the medium as a built-in-message as McLuhan's famous formula suggests (Ryan, 2006, pp.145-146)

Mary Shelley creates the monster by sewing it bit by bit just like a quilt, she adds her own piece of flesh to its creation so she can be connected to it and live through it. Shelley Jackson creates her text by piecing together bits of writing by other authors by combining it with her own ideas (her piece of flesh). Just like the monster moves away from her creator, so the text is not dependent on the writer and we as readers have more freedom in sewing the text together by choosing which parts to read and when to stop reading. This freedom is offered to us in the same manner as Mary gives her monster the freedom to leave her side, aware at the same time that she can't stop her. The writer cannot stop the reader from making his/her own connections, interpretations, misinterpretations and from reading the way he/she wants.

*Patchwork girl* does not have an intricate structure that a text of the nature of *Afternoon: a story* does and Bell (2010) maintains that Jackson's work is more conventional in this aspect. On the other hand the innovative way in which the form and content symbolise each other and are used as metaphors has been considered ingenious and innovative. Especially the feature of hypertext as “collage writing” which is used here to both put together different texts in order to question concepts such as authorship and originality but also to symbolize the process of the creation of the monster by a combination of different identities.

Rejecting the notion of an author's unique genius, this text self-consciously insist on the collaborative nature of its productions, from the monster to the assemblage to the distribution of authorship between the monster “herself”, Mary Shelley, Shelley Jackson, the user, the computer, as well as other more shadowy actors (Hayles, 2005, p.160).

Another aspect of this work that fascinates critics such as Hayles is its celebration of

corporeality. In pointing out its importance to feminine writings, Hayles (2005) cites the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz who maintains that women are always connected to their body while men have the freedom to be presented as mind (p.155). The objectifying of women has been a topic of discussion since the beginning of feminism but instead of trying to fight this Shelley Jackson embraces this corporeality as a creative and powerful force from which we cannot escape: "...in Jackson's text the emphasis on body and corporeality goes along with an embodied author and equally material text" (Hayles, 2005, p.156). The monster and the hypertext embody each other, but also the authors and the readers, and it is this embodiment and materiality which enable us to see the role of the computer not only in the process of creating digital fictions but also its importance in understanding them and what they try to represent. Shelley Jackson inspired by Storyspace's interface and design shows us the importance of the medium and presents the inevitable changes that the print technology has undergone in its transition to digital technology when creating literature.

While in Joyce's *Afternoon: a story* we had a "mystery" which needed to be solved in order to reach the climax of the story, this is not found in *Patchwork girl*. The story is divided in five parts which could be read separately and does not "end" by a revelation since this would go against the philosophy of the work and what it strives to present. The type of reading that can describe it best is "fractured reading" (Bell, 2010, p.109). It ends by the monster realizing that the only way she can exist would be to embrace her multiplicity and only dream about being one and unified. The same goes for the text itself, it can only be fragmented and can only say what it means by using multiple voices to capture the subjectivity of the authors and the characters and put it forward to the readers who probably feel this multiplicity within but suppress it because they think they should be one. Shelley Jackson through *Patchwork girl* shows us how to accept and be glad with being contradictory as the only way to exist.

## 5. Caitlin Fisher

### *These waves of girls: A hypermedia novella (2001)*

#### 5.1 A 70s diary

*These waves of girls* is about memories of a woman who is a lesbian and these memories trace back her sexual development and all the doubts associated with her experiences. The work is comprised of short trivial episodes of children's play, sexual encounters, thoughts about her peers, teachers, family, mostly random episodes from her life. It won the 2001 award for best fiction from the Electronic Literature Organization based upon the criteria that I mentioned in Chapter 1. It is interesting to see this work in the context of those criteria and the ways in which it fulfils them. When analysing this work I will pay special attention to its usage of frames, images, sounds, and the manner in which they are combined by using multimodal theory as a means of analysis. It will be interesting to point out the role that these modes play and the degree to which they are integrated as indispensable elements of the text, creating “an organic unity in which all the vital elements have interrelations” (Brooks & Warren, 1979, p.177). Moreover, the distinctive hypertextual structure will be taken into consideration, especially the associative linking and its potentials for organizing the work as an entirety despite its seemingly incoherent parts, but also as a means of orientation for the readers. Larry McCaffery (2001) was the fiction judge for Electronic Literature Organization and I will start by presenting his views on this work. Then I will continue the talk on quality by presenting Anja Rau's (2001b) criticism of Fisher's use of technology by using Raine Koskimaa's (2004) response who defends the work's multimodal “nature” and the manner it deals with the themes of identity and homosexuality.

Larry McCaffery (2001) expresses his amazement at the innovativeness of the digital fictions short-listed for the award for best fiction, and the ways in which they are different from print works. He makes it clear that what he looks for is “fiction that somehow managed to grab my attention and kept it, that amazed or amused or bewildered or disturbed me, and above all that moved me in some way” (para.5). He also pays attention to technology and the manner it

is used, whether it is a means which contributes to the story or whether it is forced upon it. McCaffery thinks that Caitlin Fisher uses technology to her advantage and that being a work about memories that come to mind in a non-chronological manner, it is not surprising that hypertext technology is seen as a convenient medium for this type of narrative: “Fisher creates an interconnected web of branching, narrative possibilities that evoke not just the girlhood of a single protagonist but a broader perspective of girlhood(s)” (McCaffery, 2001, para.8). The judge mentions technology as an important aspect which Fisher uses to create a symbiosis between content and form and that is where this analysis will begin.

## **5.2 “Technologically old-fashioned”**

Rau (2001b) presents a view which completely dismisses the appraisals which this work has received. She thinks that not only is technology not used in an innovative manner but that this work is outdated both in its usage of technology and also when it comes to its subject matter (para.3). According to Rau it is risky to showcase this work as the best of digital fiction because the potential readers will be disappointed by the slow time it takes to load the work and by the obsolete use of Flash, frames and pictures (para.10). It has to be pointed out that due to the fast development of the internet, the readers of 2011 will not experience such slowness of loading. She also views the failure of the work in the terms of the disadvantage of creating a work on ones own. According to her only works that are the result of a collaboration between individuals with different skills will be technologically innovative because she suspects that Fisher does not master the technology which she chose to use for her work and that is why it is flawed (para.23).

Another aspect which Rau (2001b) criticizes is also the use of Flash which is usually used for the animation of certain elements, and from which the work could have benefited if used properly. She thinks that Fisher has used it only as an additional accessory and has not managed to incorporate it into the work as an important feature (para.8). Also the problem here is that Fisher animates certain photographs which Rau sees as unnecessary and according to her opinion the only thing that they do is overload the system (para.8). Another criticism that she points out is the lack of titles in most nodes which are presented as “untitled documents” (para.10). This is a problem which has consequences both when

reading the text because if you want to read a node again you need to spend a lot of time trying to find it, and also when writing about it you can't point out exactly where the particular sentence is taken from.

Koskimaa (2004) on the other hand does not deny that these imperfections are noticeable but he wants us to look at them as features of the work that have been used by the writer to convey a meaning. If we view them simply as mistakes this leads us nowhere or as he says, it is an “intellectual cul-de-sac” (para.6). Fisher (2009) herself claimed that she wanted to create a work which looked like a diary from 1970s and that: “Waves came to life first as a series of old photographs of myself and scanned images from some children's books - then came the first stories and then a rapid weaving of images and stories and links” (Project, para.2). The interface of *These waves of girls* can give the entire work a feel of an old-fashioned piece of digital fiction like Rau maintains, on the other hand just like Koskimaa interprets it, this is done intentionally by the author something Fisher confirms herself.

### **5.3 Framing the memories**

Frames are salient features of the work which have been included for showing the manner in which the narrator remembers details from her childhood and puberty, they are used to present certain episodes as interconnected and circulatory. Frames here work both ways, as a means of organizing the narrative but also to facilitate the reading process. Kress (2010) thinks that frames are used to contain the experiences according to the manner in which they are viewed and interpreted: “A frame defines the world to be engaged with; it excludes and it includes; and in doing that it shapes, presents the world according to its interest and the principles of those who frame” (p.149).

Rau (2001b) maintains that the usage of frames in *These waves of girls* is both old-fashioned and does not fulfil the purposes for which frames are meant, which is putting elements that belong together within one frame: “...a visual border may be a sense-bearing element symbolizing a clash or rupture” (para.6). According to her, Fisher uses frames to change the text while using the same background (para.6). Another characteristics of the frames that she sees as the deficient usage of technology is that “the sizes of the background images do not

match the size of the frames”, she thinks that this is not done on purpose as part of the aesthetics of the work but that this is a “defect” (para.7).

Koskimaa (2004) again presents the frames from a different perspective than the one held by Rau. In most cases, if you click on a link from one chapter the text changes within the same window, but Koskimaa (2004) describes an exception to this when clicking opens up another smaller window, which presents another chapter. He terms this feature “nested frames”, which describes the way a chapter opens up within another one in a smaller window and then we have two sets of menus, one for each (Fig.1) (para.30). This is used in order to show the circulatory nature of the text and it is an orientation mechanism which links the different chapters by showing the reader the same nodes which are encountered in different parts, so that we as readers don't lose the thread and don't feel lost in hypertext. Moreover, Koskimaa (2004) views these frames as “referring to either the similarities of days following each other, nothing happens but things just repeat themselves” (para.31). He also thinks that this could be interpreted as being stuck in ones thoughts and memories which are repeated in a circle (para.31). However we interpret the meaning of nested frames, the most important thing to emphasize here is that the technology was used in order to put the story forward not only with words but also on the visual plane which has a strong effect upon us as readers, in helping us see and visualise what the memories mean and how they are interconnected in the narrator's mind.

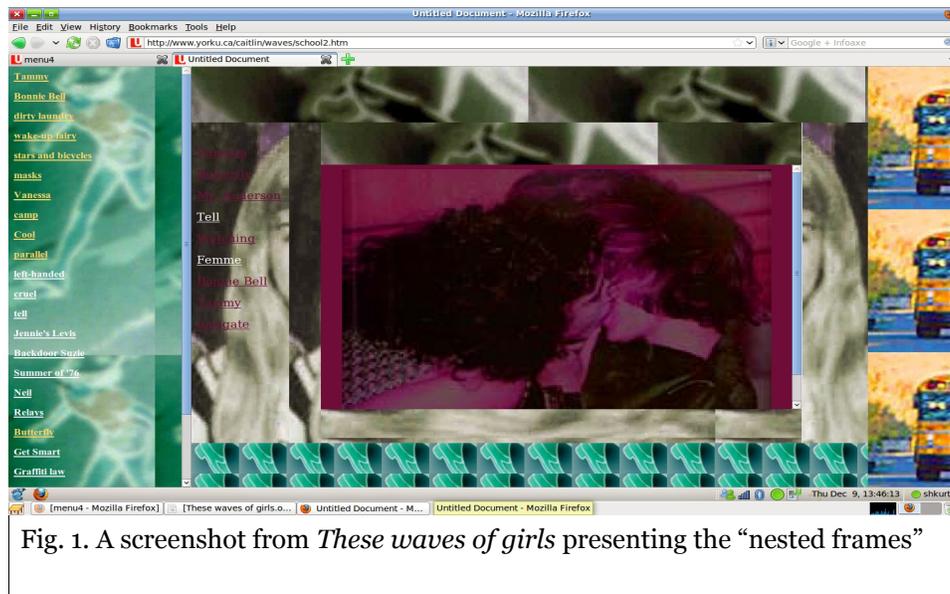


Fig. 1. A screenshot from *These waves of girls* presenting the “nested frames”

## 5.4 Manipulated images

It was mentioned above that images are incorporated in the work on different levels, there are images that are used as background to the words but also those that are incorporated with the written text. There are both static images but also images which are animated if we move the cursor inside them. The usage of images as background to words as mentioned in the presentation of the multimodal theory is what van Leeuwen (2005) terms as “integration” (p.12) which explains how an image “absorbs the text into the dream” (p.12). Koskimaa's (2004) interprets the images as inviting the words and the memories in *These waves of girls*, it is as if the narrator is looking at a photo album and recalling the memories (para.12). Therefore it is the images that invite words in their space and not the other way around.

An interesting aspect with the images is that they don't have a direct relationship with the written word and therefore they are not completely similar. Walter Benjamin has maintained that pictures offer us another view of the world and they give us details that we could not otherwise “see”, this is what he calls “optical unconscious” (as cited in Rustad, 2010, p.232). In Fisher's work, the images and words are not similar to one another, at least not on the first level (denotation), but the connotations created by the narrator are personal and related to her life and thoughts which might be difficult for the reader to decode. On the other hand even though we are not able to perceive all of these connotations, the images contribute to propounding their own story or meaning by challenging or expanding what is being written, as Jessica Lacetti (2004) maintains: “In *These Waves of Girls* the multiple mimetic modes both reinforce and destabilise meanings” (para.5). By using the linguists theories about denotation and connotation van Leeuwen (2005) explains how they can be used to understand images as well. For example John Lyons calls denotation “cognitive meaning” and connotation “emotive meaning” so connotation is more “subjective and variable” (p. 37). Even though viewers cannot maybe see the connection between the images and words in this text since we do not have the same experiences as the author, on the other hand as the term “optical unconscious” expresses, the images can make us aware of details which are missing in the words and appeal to the emotive part of our brains in order to gain our involvement and sympathy for what the narrator is sharing with us. Moreover, the “multi mimetic modes” disrupt the reader's attempts to make sense of all the elements and therefore challenges us

into paying attention to all of them on the same level. The images are not mere accessories to words, they have their own place in the story.

An important characteristics of images that should be looked closer into is their manipulation. Images are presented as negatives, the colours are distorted, there are also 'interactive images' which means that they can be made to move if we put the cursor inside their space. Koskimaa (2004) views this manipulation of pictures as the representing the inner feelings of the narrator as a person that deviates from “normalcy”.

...brings in some deeply ironical, even ominous quality to the pictures themselves, but also to the whole work. It is like the feeling of being different, not being able to do things deemed as normal, but feeling and thinking in ways which others find sick and dirty, works as a filter distorting the innocent childhood pictures (para.13)

We will look at the manipulation of these photographs from the point of view of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) “modality” which deals with the issue of the truthfulness of the information presented in images. This theory has been adopted from language where truth is expressed through modal verbs, on the other hand in images this is expressed by the degree that these images have been changed and manipulated (pp.155-156). Of course the concept of what is true or real is not a simple one: “Reality is in the eye of the beholder; or rather, what is regarded as real depends on how reality is defined by a particular social group” (p.158). In the case of this fiction work, it depends upon what the narrator regards as real and how real her memories are: “Why do I choose to be nine here, now, with brown hair and brown eyes, no Legos, no prizes for research into ventriloquism” (Fisher,2001). Memories are unreliable, we remember things how we want them to, there might be moments in which some good memory becomes a sad or a happy one depending upon the manner in which it is remembered. The fact that the pictures are manipulated, colours changed, some pictures cut presenting only the part of the eyes or legs and not the entire face or body, we can say that the modality in this work is low. This means that we have an unreliable narrator in this work and the events, thoughts, desires reflect her world-view more than “reality”, a characteristics which is common in arts in general:

Modality both realizes and produces social affinity, through aligning the viewer (or reader, or

listener) with certain forms of representation, namely those with which the artist (or speaker, or writer) aligns himself or herself, and not with others (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.171).

## **5.5 The voices of the story**

In addition to images we must take into consideration the sound files and their role as meaning making units. When we open the work we come up to the page which contains a moving image of clouds in the sky and we can hear a sound of laughter which repeats itself until we click on the story. Koskimaa (2004) interprets the laughter as first being “hilarious” and then as it continues becomes “more strained”. According to him it sounds as girls ridiculing someone and this sets the tone for the story (para.15). As the work contains episodes from childhood and puberty during which making fun, ridiculing or even bullying is part of the entire experience, it is not surprising that the work starts with such a laughter as the narrator puts it herself school is “theatre of high cruelty” (Fisher,2001). Moreover taking into consideration that this story is about a lesbian girl coming to terms with her sexuality, being scorned by her peers or being laughed at could be part of coming out of the closet process: “...will I have ice balls thrown at me and have my cat stolen?” (Fisher, 2001).

On top of the node “Vanessa” we can choose whether we want to read or listen to the story and in this part the sound files can be opened one by one by clicking on their titles. The author tells us to close our eyes and listen to the story. By closing our eyes we are invited to immerse ourselves in what she has to tell us. At the end of this node we get another chance to listen to sound files but this time: “The story spills out of us; we scramble to tell you all at once” (Fisher, 2001) and the sounds files play at the same time and we can't discern what is being said. The interesting thing here is that the narrator of this story is only Tracey but here she refers to herself as “we” and “us”. This can be interpreted in different ways, first of all this lexia contains episodes from different periods of her life, from when she is 3, 6, 10 and she might think of herself as being different in each period of her life. On the other hand this might also mean that she is a multitude of identities, ever-changing and developing, like Jackson's Patchwork girl she is “a monster by default” (Fisher, 2001). All the voices coming together at once to tell the different stories from the different periods of her life all dealing

with her girlfriend Vanessa is interpreted by Koskimaa (2004) as “the confusion of somebody trying to tell about her past and trying to deal with all the competing memories fighting for attention” (para.16). The difficulty that the narrator experiences with distinguishing the contradictory voices she hears in her head and the nature of the images (distorted, manipulated and presented outside the frames) coincide with the nature of her writing: “Don't tell, but I am very, very vain” (Fisher, 2001).

While Koskimaa (2004) tries to understand the role of the sound files in this work, Rau (2001b) dismisses them as not being “sense-bearing elements of the text” (para.9). Moreover she regards the sound files as unreliable because she can't hear the laughter of the girls in the beginning, and has to open the sound files from “Vanessa” in a separate window in order to be able to hear them: “The sound elements remain on a level of techno gadgetry and, due to their faulty implementation, appear to be mainly superfluous” (para.9). As mentioned previously I have not experienced the slowness or lack of sound files in my reading probably for the same reason as I didn't experience any slowness in loading the story: technology has improved noticeably since 2001. On the other hand criticizing the implementation of sound files by considering them as redundant elements which are put there only as an excuse for using technology does not coincide with Koskimaa's analysis or my own experience of this work. Rau presents her criticism as a matter of fact and she does not elaborate or substantiate her views. The only thing claimed is that the programming is imperfect therefore the work is imperfect too. Rau's analysis even though makes some interesting points about programming and the need for writers of digital fiction to collaborate with other artists or programmers, dismisses the entire work as not innovative in both technological and also literary aspects. On the other hand Koskimaa (2004) maintains that:

While it is easy to agree with the mentioned critic in that there are such features in the work which very much look simple mistakes or errors, there are also those of which it is difficult to determine if they are unnoticed errors, or, intentional solutions - if they are bugs or features (para.5)

I appreciated the sound files in the node “Vanessa”, it was good to close my eyes and plunge into this part before I explored the other links and nodes and tried to build up the story. This was like a moment of peace before the reader/viewer is absorbed in the chaos inside the

narrator's head. The voice of the author aided in setting the tone of the story, it is soothing, melancholic and dreamy. This coherence marker helps readers ease into the reading and understanding the work as a story filled with episodes of confusion, love, lust, pain and secrecy.

## **5.6 Challenging the discourse**

“So I was a monster by default” (Fisher, 2001)

The narrator calls herself a monster and in Halloween she has never been a pretty fairy tale princess, she has always dressed up as a creature of horror. Moreover when she has sexual encounters, they have to be hidden and secret, she has to hide under tents, she has to be quiet so that the people around her don't hear her. On the other hand, a girl from school Tammy Stevens when she has sex with a boy she does it outside in the nature, in the snow. This contrast between the narrator and the other girl represents the manner in which heterosexual relationships are more accepted and considered as more “natural” than homosexual ones.

The narrator does not want the things that other girls want, she says she has never wanted to become a Barbie, she hates soft and pink things, she is called “unladylike” and “a bad cat”. All of these things refer to the traditional discourse on gender in which lesbians are portrayed as manly and that only heterosexual girls can be fairy tale princesses and ladylike. According to Michel Foucault discourse is a “socially constructed knowledges of some aspect of reality” (as quoted in van Leeuwen, 2005, p.94) and what the narrator tries to do here is challenge the discourse on lesbians and create her own, in which she is a protagonist, even though she is the antithesis of the fairy tale princess, even though “a monster”, she is still the heroine of this tale. As she puts it, the purpose of writing is trying to create one's world and to lure readers into that world: “The desire to write is the desire to fool you, seduce you. Here I am – again – always getting the girl, saying the right thing or (toss this in for effect) something deliciously, winsomely wrong” (Fisher, 2001).

She makes the point that this does not have to be her life: “I write, but it doesn't need to be my life, exactly” (Fisher, 2001). This could be the life of all the women who are like her, who do

not fit the conventional description of women as soft, ladylike, who dress in pink and who like the opposite sex. This work represents the lives of those women and men who are defined and judged by other people's standards and rules and who are outsiders. Even though acceptance of homosexuality has grown, for more than two thousand years it was condemned as a crime and sin (Bayer, 1987, p.15). The gay activists in the 60s taking cues from feminist and civil rights movements were seeking for full legitimation of homosexual relationships by attacking the anti-homosexual circles, using “a fully developed sociocultural critique and a political assault” (Bayer, 1987, p.8). These pressures led to the removal of homosexuality from the list of mental disorders by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 (Bayer, 1987, p.3): “Sexism was thus perceived as the ideological reflection of the power of male heterosexuals incapable of acknowledging the erotic desires of women or of homosexuals” (Bayer, 1987, p. 8). It is precisely this type of sexism which is challenged by the narrator of this story.

The narrator of *These waves of girls* feels the pressure of hiding herself and her sexual preferences from others around her. Especially during puberty, she feels insecure and ashamed of her feelings. “Dishonesty” was seen as an important aspect connected with homosexuality and feminism by psychiatrists such as Haveloc Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Cesare Lombroso and philosophers Max Nordau and Otto Weininger (as cited in Bjørby, 2010, p.147).

...dishonesty was the mask you put on your face, it was a self-defence mechanism but also a result of social and medical well-meant advice: Hide you and yourself. Don't be yourself. Don't bother us with your «real» face, at least not in public and not in your literature (Bjørby, 2010, p. 147, own translational)

In the episode in which the narrator is playing with the other girls a game in which they have to tell the name of the boys that they were interested in, she feels anxious when her turn comes because she can't tell the truth and say she likes girls so she just says a boy's name in order to fit with the other girls: “I often searched the eyes of the other girls but none ever seemed conflicted or anxious, the names of boys running off their tongues through giggles without effort or regret” (Fisher “Tell”). They don't feel regret or anxious because wanting boys is “normal” and accepted whereas being a girl and wanting another girl is shameful.

There is also an episode in which she and her school friends throw ice balls at the house of some lesbians because they had been seen walking hand in hand in the park. The innocence of the children is intertwined with the cruel act of attacking someone's house because they were holding hands. We can see that the children are marred by the prejudices of what is “normal” and therefore they don't perceive the act of attacking the house of “freaks” as wrong. They also plan to steal the lesbians' cat because they feel sorry for the animal. The narrator thinks to herself that she has done worse things with girls than holding hands in parks and that the moment has come to decide whether she was going to attack other people or if she was going to be attacked herself. This is a battle that she has to fight against society by coming out as a lesbian, by accepting herself and therefore exposing herself to such attacks.

### **5.7 Associative thinking /associative linking**

While images have been interpreted as possible sources for bringing about the memories, we can also say that certain memories themselves awaken other memories and this can explain why this hypertext uses associative linking to present them. In fact hypertext began as a project called Memex developed by Vannevar Bush who presents the view that the best way to organize information is to use association to link it (as cited in Hayles, 2008, p.64). According to Hayles (2008) in her interpretation of another work which uses associative linking (Michael Joyce's *Twelve Blue*), the reader “must in a certain sense yield to this cognitive mode to understand the work (to say nothing of enjoying it)” (p.64). In *These waves of girls* by getting to know more about the narrator due to the stream of consciousness style of narration we go deeper in her head and get to know more about the manner her associative thinking and linking works. Lodge (1992) explains that stream of consciousness gives us a unique insight into the mind of the characters of a fiction work and gives us access to the most hidden parts of their subconsciousness.

For the reader, it's rather like wearing earphones plugged into someone's brain, and monitoring an endless tape-recording of the subject's impressions, reflections, questions, memories and fantasies, as they are triggered either by physical sensations or the association of ideas (p.47).

According to Ryan (2006) hypertexts are especially suited for dealing with topics that have to do with the inner processes of the mind more than with what happens outside (p.145). If we take this into consideration we can say that Fisher aims for this type of narration and even though she recounts some episodes which deal with events that she has experienced, they are all presented from the narrator's deep inner consciousness and do not focus on the outside on the same level as on the inside. Fisher also makes extensive use of repetition or “recycling of nodes” (Ciccoricco, 2007, p.23) in her work, different “words that yield” can take us to the same node (memory) but at different points in the narration. According to Ryan (2006) this should be interpreted as a memory that is haunting the narrator or a memory which she is constantly trying to understand (p.145). On the other hand as was mentioned earlier when analysing *Afternoon: a story*, “recycling of nodes” is considered as “an indispensable means of orientation” (Ciccoricco, 2007, p.50). While there are a lot of links to follow in each node in *These waves of girls* and we cannot follow all of them in one reading, recycling of nodes happens here “as a function interface” (Ciccoricco, 2007, p.66).

Therefore associative linking is helpful both in organizing the different memories but also as a means of understanding the narrator's deepest thoughts thus grasping her associative thinking. For example in the lexia “Mr. Anderson” if we follow the link from “The girls from my camp are from the country” we get to another lexia in which memories from girls' camps are recounted. This is one of the links in which the association can be said to work in a more straightforward manner. There are other more subtle associations, for example in the end of the lexia about the girls' camp there is a link contained in the phrase “Take it off, baby, take it off”, which takes us to an episode in which the narrator recounts going to see the film based on Margerite Duras' novel *The lover*. In this episode Tracey's experience is mingled with that of the heroine of the film who is also fifteen years old girl and who has a relationship with an older man: “At fifteen I was stupid; also a little brave, though not nearly so beautiful... for all my sporadic holding back, at fifteen I was invulnerable”. The associative linking is subtle here because the girls screaming “Take it off” lead her to remember the naked girl in the film and her identification with her, and in turn remembering her episode of sexual abuse in the hands of an older man. This episode is quite confusing in many ways since it creates difficulties in separating the events of the film from the experiences of the narrator and also the change from one memory to another: “But in today's version I am the fifteen year old girl who chose

the man” but she admits that “he won't remember it that way” (Fisher, 2001).

Koskimaa (2004) calls this work a masterpiece of associative hypertext and he maintains that the links create connections between the memories and assist the reader in following them but as was pointed out earlier this depends upon the degree to which we succumb to the narrator's way of thinking.

Regarding Fisher's work one is tempted to say that it is a paradigmatic example of the associative hypertext. It is a work of autobiographical reminiscences (whether it is a 'true' autobiography or a fictional one is not relevant here), where the hyperlinks are mainly motivated as a means to point the interconnections, overlaps, and coincidences between several episodes recounted by the narrator. The hypertext serves both to stimulate the associative working of the (narrator's) memory, and a way for the reader to follow possible associations (para.28)

Succumbing to the manner she associates the memories is not always easy, the author sometimes frustrates us and confuses us with her subtle and less direct associations and with her unreliable narration style which challenges our attempts to build up a coherent story but according to Landow (2006) this is the aim of a good hypertext: “...with hyperfiction and poetry the question must be, not does following the link chiefly satisfy an intellectual need but does the following link produce surprise and delight?” (p.202). Landow thinks that a lexia should leave inquiries and mysteries unsolved for a while in order for the reader to feel the need to continue reading (p.203). While we are reading *These waves of girls* we do not encounter any mysteries that need to be solved. But since the narration progresses as a “stream of consciousness” this might intrigue us to read more by making us curious about the narrator and her musings which are sometimes delirious: “I surprise myself and am in awe at how weird I've turned out to be, liking only grade 12 girls who look like boys and middle aged men with lisps” (Fisher, 2001).

Moreover, while in Joyce's *Afternoon: a story* following different lexias conjures a slightly different storyline depending on which links you decide to follow, in *These waves of girls* the story is a string of episodes which can be read randomly and the order in which we read them does not have much bearing on the story.

## 5.8 Conclusion

One of the main qualities of this work is its hypertext structure, employing associative linking to connect different episodes as they are recalled in the mind of the narrator. This gives us an insight into the workings of the narrator's mind, helping us in understanding the non-sequential organization of her memories. The different voices which recall the memories could belong to anyone, to any girl who has felt like a “monster” at some point in her life, making her the central figure of the stories or as Fisher (2009) points out these episodes can be seen as presentations of girls as strong, weak, in control or out of control. The narrator herself can embody all of these roles or they could represent different girls and precisely because the author wanted to contain all these different voices within her story, she found hypertext as the perfect medium.

The waves can be read as generational, as one girl growing-up, or many. It can signal one point in time with all these crashing narratives, remembered in one instant, like a thick palimpsest. Because it's a hypertext, I think it can be all these things (Fisher, 2009, Project, para.1).

In addition to the inventive usage of the hypertextual structure, another important aspect with this work is the manner it uses the different modes which challenge and distort one another's meaning but at the same time contribute to the overall coherence of the work. From my analysis I would say that interpreting words, frames, images and sounds has shown a collaboration between them which is akin to symbiosis: while they are different, each of them is indispensable and irreplaceable. Even though, for example words and images don't have a straightforward relationship with one another, it is precisely this contrast between them that is important for the unity of the work because hypertext fictions are able to create worlds in which contradictory things are contained within the same space. The description that Alckmar Luiz dos Santos (2010) gives to *The Book of the Dead*, could very well be applied for the fiction at hand:

On the one hand, none of these elements can be reduced to one another (i.e. they cannot be mistaken for one another), but what is more they intermingle in such a convincing and harmonious way that omitting one of them would amount to losing all the others (p.89).

The whole of *These waves of girls* creates the impression of a phantasmagoric events remembered by an unreliable narrator represented by the manipulated and distorted images which symbolize the distorted memories and the instability of the narrator's mind. By using recurrent lexias extensively Fisher embodied the spinning thoughts of the narrator which are also experienced by the reader when reading and re-reading these lexias. We are put in the shoes of the narrator, we can feel her obsessing, recalling, cutting and pasting her memories, trying to make sense of them at the same time as we are trying to make sense of the work as a whole.

## 6. Kate Pullinger, Chris Joseph and participants

### *Flight paths: A networked novel (2007-2009)*

#### 6.1 Collaboration work

'Flight Paths' is a networked novel, created on and through the internet, open to contributions from anyone, anywhere. Created and curated by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph, 'Flight Paths' uses stories, texts, videos, photos, sounds, and animations to tell the story of Yacub, the man who fell from the sky, and Harriet, the woman who witnesses his fall. It's a tale of refugees and migrants, consumers and cities, the desperate journey of one man and the bored isolation of one woman (Pullinger&Joseph,2007-2009, What is FlightPaths?).

This quote is taken from the website that was created for gathering contributions for creating this work. The project started in November 2007 and the website is still active so it is technically possible to contribute to this day. While there has been a lot of writing about the empowerment of the reader and the possibility of constructing his/her own stories in hypertext, this fiction has empowered readers in a different manner, by giving us the possibility of writing thoughts, contributing with images, sounds on the Netvibes site created for this purpose. The work itself is comprised of five parts entitled: "Yacub in Dubai", "Yacub at the airport"; "Harriet driving", "Dark mass", and "Paths crossing" which contain pictures, sounds, text, videos and tell the story of Yacub and Harriet and their encounter: two different people meeting at the parking space of a supermarket. In this work the term hypertext has been used in a simple manner, it means that we can only choose which part we want to view but there are no winding paths nor multiple points of entry or closure. Once we start viewing one of the parts, we progress by clicking on the icon  which means "go" or "forward" in Urdu.

Pullinger and Joseph (2007-2009) write in the blog dedicated to *Flight paths* that they have been interested in stories about stowaways and the clash between the East and West cultures that have been brought about by the increasing number of people immigrating to the West from all over the world (About, para.5). The story is told from the points of view of Yacub and

Harriet and it expresses a compelling view on the differences between people coming from different countries but at the same time by also pointing out to certain similarities which all of us share, thus making us aware that despite the differences we are all humans in search of happiness. Pullinger by accounting Yacub's life before, during and “after” his tragic ending is trying to commemorate all the young people who have taken this path and failed and whose voices have never been heard before.

The collision between the unknown young man, who will be both memorialised and brought back to life by the piece, and the London woman will provide the focus and force for a piece that will explore asylum, immigration, consumer culture, Islam and the West, as well as the seemingly mundane modern day reality of the supermarket car park itself (Pullinger&Joseph, 2007-2009, About, para.5).

The question of what qualities this work possesses or lacks will be explored by looking firstly at what implications the simple hypertext structure has for the presentation of the story. Secondly, I will look into the manner in which the different modes have been used and how they create the unity and coherence of this work because in multimodal works like the three last ones that I have analysed it has been important to show the manner in which all of the modes come together, what role they each play and how their roles are integrated and intertwined with one another. Finally I will explore the affordances of the collaborative writing process and its significance since this fiction is the result of a collaboration between Kate Pullinger who is a writer and Chris Joseph, a visual artist on the one hand, and people all over the world who contributed with their stories on the other. We have seen that Rau (2001b) points out in her analysis of *These waves of girls* that the best works of digital fiction will be those that are created by people who have different talents so that technology will be used in the best way possible (para.24). This is something which Pullinger takes advantage of when creating digital fiction because she (2009a) claims that she is not interested in the medium itself but in stories she can tell and how language can create beautiful pictures in our minds depending on the words we use and how we put them together (Statement, para.7). Therefore in creating multimodal digital fictions she always collaborates with artists from other fields, in this one with Chris Joseph and in *The Breathing Wall* with Stephan Schemat and babel (a.k.a Chris Joseph).

## 6.2 Simple hypertext structure

### The presentation of the subject matter

As mentioned previously, hypertext is used in this work to simply mean that we have to click to progress in the story in which there is a single path which leads to a single end. We can choose to skip a part but the story depends upon it being read in a linear fashion. This marks a change from the previous works, even *Patchwork girl* which does not have such intricate navigational structure as for example *Afternoon: a story*, is build in such a manner that its five chapters can be read in any order the reader chooses and can stop reading whenever he/she wants. This feature has been developed by Shelley Jackson in order to provide freedom for the reader to explore whatever he/she wishes and leave the story whenever it is convenient for him/her. On the other hand, in *Flight Paths* we have to follow the story by going in the order previously determined and any change we make will be at the expense of the story. Moreover while the visual aspect of *Patchwork girl* and its structural organization works as a metaphorical representation of the subject matter which provides the reader with clues on how to read and how to interpret what is being said with words. In *Flight Paths* we don't encounter such a metaphorical presentation but we do have a usage of an array of different modes: images, videos, music and sounds which Pressman (2009) maintains can also present the various people that have been involved in creating this work.

The interface of the work is a patchwork quilt of images, text, and videos presented in discrete windows that fill the screen and encourage the reader to seek out intersections between the narrative threads and the identities of the writers submitting them (para.11).

The simple hypertext structure enables this story to have a single point of ending but this ending uses a special technique which is important to look closer into. After Yacub has fallen from the sky and landed on Harriet's car, he is “not dead at all” and after they have discussed “in perfect English” whether he is dead or not, they leave together to go at her place to get something to eat because he is hungry (“Paths crossing”). This effect is termed “magic realism”, which describes a fantastic event which happens in a work of fiction which is deemed to be realistic (Lodge,1992, p.114): “Since defiance of gravity has always been a human dream of the impossible, it is perhaps not surprising that images of flight, lévitation

and free fall often occur in this kind of fiction” (p.114). This is precisely what is done in *Flight paths*, Yacub is brave for seeking his right to live, he is made immortal and unforgettable through this story and in the end his dream “comes true”. The free falling symbolizes his refusal to accept the boundaries which separate him from his freedom and his stubborn demand to be accepted as a human being.

Christine Brooke-Rose (1992) calls magic realism, “palimpsest story” and describes it as a way in which history can be presented as fiction (p.125) and this “history” creates “not an alternative world but an alternative history” (p.131). Brooke-Rose is mainly discussing books which have offered their own portrayals of a sacred or historical book or event and therefore have challenged, reinterpreted and presented different views on those events and have offered alternative ways of looking at the world which question the conventional way of thinking. In the same manner, *Flight paths* offers an alternative immigration story than the ones we usually read in newspaper. It was actually a newspaper article which inspired Pullinger to write the story and while in the real story the stowaway dies, in her version he survives the fall. This ending challenges the manner in which we perceive the world and by twisting our expectations it provides an element of surprise or “defamiliarization” which is only possible in art where our imagination is expanded so that we accept even the impossible as “real”. Successful works of art enable us to view the world differently and open up our eyes to its transcendental side and they achieve this when they: “... do things which only novels can do” and that is “to stretch our intellectual, spiritual, and imaginative horizons to breaking point” (Brooke-Rose, p.137).

Literature can thus be used to change the manner in which we think about certain social issues and how successfully a work of fiction does that is connected to how the writer decides to present the subject matter of his/her work, which as we mentioned previously Ensslin (2007) considers as one of the important values that a canonical work should possess: “Thematically, the focus will be on text's ability to make the readers reflect, to influence their world picture, or expand their horizon of expectation (p.63). Moreover, Attridge (2004) maintains that: “Literature - when it is responded to as literature is not a political instrument, yet it is deeply implicated in the political” (p.120). He claims that if the work is directly political it is not because of literariness but because of other qualities “such as reflective or

argumentative effectiveness, vividness of description or emotive appeal, or imaginative modelling of utopian projects” (p.119). This work, as I have tried to emphasize, appeals to our emotions and its effectiveness lies in the successful portrayal of the subject matter of stowaways from the insider's point of view (Yacub's point). This portrayal contrasts from the common ways this issue is usually dealt with in political discourse which usually draws upon laws and rules to tackle it and which rarely takes into consideration “the others” aspect, the stowaway's side of the story. The borders which politics has placed between humans and which create animosity and separateness are broken free and in *Flight paths*, there are no legal or illegal humans, there are only humans on the same level and with the same rights to freedom and acceptance.

### **6.3 The visual presentation of the story**

While I have dealt with images and sounds when analysing *These waves of girls* and have seen how the different modes are used in constructing the story and contributing to its overall effect, in *Flight Paths* I will be able to explore this even further since this work has more similarities with films than with books or hypertext fictions.

The most salient mode are the images which come in the window from left or right, up or down and create a screen that looks like a scrapbook (except for that the images move), this is especially noticeable in “Yacub in Dubai”. On the other hand the parts about Harriet are videos with more lively colours. The contrast between Harriet and Yacub's stories is especially apparent in the fourth part entitled “Dark mass” in which the characters' thoughts and worlds are contrasted against each other in the same window divided in two. The one to the left represents Yacub's world and the one to the right represents Harriet's and the screen is divided by a red line just like their worlds are divided by borders. The red line is associated with something forbidden, whenever you see a red line at the airport or bank you know that you are not allowed to cross it without permission from authority. Yacub is not allowed to cross the line that divides the East and the West because he is an illegal immigrant. His part of the screen is black since he is in complete darkness hiding in the aeroplane: “There is no room for me on this shelf; there is no secret entrance, into the cargo hold” (“Dark mass”). On the

other hand Harriet is shown shopping under the influence of background music which she calls “zombie-like muzak” and under the bright lights of the supermarket. She feels herself like a zombie, living a boring middle class life of shopping, contemplating about trivial things of everyday existence until she looks up in the sky. At this moment the line dividing the two worlds disappears from the screen and we can only see the blue sky and the text which tells us what they are thinking at that moment. Yacub's are on top and Harriet's on the bottom of the screen, contrasting what is going on in their minds in complete silence until a crashing noise is heard and he has fallen on her car. The contrast of two people living completely different lives, thinking about different things, separated by a red line which creates a boundary between them breaks away for a moment as Yacub is “released” and falls from the sky “reaching his destination”.

If we go back to analyse the first part entitled “Yacub in Dubai” we are shown images of both tall and new buildings on the one side and images of the construction workers on the other which contrast the lives of the rich and poor in Saudi Arabia and the irony is that it is the poor work force that keeps the development going: “The conditions were not good, worse than at home - too many men” (“Yacub in Dubai”). Colour is one of the modes here that attracts our attention since it reinforces coherence in this text but also serves to portray Yacub's world (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.229). The colours that we see here are black and yellow, therefore a lack of differentiation, a world and a life without colours. It is a harsh and a grim fight to survive in bad living conditions, lack of possibilities and a struggle to make it another day: “I wanted to work and now I had a job. Now I would be paid” (“Yacub in Dubai”).

As I have pointed out in the presentation of the multimodal theory in Chapter 2, pictures can also be analysed by taking into consideration the people presented in the pictures which are called “represented participants” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.114). For example in “Yacub in Dubai” there are images of workers, either posing for the picture or working, and in many of these images we can barely discern their faces because the most salient colour is black. But there are some of the “represented participants” who are trying to make direct contact by looking straight at us, while for us as viewers it is difficult to respond to this request since we can't return this desire for human contact because we cannot look into their eyes: “There is ... a fundamental difference between pictures from which represented participants

look directly at the viewer's eyes, and pictures in which this is not the case" (p.117). As we have mentioned previously, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) the difference is that in pictures in which the represented participants are looking directly at us means that they are "demanding" something from us. On the other hand in pictures where this is not the case, it means that they are "offering" us something, like for example a glimpse into their life without the need for the viewer to return the favour "as though they are specimens in a display case" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.119). The "specimen" here are the workers like Yacub who are used as slaves and who have no choice but to work with whatever is offered to them. In the next part "Yacub at the airport" there is an image of what looks like a woman wearing a burka who is very close to the screen. It is quite difficult to discern her clearly since also here the black colour is prominent, but with difficulty we can see eyes staring at us and at this point the words help us understand the picture more: "My sister could tell that something was up, but I told no one of my plans, not even her. I found it hard not to cry" ("Yacub at the airport"). She is looking directly at him and/or us and she can see that something is wrong and she is trying to find answers by looking into his eyes, that is why she is standing close to him and we can notice this because she is very close to the screen. Another interpretation could be that she is asking us, the viewer for answers as to what is going on with her brother or maybe she is just asking for compassion and human understanding.

On the other hand in the third part entitled "Harriet driving" we get a glimpse in the mind of a housewife, living in suburbs, contemplating about the calmness of her surroundings and her family. Despite this quietness she is aware that in other parts of the world there might be conflicts and wars but where she lives there is only peace. She is going shopping while at the same time she is aware that she doesn't really need to buy anything: "...the fact that there is already a ton of food in my house and I am on my way to buy more is not the point" ("Harriet driving"). Harriet is part of the consumption culture of the West where people buy things even when they don't really need to, while on the other hand in other parts of the world there are people like Yacub who are starving and who don't even get paid for the work they do. This contrast between Yacub's thoughts and isolation and Harriet's philosophical musings about her existence is made apparent through the text, the video and music. While in the two parts about Yacub we have images and very little movement, in Harriet's part, she is driving, the video is showing nice surroundings which change as we move and the moving car makes us

feel like we are inside with Harriet, that we could be her. This connotes to us viewers feelings of freedom, people like Harriet can move and drive whereas Yacub is confined and trapped. There is another contrast here with colour, while Yacub's words are presented against a black background, Harriet's are presented against a white background. Yacub's world is grim and his future does not look any brighter. Harriet's world is more colourful and brighter, at least on the outside under the bright lights of shopping malls. She might be bored and tired of her mundane life and the consumer society she is part of might be crushing her spirit, she might have lost sight of more important issues of the world by burying herself in the suburban existence but she has the freedom of movement, she can travel anywhere. Yacub faces difficulties in surviving trying to get payment for his work, help his family which proves to be more difficult than he had thought. They are worlds apart in their thoughts, surroundings, life circumstances but in another way they are similar, they are both trying to break free from their circumstances.

Another aspect of the images which is important to analyse is that we cannot see either Yacub or Harriet, there is “non representation” of the main characters of the story (Machin, 2007, p.121). We see everything from their perspective and therefore feel more immersed in the story. When we watch films we look at the actors talking and doing other things from the outside, in this digital fiction we are directly connected to Yacub and Harriet's surroundings by seeing things from their eyes. This lack of direct representation of participants and other elements in pictures gives the work a universal application (Rustad, 2010, p.233, own translation). This has the effect of getting us involved in their thoughts and fates which make us aware that any of us could be Yacub or Harriet and that putting oneself in another person's position by seeing the events from their points of view is the best way to understand them.

In this part of the analysis I have tried to point out the manner in which this fiction uses images, colours, to complement the words. This complementation works on many levels, while images present what is being said with words they also play another function, they give us other details with which to interpret Yacub and Harriet's story. The words help us understand what is being presented with images and the images help us understand the words by presenting with the colours, “represented participants”, moving images or static ones everything that is left “unwritten”. The simplicity of the language of this work leaves space for

the other modes to contribute with their own representations of the world. In addition, there are also two other modes that are important in this fellowship and these are sounds and music which I will deal with below.

## **6.4 The soundtracks of Yacub and Harriet's lives**

Sound has the ability to bypass the linguistic system of awareness and stimulate emotions in ways that we are less verbally conscious of. This characterises sound as a system of signs perceived without being filtered out at more conscious levels of our perception and cognition (West, 2009, p.285).

We have seen in the analysis of images, colours, represented participants and videos the manner in which all of them work both separately and together to present the story of isolation, hope, escape, ordinariness, difference and sameness of Yacub and Harriet. There are two other modes which also play just as important roles in this “community” of modes and these are the sounds (and lack of it at certain points) and music which can be heard in each part of the story, and it will be interesting to see the manner in which they heighten the narrative.

The sounds are those that can be heard in the surroundings where the narrators are located, for example the noise of aeroplanes when Yacub is at the airport, the noise of shopping carts' wheels when Harriet is at the supermarket and these sounds create the ambiance for the stories. Moreover, each part of the story is accompanied with music which also works in a similar manner as sounds in creating the background for what is being presented with words and images and set the mood for it since each part has its own unique soundtrack. According to Tore West (2009) music in a multimodal work is reliant on other modes and must be analysed as a part of a complex system: “Therefore, multimodality brings forward the need for analysis of music and sound as part of a system of complex interactions with logics of other modes” (p.289).

What functions does the music play here and in what manner is it connected to the quality of the work? Larsen maintains that music can have three functions: formal function (music creates coherence in a work), narrative function (music serves as leitmotif and it prepares the

reader for what will come next), and emotional function (the music creates a certain ambiance) (as cited in Rustad, 2008, p.125, own translation). In this work the music performs all of these functions and by doing this it contributes to “extend the verbal narration” (Husárová , 2008, p.4). Below I will deal briefly with these functions and the manner in which I perceive they are performing their roles.

Each part has its music, the accompanying soundtrack to the story and this is a short melody which is repeated until the specific part we are viewing ends, this type of recurring theme is called “leitmotif” in music and it establishes a connection with a person, place or idea (West, 2009, p. 286):

The theme is usually a short melody or a certain chord progression, or a rhythmic pattern ... Leitmotifs are used to tie together a work into a coherent whole, and relate the music to the libretto or story; it can also supplement or extend the plot (West, 2009, p.286).

The music in this work establishes the tone to the characters' stories and their cultural background. For example in “Yacub in Dubai” the melody sounds like ethnic Arabic music and is in harmony with the pictures and the surroundings which are being shown - Dubai. On the other hand in “Harriet is driving”, the music is more modern and fast paced, it contains a refrain which is repeated again and again. The music features a female singer, who sings with a very sombre voice, this relates the music to the story because Harriet's thoughts are gloomy and reflect her life as a suburban housewife, doing the same things every day. The music pinpoints also the connection between *Flight Paths* with films more than with hypertext fiction. Just like in films, the music sets the tone and the mood of the story and engages us emotionally.

There are also moments of silence between the sounds and music which create suspense. In “Dark Mass” when Yacub is falling down from the sky while Harriet is watching, there is silence which creates the climax of the story and which is charged with emotional overtones. In soundscape field this is known as “aurial space” or “auditory space” and according to West (2009): “Moments of aural space are used to redirect the attention of the listener, to build tension or to simply let the ear rest from sound” (p.286). In this part Harriet loses herself completely in the moment, she doesn't move, she just stands watching this dark mass falling

from the blue sky, on the other hand the people around her continue shopping and don't notice anything. Nobody cares. The silence also creates a feeling of momentary calm before something bad happens, that is the effect of the crash sound at the end of this part, it is made more dramatic because of the silence which precedes it.

The music when used successfully as in *Flight Paths* plays all the functions that Larsen pointed out and since in this work the characters don't speak but their thoughts and dialogue is presented in written form, the music serves also to fill the silence and to draw us closer into the narrators' thoughts, making it thus an indispensable element without which not only the coherence but also the aesthetic effect of the work would be weakened.

## **6.5 Fellowship and collaboration**

There is another aspect about this work which brings together different people with different experiences and life situations like Yacub and Harriet and that is the project itself that lead to the creation of the work. Everybody, no matter where they came from were invited to contribute with stories, anecdotes, sound files, music, images or anything else they wanted to share. According to Rettberg (2005) there are different degrees and types of collaboration in creating literary works, from those in which participants are completely aware of how their input is going to be used to those who do not know this (para.58). He distinguishes three types of collaboration: “conscious participation” in which the participants are aware of how their contributions are going to be used and are also knowledgeable to the nature of the work itself (para.59); “contributory participation” the participants do not know how their input is going to be used or what type of work it is going to be used for but nevertheless participate consciously in the project (para.60); and “unwitting participation” in which the participations are selected by the machine and people have no control over how their input is being used or what it is being used for (para.61). Rettberg (2005) maintains that these different levels can be combined and used together (para.62). In *Flight Paths* we have two types and levels of collaboration and participation: “conscious participation” between Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph who knew the nature of the project and how their contributions were going to be utilized, and on the other hand other people (everyone else who knew about the project and contributed) who were aware of the nature of the project which is described in the website for

collecting the contributions but who did not know how their input would be used in the work itself, therefore making them contributory participants.

Despite the fact that the project did not attract as many contributions as was expected and despite the problems associated with creating a work in this manner, we can go to the website which gathered these contributions, “Flight Paths universe” which is also included in the page of the fiction work itself, make our mark and read all the other stories which enrich the entire work. This affordance of the internet has the potential of bringing people together by enabling us communication and information exchange with people all over the world. Our daily lives are confined to a single environment and we might get so caught up in our routine (like Harriet) that we might forget the world around us. Even if we remember it, like Harriet does, we can feel too far removed from it and therefore it can appear alien and too strange from our own. Direct communication with this world enabled by internet has the potential of creating ties among people all over the world.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

The simplicity of the language which leaves space for the other modes to tell their part of the story, a subject matter which is both contemporary (the problem of immigration) but also universal (fellowship among all humans), the synergy of the various modes which gives us the impression of being there, present in the aeroplane with Yacub or driving with Harriet in the car, are some of the pleasures offered to viewers when experiencing this work. It expands our horizon and understanding of other humans who may feel like they are far away and different from us but who might cross our path when we least expect it and awaken us from our confined spaces into seeing the bigger picture.

This work challenges the statements about digital fiction that it posits difficulties in orientation for its readers, some of which we have already stressed in the analysis of the first generation works. There is no difficulty in navigating this work, it is as sequential as a print work but it challenges us on other planes by stimulating our sight, hearing and emotions. I would say that for this work “less is more”, less complication in navigation, but on the other hand a wider selection of modes which we have to interpret in order to understand the work.

This is not to say that all digital fiction should be linear or have less complicated navigational structure in order to be valuable, on the contrary I am maintaining that lack of these features does not make it less worthy or less innovative and challenging work. On the other hand it lacks some of the qualities that we have seen for example in *Patchwork girl* when it comes to using the medium as a metaphor for what the story tells us and how it is presented.

An important feature of *Flight paths* which makes the work technologically unique and innovative is the collaboration project which as mentioned earlier gathered contributions from people all over the world willing to participate.

‘Flight Paths’ attempts to explore the potential for writing, collaboration, reading and viewing online. It builds upon my established track record in this field; while the world of traditional book publishing has been slow to respond to the opportunities afforded by the internet, ‘Flight Paths’ is a serious literary endeavour that seizes upon the possibilities for participation and inclusion that the network can provide (Pullinger, 2009a, Project, para. 2).

Pullinger (2009b) in her blog discusses the problems that she and Joseph faced when it came to attracting wide participation from the audience and that even though they had been able to reach some people, they were never really satisfied with the level of participation and in discussing this issue with other new media artists, they were asking themselves whether participation was “a good idea in theory, but very difficult to actually pull off” (para.2). The difficulties were especially connected with the technological affordances because some people found the platform in which contributions were gathered too complicated. Nevertheless, she and Joseph continued the project and despite the difficulties and not as large participation as expected, the blog and the site hosting the contributions makes for an interesting reading and provides a deeper insight into the story itself and we get a glimpse of the thought process of the writer while creating the characters and the story.

In my opinion it is this type of collaboration and inclusion into the creation process that can attract more readers to digital fiction. Its influence could also increase when such projects are dealing with societal or political issues which are current but which also have to do with fundamental human issues and concerns. These suggestions are not meant as guidelines that should be followed but only as remarks based on the analysis of *Flight paths* and to point out

the reason why I regard this work as a good example of what multimodal digital fictions could look like and what effects they might have on readers/viewers.

## 7. Kate Pullinger, Stefan Schemat and babel *The Breathing Wall* (2004)

### 7.1 “Hyperventiliterature”

The third generation of digital fiction will be represented by *The Breathing Wall*, an innovative piece of fiction created by Kate Pullinger in collaboration with Stefan Schemat and babel (a.k.a Chris Joseph) which requires an unusual form of contribution from its viewers: their breath. It is a ghost “gothic” story combined with elements of detective story and it is comprised of five “Day-dreams” which tell the story of Michael who has been falsely convicted of killing his girlfriend Lana and four “Night-dreams” during which Michael is visited by his girlfriend's ghost who is trying to help him get out of prison. It is in this part that our breathing functions as a force for moving the story as the wind moves the trees.

There are two interesting readings of this work, one by Ensslin (2010) in which she pays special attention to the “corporeality of multimodal perception” (p.155), by taking into consideration theories on cyberculture and also the manner in which the multimodal theories as developed by Gunther Kress and van Leeuwen and also Anthony Bauldry and Paul J. Thibault stress the “physical and physiological” (p.155). Ensslin's interest is to investigate the manner in which works of digital fiction challenge the “intentionality in the readers-users”, and she does this by using Aarseth's theory on cybertexts in which he analysed the dynamic texts by paying more attention to the code than to the content of the text (p.155). The focus of my analysis is a different one therefore her reading will be used in a limited manner.

On the other hand Edward Picot (2004) in his review coins the term “hyperventiliterature” due to the fact that sometimes he got so frustrated that the “Night-dreams” were progressing so slowly that in order for something to happen he blew more and more into the microphone finding himself out of breath. While he feels at certain points that the interaction of our breathing with the images and sounds in the work is striking, he claims that this very technique “hinders our involvement rather than enhancing it” (para.9).

Reading *The Breathing Wall* is a quite different experience from reading the first and second generation works, except for *Flight Paths* which is created by two of the same artists. Just like in the latter work, also in this one we do not need to worry about which links to follow or get frustrated when we do not understand how we got to a particular place in the story. Moreover while in *Flight Paths* we have to push the button “go forward” in order to progress in the story, in *The Breathing Wall* we don't even need to perform this minimal activity. In this interpretation I will focus upon how the work tries to pull us into the story by using its medium as a hypnotizing tool. This medium makes it possible to incorporate multimodality and a software that measures the rate of the reader/viewer's breathing thus creating the ambiance which completely absorbs us in it. Immersion has usually been used by mass entertainment literature, film and television in order to capture the reader's attention and has usually been considered as a means of entertainment which provides thrill but not as a mark of literary quality. By looking at what role immersion plays in this particular work, I will explore the ways in which it can be seen as a quality in this type fiction. On the other hand in this work, as Ensslin (2007) points out, despite its extensive usage of images, sounds, despite its technological innovativeness which allures us into its domain, the work nevertheless derives its power from the story that is trying to tell us (p.112). The beauty of the story is not sacrificed for the effects of the medium which contains it. I want to elaborate how this “beauty” is presented by analysing and interpreting the different elements of this work and how they interact with one another.

The Breathing wall owes its attractiveness to a variety of things. Visually and auditorily, a lot of effort and attention to detail went into creating an enticing user interface. Background images, colours and sounds change frequently, giving the work a synaesthetic aura akin to film. However, verbal language remains the decisive medium of information retrieval (Ensslin, 2007, p.112).

## 7.2 From clicking to breathing

### “Night-dreams”

In an interview Kate Pullinger (2004) admits that she wanted to create a work which moved away from the hypertext technology with its links to a work which offered an immersive environment for the reader to get lost in and which managed to remove the obstacles which hinder this experience (p. 476). The other collaborator Stefan Schemat, shares her view about hypertext and has created the software Hyper Trans Fiction Matrix in order to break free from the constraints of links and clicking which he claims: “... forces you to emerge from what you want to be submerged in, continually” (p.476).

The manner in which this works submerges us into the story is especially prominent in the “Night-dreams”. Before we even start reading this part we are told to lie down in our bed and turn off the light and let ourselves be moved into Michael's dream realm. We are hypnotized through the sounds and the film footages which move according to the rate of our breathing, the more relaxed we become, the more the story is revealed to us. Lana tells Michael but it seems like she is also telling us to breathe and dream, to follow her voice: “You can't get out of prison if you can't listen to me”. This is because in the “Night-dream 4” we find out what happened to Lana from her point of view in her chilling description of the night of her murder. Her voice calmly describes the wind that night and her surprise when she saw that the gate of the park was open even though it was late at night, she describes a hand covering her mouth and how her initial fear slowly dissipated as life ran out of her. Ensslin (2010) pays attention to the appearance of a hand close to the screen in “Night-dream 2” and also in “Night-dream 4” and the contrast of meaning in each dream. While in the second one the hand inspires “a positive and hope-inspiring atmosphere” (p.162) due to the warm colours used which give us a feeling of comfort. On the other hand in the “Night dream 4” the hand becomes the murder weapon, while Lana was sitting on the bench in the park she felt a hand covering her mouth and she suddenly thought of the game “Who am I?” which she loved playing and which ironically she was very good at. The problem is that Lana does not know who killed her, she doesn't know whose hand covered her mouth but she wishes that it was Michael who did it. She finds comfort in thinking she was killed by the man she loved: “I so

wish you were my lover. You were my killer... It feels better with your hands. Do it for me. Push me into the white sleep” (“Night-dream 4”). Then the act of placing his hand over her mouth could be interpreted as an expression of affection. According to Ensslin (2010):

... the symbol of protective and simultaneously threatening hand, which serves as a *pars pro toto* of both ally and enemy, is used to show on the literal level, impeded visual sensation and thus, figuratively, withheld insight and knowledge (p.162).

When it is implied that her father might have killed her, we finally understand why the hand was associated with warmth in the second dream and moves to be associated with suffocation and murder in the fourth. It is the hand that raised and fed her. It was the hand that parented her and protected her from the outside world when she was a child that took her life.

As mentioned above according to Picot (2004) there are instances in the “Night-dreams” which don't work well for the purpose that they were created and that in fact they make us weary instead of lost in the story. But on the other hand: “Where the technology works well, the feeling that the flow of images and sounds is controlled by our breathing makes the 'Dreams' sequences authentically dreamlike and immersive” (para.9). Such instances are for example the trees moved by the wind which feels like we are moving with our breath, another moment is when a single leaf appears on the screen which also moves in accordance to our breathing, if we stop for a moment, the leaf disappears from the screen. These moving images combined with the eerie sounds invite us to let go and be carried into the story like the wind carrying the leaf.

The wind itself is an important symbol whose presence is seen, heard and felt in every dream, both day and night. The wind and breath are seen as interconnected because they symbolize the spirit of divinity, of God in Christianity and Gods in Ancient Greece (Ferber, 1999, pp.235-236) and that is why Lana can be seen as Michael's guardian angel who speaks to him in his solitude and who saves him. In this story the wind can also symbolize freedom, Michael asks his parents to bring him pictures of the wind on the trees when they come to visit him (“Day-dream 2”). Freedom is like the wind, it is a life force which moves everything but which cannot be seen. The wind is also a means of being carried away inside the story when Lana tells Michael to “Listen to the wind. Listen to the voices in your head” (Night-dream 2”). The voices

in the head of the reader/viewer are Michael and Lana's which we need to listen in order to understand what happened. The wind brings Lana's voice closer to us, but at the same time echoes in the background thus creating disruptions in the communication. The wind in this story symbolizes freedom and being carried away but at the same time it is sinister and dangerous and can serve as a warning sign that something bad is going to happen just like the night Lana was killed is described as "Such a windy night" ("Night-dream 3"): "Winds are fickle, they snatch things away, they clear the air or darken it, they change the weather" (Ferber, 1999, p.236). The story plays on these characteristics of the wind to change the events, to challenge our attempts to understand the story, just as the wind can change what we hear. The story plays with us by making revelations and then contradicting them later, all the time using the wind in the background as a creator of confusion. Therefore the wind can symbolize the medium itself which is like a double-edged sword, on the one hand it enables stories like this to exist but on the other hand it can also disrupt the reader's reading and understanding of these stories by its "strangeness".

In "Night dreams" there are also long sections with only sound in which nothing happens. According to Picot (2004) the work can lose its effects upon the reader who might lose patience and stop viewing before he/she has heard the entire part. He laments that we can't see how much we have progressed in the "Night-dreams" and therefore we don't know when we have finished (para.10). I would add here that even though what Picot says is true, that it is difficult to tell whether the dream will reveal something new to us, nevertheless before we start viewing we are provided with the information that each "Night-dream" lasts between 20 to 30 minutes. Even though once we open the window there is no way to tell how much we have progressed, knowing the time frame gives us an assurance that there is going to be more revealed to us after long sequences with only eerie sounds.

As a matter of fact, however, breathing down your nose generally isn't enough to shift the dream- sequences forward: blowing gently into the microphone is more likely to do the trick. Even employing this technique, the dreams only unfold very slowly, especially the fourth dream, which I abandoned in despair on four or five occasions before I finally managed to get beyond the opening scene (Picot, 2004, para.9).

I had the same experience when reading/viewing the work, there were moments in which I

was wondering if something was going to happen or whether I was going to hear only sounds until the end of the “Night-dream”. On the other hand knowing how long the dream was going to last kept me going on breathing into the microphone, waiting excited for something to happen. Sometimes like Picot, I would feel frustrated and would blow into the microphone because I was caught in the thrill of the story and wanted to discover more: “This is the strength of *The Breathing Wall*: being a murder mystery, it has an old-fashioned 'page-turning' quality which isn't found very often in new media work” (Picot, 2004, para.5). Even though this “page-turning” quality is not a mark of literary quality, *The Breathing Wall* has showed that digital fiction can be used as a medium for exciting and thrilling stories of mystery and murder. Moreover, this is not the only quality the work possesses. In my opinion it is more important the manner in which the detective genre is used to challenge the reader, make him/her an active participant who wants to find out what happened to Lana by involving him/her physically in the story. The murder, while it drives the story, in the end remains a sub-plot (it is not important who killed Lana) and the main aspect remains the relationship between Lana and Michael and their families, the struggles of a man who lost his love and who is blaming himself for not being there to protect her and it is about Michael finding peace of mind. This human struggle is the main subject matter of the story and the thrill is used for effect because in the end: “No one knows who did it. But it doesn't matter anymore. Michael and Lana are at peace” (“Day-dream 5”).

### **7.3 “Day-dreams”**

While in the previous section I focused upon the “Night-dreams” and how they are organized, in this part I will take a look at the interface of the “Day-dreams” by looking at the way the modes are organized and the techniques used for telling this part of the story.

The “Day-dreams” deal with Michael's life in prison and these sections are organized in a linear manner with words, images, text, audio files and lines which are spoken by Michael and Lana. An interesting aspect of the narrative technique in these parts is that there is a shift between a third person narrator who tells us the background information about Michael and the first person narrators who are Michael, Lana and Florence. The story is told in the present

tense which is used as a technique to make the fiction more immediate but also to make the reader more sympathetic to the plights of the main characters. Michael is tormented because he wasn't able to help his girlfriend when she needed him the most. On the other hand his sister Florence, who at first believes that her brother had killed her best friend Lana, feels responsible because she was the one who had talked Lana into breaking up with Michael.

Once we enter a “Day-dream” the story progresses on its own and there is no need for the reader to click or do anything else. Below on the screen there are numbers which show the number of changes in screen, we know every time where we are because circles move around the number we are currently viewing. It is possible to click on the number and move directly to that part, or go back to another part but each of them is organized in such a way that the reader/viewer is not encouraged to do this, except if we want to go back to a section previously viewed to see it again.

The images in “Day-dreams” are still and usually have a direct relationship with the written text, for example when his parents are visiting him and are trying to comfort him, we are shown an image of a hand placed upon another hand which is a usual way for people to comfort one another. This is what Ensslin (2007) calls the iconic use of image, which means that the image “mirrors or reproduces the meaning of another sign” (McKillop and Myers as quoted in Ensslin, 2007, p.21). When we are told about Michael's prison cell, the image shows a dark room with a bed, as Ensslin (2010) puts it: “The closed room images depict the dark, stifling interior of a prison, thus multiplying the effect of Michael's verbal expression of frustration, emotional suffocation and despair” (p.161). The text tells us of his routine there, the fact that the lights are turned off at 7:30 and turned on at 7:30 the next morning. It is twelve hours of noise, music, loud talking from the other prisoners while Michael lays in bed: “Alone in his cell, Michael falls apart. Full of dread and horror, afraid to sleep in case he has another nightmare about Lana. Noise, hip-hop music, rattling...” (“Day-dream 2”). In contrast to this, in “Day-dream 3” the prison cell has a light shining inside, while Michael can feel Lana's presence in his cell comforting him: “He has her with him”. Her presence is the light which we see shining through the small prison cell window and this symbolizes the hope that Michael has for getting out of there. We see the light also when Florence is talking to Michael on the phone and she is looking over at the neighbour's house, the light is shining through

their window. In contrast Florence is in her family home which is dark and cold, while their neighbour's house always looks filled with warmth. In all these examples we can see that the images augment what is being expressed verbally. Images showing the prison cell, the dark and cold house of Florence's parents and the messy house where Lana's father Dr. Doyle lives represent the feelings of coldness and emptiness felt by the characters who are affected by the death of a loved one.

An interesting aspect with the “Day-dreams” is that Michael's lines are spoken, while on the other hand what the other people say is presented by the written text. So when Michael is talking to his sister Florence even though we are “transported” to her house and can read on the screen what she is saying, we cannot hear her voice. According to Picot (2004): “The problem is that the text seems to be arriving inside our heads as we read it, whereas the spoken words seem to be coming from the outside” (para.6). To me it seems like when Michael is speaking to the other characters it feels like he is talking to us, asking our help and compassion, immersing us into his story, the same effect is felt when Lana is speaking to Michael telling him: “Michael, sleep, sleep”, we feel like she is addressing us when she says: “I will tell you everything I know” (“Night dream 4”).

In the still images there are no people represented, only objects, as mentioned previously in *Flight Paths* this is termed as “non-representation” (Machin, 2007, p.121). We are not outside viewers of Michael's life, we are invited inside his experience, we have to find out together with him what happened to Lana by keeping our breathing steady and normal because Michael says: “I haven't been able to breathe since you have died” (“Day-dream 2”). So we need to participate actively and directly because we need to help him and lend him our breath. To Ensslin (2010) digital fiction works even though do not represent their “readers-users” in the physical manner like avatars in video games, nevertheless the reader-viewer in works like this one plays an important role and has to share his corporeality with the narrator which is done “in comparison with the implied, 'ideal' reader, or 'breather' ”(p.162).

...every narrative assumes an implied 'reader', and it is one major achievement of cybertextual narrative that this implied reader or 'breather', as in our example, shares his or her phenomenological physicality with the narrator and/or hero(ine) of the story (p.158)

The “Day-dreams” are aesthetically very different from the “Night-dreams”. In the “Day-dreams” we have still images of confined spaces, whereas in the “Night-dreams” we are presented with footages of open spaces which could have been used for presenting a sense of freedom which Michael feels in his dreams. Picot (2004) sees this division at times as threatening to the unity of the work but at the same time acknowledges that “the two halves are unified by the demands of a single narrative” (para.5). Lana tries to tell Michael what happened to her in the “Night-dreams” and Michael uses those clues in the “Day-dreams” to try to prove his innocence: “And he remembers her words. Every single word that she said last night. Lana fed him a clue.” (“Day-dream 3”).

#### **7.4 This is not a hypertext**

We have discussed also in the previous works that in digital fiction, especially in hypertext fiction arriving at an ending can be problematic. While this work is linear and Pullinger (2004) insists that *The Breathing Wall* is not a hypertext (p.481), this does not prevent the work from intriguing the reader and leaving certain questions open to speculation despite the lack of multiple paths of entry and ending. Moreover, in contrast to *Flight Paths* where the medium is used to present the images, sounds and animation but is not used in a metaphorical sense. In this work the medium is used in a compelling manner in order to involve the readers/viewers as breathers.

In writings about hypertext it has been maintained that it can have many points of closure and that it is characterized by gaps and indeterminacies. Hypertext can also challenge our attempts in building a coherent narrative by placing obstacles and by presenting inconsistent and contradicting points of view. These were meant to challenge the writer's control over the text and to present a text which is fluid and in motion. All of these characteristics were attributed to the affordances of the hypertext structure. Nevertheless, *The Breathing Wall* despite its linearity has offered us a possibility to see the manner in which a work which does not use hypertextual structure can still challenge us, offer us indeterminacy and a type of open-ending which I will deal with in more detail below. Moreover, the lack of links offers us a type of immersion which lacks in hypertext fictions.

In *The Breathing Wall*, even though in “Day-dream 4” it is presented as though the murder mystery is solved by Florence, this resolution is immediately questioned by Florence herself: “Florence thinks there is more to the story” (“Day-dream 4”) and she later wonders why would Dr. Doyle lie about killing his own daughter. Expressing this in the present tense as fact, makes us believe it but we are still left in the dark as to what this “more” could mean. Why does Florence say this? And while we might hope that Lana is going to reveal new information in the next dream, we soon realize that she doesn't know who killed her. We are left to think that it might have been Dr. Doyle who did it, even though we can't really believe what he says since he is emotionally unstable: “Oh my god, he says, it was me. Wasn't it? It was me. I killed her. I killed my baby.” (“Day-dream 4”). But the physical ending of the narrative after “Day-dream 5” in which Michael visits Lana's grave doesn't give us the possibility to explore the issue further and leaves us to speculate about what happens to Dr. Doyle. Florence's “there is more to the story” is left to our imagination which means that the work is savoured in the reader's mind even after its “physical ending”. On the other hand, as Douglas (2000) puts it, the physical ending of the story stops us short from finding out things that we might feel are left unspecified in the story.

So, to eco Gertrude Stein, an ending, is an ending is an ending. Regardless whether the plot stops dead or dribbles to a halt in the middle of the novel, or the narrative turns itself into a labyrinth where neither center nor the end offers us any scraps that resolve riddles in the plot, their physical endings sever our connection with the story (p.95).

By moving away from hypertext structure, this work offers the readers a possibility of immersion through pictures and music which lack in the first generation works (mostly build upon words). Moreover by involving our bodies (respiratory apparatus) for revealing the story, the work develops an immersion which Ryan (2001) considered as ideal for an aesthetic experience: “...immersion is a corporeal experience ... it takes the projection of a virtual body, or even better, the participation of an actual one, to feel integrated in the art-world” (p.21) Even though getting lost in an another world and being able to picture it is a great source of pleasure, it hasn't been considered as a mark of aesthetic quality of the text: “For Victor Nell, the experience of immersion - or rather calls it, of reading entrancement - is a major source of pleasure but not necessarily a trademark of 'high' literary quality” (as cited in Ryan, 2001, p.96). Nevertheless Nell doesn't maintain that immersion is not worth pursuing, on the

contrary he thinks that readers can benefit from such an experience because they can build upon what is familiar and known to them (p.97). In the same manner, Ryan (2001) does not deny that immersion comes from being exposed to known patterns nevertheless maintains that after reading or understanding a difficult book we can return to it and “enjoy the 'easy' pleasures of immersion” (p.97). In *The Breathing Wall*, we also have to overcome the obstacles of the medium and its strangeness in order to feel immersed and enjoy the story.

We see from these points that even linear texts like *The Breathing Wall* can challenge the readers and can prolong the pleasures of reading by leaving us with open questions and unresolved mysteries which will continue to haunt us long after we have finished reading the text. This is not a revelation, this is only a confirmation of what we have known before from print literature. We don't need multiple paths in order to feel in control or to feel like authors, we don't need multiple points of closure in order to feel that the story will always be open to us to discover more from it. There are other manners to achieve these effects and that each of these ways is unique and interesting to explore and one is not superior to the other.

## 7.5 Conclusion

When asked what attracts her to digital fiction, Kate Pullinger says that it is the combination of the different modes like sound, text, video which enables the creation of effects which can be similar to books and films, but which are at the same time unique to the experience of reading digital fiction.

I think it's that combination of text, sound, video, and graphics, and what appeals to me is the fact that there is a way in which it's like film, it's like a book, it's like television, but it's not like any of them at the same time (Pullinger, 2004, p.480).

It is this quality that describes what makes this work unique and technologically innovative. In “Night-dreams” the work combines elements of film footage, but on the other hand it offers its viewer a more intimate environment and more inclusive one than the experience of watching a film. Moreover, unlike a book, the narrative builds its coherence through the usage of the different modes and media, each of them reinforcing and complementing the other and

none of them can be said to be more principal than the other. While Pullinger stresses that the aim of *The Breathing Wall* was the creation of a work which uses the affordances of different media in order to immerse the reader and make him or her oblivious of the medium itself, I cannot help thinking that having a microphone under my nose, trying to control my breathing in order to get more from the story, makes me “more engrossed in the medium than in the story itself” (Bouchardon, 2010, p.10). As I have tried to point out in the analysis, in this work we find instances of both: when the technology works the sections are immersive and manage to pull us in the narrative. On the other hand it cannot be denied that there are instances in which we might be paying more attention to our microphone and breathing and this interrupts our interaction with the narrative. While immersion has always been considered as a quality of romances, detective stories which use specific techniques to allure “the naïve reader”, one who reads for entertainment and who does not want to be challenged (Bolter,2001, p.170). *The Breathing Wall* shows that a good work can use immersion not only for entertainment purposes but play upon the characteristics of the medium to challenge the reader and his/her attempts to resolve the mystery of the story and that immersion can be achieved only after we have understood the medium and its affordances.

Another important feature is the linearity of the work which is even more prominent when put in contrast with the works of the first generation. This linearity was used in order to experiment with the software which used breathing as a means of moving the story forward. This technique goes well with the story being partly a murder mystery because it is very important the order in which we get to know the events, the clues and the resolution of this mystery. This accounts also for the way in which the narrative is organized and presented in “Day-dreams” and “Night-dreams”.

The work derives its power from its technologically advanced software, its combination of images, film footage and sounds but despite all of this newness, it is the words (spoken and written) that are the main attraction of the work. Moreover, as Ensslin (2007) points out: “...the most important aspect is the overriding physical impression of finding their respiratory apparatus in harmony with that of the protagonist, thus establishing a previously unknown degree of identification” (p.112). So for a digital fiction work to be attractive to the readers it will be expected not only to tell a good and original story by using language as its tool, but also

the materiality of the medium will be an essential component and works like *The Breathing Wall* will allure readers by presenting them with a story to engage with, in a manner never experienced before.

## 8. Final remarks

### 8.1. Interpretation as evaluation

It has been emphasised in the first chapters that the questions about quality in digital fiction are not easy to tackle since this field incorporates works which are diverse and use the medium in different ways, therefore it is a challenge to pinpoint in detail all the features that make a particular digital work a masterpiece. This is not only an issue with digital fiction, even print literature with its long tradition does not have clearly defined evaluation mechanisms. With these difficulties in mind, the method that has been chosen here is to analyse and interpret digital fictions in order to discern how they work, by putting emphasis on literary techniques and the manner in which the technological affordances are used for the presentation of the subject matter. Understanding the medium which hosts these works has been done in order to analyse the manner it contributes in creating an original work which plays both on the traditions of print and takes advantage of the digital medium, thus inventing its own unique techniques of narration. Hayles (2002) is an ardent advocate of paying due attention to the technology (materiality) which has influence on the literary (p.25) and she maintains that it cannot be seen as second to it or as a mere addition but as an equally important aspect.

Understanding literature as the interplay between form, content and medium, MSA (media-specific analysis) insists that the texts must always be embodied to exist in the world. The materiality of those EMBODIMENTS interacts dynamically with linguistics, rhetorical, and literary practises to create the effects we call literature (p.31).

The embodiment of digital texts is especially noteworthy in works which manage to represent the content on a “physical” or metaphorical plane. These are the works that manage to engage us “physically” in experiencing them by affecting our different senses. This is especially true of the multimodal works which use pictures to pique our visual skills and capabilities, music and sounds to affect us emotionally, but hypertext fictions also challenge our cognitive abilities by presenting us with choices and prolong the literary experience by denying us the “pleasure” of

an ending. Therefore in dealing with quality in literary works: “Final evaluation is ... dependent on our arriving at an overall understanding” (Short&Sermino, 2008, p.119). This overall understanding is based upon interpretation of the elements of each work, how they function as meaning making units and the manner in which they change our world-view, the way we perceive and think about the things around us, as the term “defamiliarization” emphasizes. This concept as it was mentioned previously points towards the “originality” of a work (Lodge, 1992, p.55) and saying that a work is original has always been considered as one of the best praises that can be bestowed upon a work. As I pinpointed in Chapters 1 and 2, compiling an encompassing list of qualities that a literary work should possess or discussing the appraisal of works from a purely theoretical perspective would be an impossible endeavour. Thus, I decided to focus upon the particular works and through them point out that talking about the quality aspect of literature is a learning experience that can broaden our literary horizon. I wanted to explore these new literary forms and the best approach according to my opinion, was to talk about what makes them intriguing, intricate and challenging, what connects them with print literature and in what ways they are new and different. The critic's job is not to provide us with definite or finite answers like for example scientists do: “Woolf's critics are not trying to solve Woolf. They are trying to ensure that the discussion of *The Waves* continues into further and further reaches of intellectual depth” (Ramsey, 2008, para.46). In the same manner in these discussions of quality I am aware that reaching finite results is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, this discussion is one contribution which can be supplemented, challenged and developed further but the important thing is to point out that despite its contingent nature, it is a discussion which is worth undertaking and one from which digital fiction can benefit.

In this part I take a look at how the critics have talked about quality from print literature and move on to how the concept of quality was dealt with in digital fiction. I will conclude by summarizing why I think the works analysed in this master thesis are unique and how they contribute to development of literature in the digital medium.

## **8.2 The concept of quality from print literature to digital fiction**

Before we move to the discussion of this issue regarding digital fiction, it is interesting in this context to look at some of the discussions of the concept of quality and the process of evaluation in print literature. This will serve as a basis which will be supplemented by a more specific discussion on quality in digital fiction.

According to critic Terry Eagleton (2008) the concept of “value” in literature is not a stable term and it depends upon the context and “particular criteria and in the light of given purposes” (p.10). According to him it might happen that in some future society Shakespeare will not be appreciated any more than some graffiti-art: “Literature in the sense of a set of works of assured and unalterable value, distinguished by certain inherent properties does not exist” (p.11). There are many critics that agree with Eagleton that the concept of value of literature is historically dependent but who still think that this does not diminish its value as a concept. For example Eirik Vassenden (2007) maintains that “quality” is one of those terms that the philosopher W.B Gallie called “essentially contested concepts” (p.18, own translation). It is a concept which has changed through history and which is in constant motion. According to Vassenden this does not mean that it is impossible to pinpoint, but that its very essence is that it cannot be stuck in one meaning: “The very conflict with its meaning and usage has cemented itself as part of the concept's central meaning” (p.18, own translation). What Vassenden (2007) means is that even though the meaning of this concept evolves throughout history, it is still a concept that we can use to talk about literature and art and other “cultural phenomena” (p.18). These are the concepts that “call for one form or another of qualitative discourse, one or another form for qualitative sorting” (p.18, own translation). Moreover he thinks that the issue of quality, especially when we are talking about the formation of canons of literature is not determined by our gut feelings or hunches, but it is based upon knowledge: “Instead of thinking of quality as an intuitive, subjectively understood concept, it should rather be considered as a historically changeable and socially constructed term” (p.18, own translation).

Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1988) maintains also that literary works have value which changes and develops constantly and that this value will be found in these processes: “... literary value

is not the property of an object or subject but, rather, the product of the dynamics of a system” (p.15). Despite this view she does not agree with Eagleton that exploring this issue will be useless, on the contrary she finds it interesting that this issue has not been pursued more arduously by critics because according to her it is an issue which we cannot ignore: “...for a responsive creature, to exist is to evaluate” (p.42). Despite the disagreements about whether quality or value of a literary work can or cannot be accounted for or whether it is objective or subjective. I agree with Vassenden and Smith who are keen to point out that despite its contingency and/or instability it is a discussion which critics and readers of literature cannot evade.

Erik Bjerck Hagen (2000) has a different perception of quality than the ones presented above, he emphasises that quality in a work of fiction is felt in our enthusiasm over a sentence in a novel or poem and that literature makes us more sensitive, it can both lift us and bring us down (pp.131-132, own translation). Building upon the most renowned names of critical theory such as I.A Richards, Harold Bloom, F.R Leavis, Hagen presents four aspects as important for determining quality in literature. The first one is the fiction's presentation of reality, the second is the concept of “sincerity” (introduced by F.R. Lewis), these two are complemented with the third one, which is “strangeness” (Harold Bloom). To all of these Hagen adds a fourth one which deals with the reader's feelings and experiences of fiction works: “...analysis of his or hers emotional response to the reading experience” (p.138, own translation). I will briefly account for these concepts below exemplifying them with the digital fictions analysed previously.

The concept of reality has nothing to do with the conventional realism, but it has to do with the manner in which the fictional world is represented. It has to be described in such a believable manner that we as readers are able to participate in it and perceive it as “real” as the world in which we find ourselves in (Hagen, 2000, p.136, own translation). It is this realism that makes us believe that Yacub survives the fall and becomes friends with Harriet in *Flight Paths*. The second concept “sincerity” has to do with the vividness of the voice which tells the story or speaks in the poem (p.137, own translation). For example in Caitlin Fisher's *These waves of girls*, it is precisely the sincerity of narrator Tracey which is one of the main attractions of the work, it is not important if Fisher has experienced these events in real life,

what matters is that her narrator attracts us to her world with her unique voice. The “strangeness” of a work (or “defamiliarization”) describes its originality. Each work has to be able to present the world in a new light and absorb us into this description so that we accept this strangeness as something “natural” (p.137, own translation). To these three concepts, Hagen (2000) adds a third one which he calls “emotional centre”. This deals with the manner in which the reader experiences a literary work and the manner he/she feels about its quality: “We are either attracted to the author's style or it gets on our nerves” (p.138, own translation). While the first three concepts can be accounted for in the text itself, the last one has to do more with the reader's “emotional response”.

... I will use a term about the literary experience's emotional centre, which can be comprised of one or more scenes, paragraphs, words or a relatively uncomplicated constellation of scenes, paragraphs or words. These points are responsible for the perception of quality, and they can be found in any analysis or interpretation (Hagen, 2000, p.139, own translation).

In order to exemplify what Hagen means by “emotional centre”, I will use Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork girl*. The creation of the monster by Mary Shelley and the relationship which develops between her and her “monstrous” creation make up some of the most powerful scenes in this work. As mentioned in the analysis, the monster in the beginning has problems with accepting herself and the way that she looks, in the same manner as Mary is scared of her creation. In due time both of them realize that Patchwork girl is in fact as beautiful as the “autumn foliage” with its “myriad differing hues” because the multiplicity of colours creates a contrast which is much more beautiful to look at than a single colour. The development of the relationship is described in a series of events in which Mary grows closer to the monster. This intimate relationship is so special and secret that Mary cannot even share it with her husband. It is a combination of feelings which are shared between sisters, parents and children and also lovers.

Hagen's combination of textual elements with the reader's experience of the “emotional centre” of a work is not far removed from van Peer's view (2008a) that there are three factors that influence the evaluation process: the text, the reader and the context (p.2). According to him critics like Terry Eagleton have placed all the importance on context while denying the other two factors which according to van Peer are just as influential and important for the

evaluation of literary works (p.2).

By denying that any influence from the reader's personal characteristics or particular linguistic features of the text play a role in the evaluative process, these authors claim that out of a range of potential explanations, only one applies (p.2).

There are certain works according to him which will remain in the canon of literature whereas there will always exist others that have not entered nor ever will. For example he compares the works of Shakespeare and Arthur Brooke who wrote about the tragic love story of *Romeo and Juliet* and points out that while Shakespeare's work has survived the test of time and is still considered a masterpiece, Brooke's has been forgotten. In his analysis van Peer (2008b) shows that even though Shakespeare's work challenged the opinions of the time it was more popular and still remains so, whereas Brooke's work has faded into obscurity. By this example he tries to show that there are features within a work that account for their quality which can be stable, at least to a certain degree (p.19).

This is the approach that I have also adopted in the analysis of digital fiction. Even though for example a hypertext fiction like *Afternoon: a story* may seem technologically old-fashioned now and its lack of images, sounds and other modes could be seen as a deficiency when seen from the point of view of more recent fiction works like *Flight Paths* and *The Breathing Wall*. On the other hand, the work is appreciated for its innovative navigation strategies, the manner it took advantage of the affordances of hypertext not only in presentation of its form but also content, with its multiple narrators which a reader has to strive to know in order to tell who is speaking and which in turn helps him/her to piece the story together, as Walker (1999) puts it. Rettberg (2001) maintains that critics of digital fiction should not make the fallacy of substituting technological innovation for literary quality (pp.2-3). Like we have seen in the analysis of *These waves of girls* where I showed that while for Rau (2001), who views the work strictly from the point of view of the programming, the work is a faulty and non-professionally designed piece of digital fiction, Koskimaa (2004) tries to seek meaning and interpret all the elements of the text, even the "faulty" ones. Rau wrote her essay in 2001 and we can see that in her analysis she placed importance on the context from which she wrote and that when I read the work in 2010 I don't experience any problems with the loading of the fiction or with opening and seeing the images and sound files. Looking at digital fiction from

this point of view, I can agree with van Peer (2008) that a critic should analyse the works by taking into consideration the text itself and how it affects the readers or in the case of digital literature the viewers. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind also Smith's (1988) view that the perceptions of value of literary works will change over time. These paradigm shifts should not be seen as making it impossible to talk about the value or quality of literary works. On the contrary, they contribute to it with new readings and new interpretations thus enriching it.

Ensslin (2007) as mentioned previously maintains that in digital fiction we can build our theory from print literature criticism and supplement it with “augmented sense of mediality” (p.26). This is the view that I have adopted in this thesis and the discussion presented above shows that some of the same issues about quality that critics dealt with in print fiction can be applied and used in the discussions about digital fiction, but by always keeping in mind the specificities of the medium. One such medium which has been very important for the development of digital fiction is hypertext. Even though not all critics completely agree with this view, for example Aarseth (1997) didn't consider hypertext as an innovative medium due to the fact that it shares many of the same characteristics of print fiction (p.78). On the other hand, as mentioned in the analysis of *Afternoon: a story*, the similarities and differences between print and digital fiction and the manner in which they influence and shape one another is described by Hayles (2008) with the term “intermediation”. This term accounts for the manner in which literature moving from one medium to another carries with it the knowledge “typically by trying to replicate the earlier medium's effects within the new medium specificities” (p.58). She thinks that the power of electronic literature comes from traditional literary techniques which are supplemented by the materiality of the medium (p.59). This materiality can contribute to the creation of new literariness which is also maintained by Serge Bouchardon (2010). While literature was defined by the Trésor de la Langue as “the aesthetic use of the written language”, Bouchardon describes digital fiction as: “The aesthetics of materiality: materiality of the text, of the interface and of the medium” (p.8). The materiality of the text is seen in the manner in which the text responds to the actions of the reader, for example in *The Breathing Wall*, the text responds to our breathing: “It is the gesture of the reader which reveals the materiality of the text.” (p.8). The interface is a salient component when entering a work which gives us an overview of the work without revealing everything, for example in *Patchwork girl* the interface shows us each part of the

work and how they are organized. Whereas when it comes to the medium, Bourchardon (2010) wonders whether the readers get more immersed in the medium than the story itself (p.10). He also wonders if digital fiction does not create a new type of literature through the possibilities of its medium.

According to Jean-Pierre Balpe, many electronic literature works deal with literariness: “the sole interest of electronic literature is literariness, what makes a given work, a literary work”. Electronic literature opens up literariness by getting us to consider as literary works that do not meet the traditional criteria of literariness (constantly evolving text, use of multimedia, material interventions of the reader). By opening up literariness, electronic literature could announce the emergence of a new form of literature (p.15).

In its beginnings hypertext was hailed as precisely the medium which was going to change literature and its development was going to be the beginning of the end of books. Hypertext was described as an innovative medium which freed us and which gave us the powers of an author or creator (Coover, 1999). This characteristics was seen as one which made the hypertext different from the print medium and one from which it derived power and influence. It was not long before such views were criticized and denied by other influential critics such as Aarseth as was elaborated in Chapter 2. Nevertheless, digital fiction is greatly identified with the hypertext technology, many critics use the term hypertext fiction when talking about these types of works. For example, Ensslin (2007) in her book *Canonizing hypertext: Explorations and constructions* classifies the works in three generations, she does so by emphasising their nature as hypertexts and her entire book is based upon hypertext theory. Hayles (2008) on the other hand by dividing the works into two generations: the first generation (hypertexts) and the second- generation (multimodal works), claims that the second generation works “deemphasize the link” (p.7). Even though both of them apply the same criteria when dividing them into generations (salience of words or the usage of other modes), Ensslin limits this by focusing on their nature as hypertexts whereas Hayles points out to a rupture with hypertext which happened around the time that *Patchwork girl* (1995) was written and which lead to the creation of works which use images, sounds and animation.

Taking into consideration that many critics use the term hypertext fiction to refer to all of these works, it is not surprising that we can find more answers to the question of what makes

a hypertext fiction good then a discussion of this issue from the perspective of digital fiction in general. The first one is a question which George P. Landow (2006), Robert Kendall (1999), Marie-Laure Ryan (2006) and Astrid Ensslin (2007) among others have attempted to answer. As we have mentioned previously in the analysis of *These waves of girls*, according to Landow (2006) links in hyperfiction should not offer clarity to the reader because that is not the purpose of literature. On the contrary they should astound the reader, confuse and challenge him/her (pp.201-202). While the links might not provide an obvious coherence for hypertext, Landow thinks that we can still built up a text that makes sense (p.204). While for example in Joyce's *Afternoon: a story* we as readers can make informed choices on a very limited scale due to the fact that the links first of all are hidden and that they also provide very limited number of hints for what should be expected. In Fisher's *These waves of girls*, the links are built upon association, so we as readers do not feel as disoriented as for example when navigating *Afternoon* but nevertheless we have to accept the “cognitive mode” (Hayles, 2008, p.64) of Fisher's narrator in order to be able to follow the association presented in the text. Whereas *Patchwork girl* while it uses a simple navigation structure is nevertheless a successful hypertext because of its innovative usage of the hypertext medium to present the subject matter on a metaphorical plane.

... employ the powerful organizing motifs, in this case scars and stitching together that function as commentaries on gender, identity, and hypertextuality. Stitches and scars, which have obvious relevance in a tale involving Dr. Frankenstein and one of his monsters, become metaphorical and create unity and coherence for the entire assemblage of lexias (Landow, 2006, p.206).

Kendall (1999) thinks that the nature of hypertext as a new medium for storytelling is one of the most important characteristics which should be emphasised when reading and analysing these texts because it is the hypertext structure that makes them different from print. He thinks that hypertext should offer many different paths which are based upon different perspectives, and give the reader the power of choice. This of course must not be overdone and the reader should get enough information from the link in order to make knowledgeable choices and not just lucky guesses: “Too many vaguely defined choices can seem like no choice at all...” (para.9). Ensslin (2007) shares the view that hypertext fiction is dependent on the medium and that the manner in which the reader navigates these types of texts is by

understanding confusion as a feature and by using it in a artistic manner. The features of hypertext expand our cognitive abilities by displaying texts which are different from one another and require different reading strategies.

...the actual idiosyncrasy of the hypertext is its ontological and aesthetic dependence on the medium, with its vast amount of functionalities, applications and navigation possibilities (which include the link as a decisive, yet, not its sole structural novelty). As a result, every single hypertext confronts the reader with a new epistemological challenge, a phenomena that is largely foreign to book consumption (p.42).

Ryan (2006) on the other hand thinks that a way to make the hypertext more available and less disorienting to the reader is by offering a linear storyline and after a while offer different links and alternative plot lines and elaborations of the main narrative (p.144). This technique is noticeable especially in *Afternoon: a story* which has a default path which needs to be supplemented in subsequent readings by following the different links. As Walker (1999) has discovered without the default path, the reading of this hypertext ends in frustration and disappointment. On the other hand *Patchwork girl* has a quite simple navigation structure but makes up for it in other features: the various mapping structures which show us not only the manner the work is organized but are also important for understanding the work. The images of the monster used as a map, her body parts stitched together are used as a metaphor for reconciling of the different writing styles and writers within Shelley Jackson's work.

It cannot be denied that these claims are useful and help us get a more overall view on the structure and organization of good hypertext fictions and the manner in which the hypertext technology can be used more effectively by writers and can be better understood by readers. We can not deny that this medium is important for digital fiction and has opened up for a new way of thinking about literary techniques and styles of narration. On the other hand we cannot deny that critics (like Aarseth) who have dismissed some of the overstatements maintained by Landow and Kendall make some valid points. As we have pointed out previously, in the analysis of hypertext fiction taking into consideration both of these positions gives us a more nuanced point of view about the nature of hypertext and how it is used for creating literature. Moreover, through the analysis of the diverse works that are presented in this thesis I have tried to point out to another development that cannot be

disregarded and that is the creation of works which have moved from the complex navigational structures and which explore different modes, especially images, sounds and animation and the usage of technology not only to present choice and multiple paths to the reader but also to open up a new way for creating and experiencing digital fiction.

### **8.3 Summary of the analysed works**

The analysis and interpretation of the five fiction works presented in this master thesis has shown that each of them contains unique qualities which demonstrate the infinite possibilities of the computer as a medium for creating literary works. At the same time they have enabled me to draw certain general conclusions about quality in digital fiction which I will summarize here.

Looking back at the research questions presented in Chapter 1 and the judging criteria put forward by the Electronic Literature Organization (2001), it is noticeable that these works even though they use literary techniques and characteristics developed in print literature especially in modernist and postmodernist fiction, they do so in an innovative manner by taking advantage of the affordances of technology and therefore open up for the development of a new type of literariness. This literariness is dependent on the medium and it is the medium which the reader should get acquainted with before he/she starts reading the work. For example as Jill Walker (1999) showed in her analysis of *Afternoon: a story* before she found out that she could read the story by using the default route, she didn't manage to get anywhere and gave up in frustration. Nevertheless, the readers of *Afternoon: a story* soon find out that they need to explore this work through clicking on links which are not marked but which are hidden and they soon realize that clicking on links is not the same as turning the pages. Links from one node to another are gaps which the readers needs to fill, in addition to what it is being told and how it is being told (like in print fiction), we have to understand also how the links are organized as I have showed in the analysis of associative linking in *These waves of girls*. Just like reading between lines is important when analysing and interpreting print novels, in hypertexts in addition to reading between the lines we have to also read between the nodes, as Rettberg (2001) points out: "The reader of the hypertext is not only reading the text, but also the intentions of the linking strategy" (p.8). In contrast to

*Afternoon: a story* which uses the Storyspace software to create a work with multiple paths which we need to explore, we have seen that *Patchwork girl* uses a simpler way of organizing lexias by dividing them in five parts which can be read in a quite linear fashion. On the other hand she uses the medium and its capabilities in order to present the subject matter and the experience of reading the work on a metaphorical plane. This is the metaphor of a work patched from different and contradicting ideas just as the monster is created from the parts of different women and her character is a representation of all of them. The text is an amalgam of contradicting voices which also reflect the monster's struggles with her many identities. According to Eskelinen (2004) the manner in which the classic hypertexts have used the medium to motivate readers is by presenting the protagonist's actions and state of mind in navigational structures of the works so that the reader can experience them first-hand (para.22)

Moreover, I have included works which have even simpler navigational structures than *Afternoon*, and in which the term hypertext is used to mean simply moving from one part of the story to another but in which there are no links to explore within the lexia itself. By analysing such works I have tried to demonstrate that digital fiction is not only hypertext fiction and does not have to be built upon intricate linking structures to be challenging and to “make strange” the techniques of print literature. The challenge in these works have to do with analysis and interpretations of different modes. The images can have a direct relationship with the words or they can present new perspective on what is being said. Both of these instances might be challenging for the reader but they are incorporated into the story and are just as critical for the understanding of the work as words are. The same applies to other modes like sounds, music, frames among others. It can be maintained that in these works the image and other modes have replaced the link. Just like the link is not merely a connector of two lexias but which can help us understand the intentions of the writer (Rettberg, 2001) and teach us the “joys” of the freedom of choosing our own path (Parker, 2001). In the same manner pictures are not merely decorations displayed next to words, they challenge what is being said, they show what is being said and they can distort what is being said. This means they need to be analysed and interpreted in their own right and we also need to account for the relationship they have with the words and how they contribute to the aesthetic value of the work. This will help us see that despite their differences, images (and other modes) and words

contribute to the coherence of the work as a whole. Another advantage with the works that do not have complex linking strategies is that they can attract more traditional readers to enjoy digital fiction. Those are the readers which are more comfortable with being offered one path of the story and which get lost and distracted if they are presented with a work like *Afternoon: a story*. In all of these works it is important to stress that when I say the “innovative” usage of technology, I don't mean that they use or should use the latest technology in order to be perceived as highly qualitative works of digital fiction as has been emphasised when I presented Rau's (2001) views on *These waves of girls* where she dismissed the entire work because the programming was faulty. What “innovative” means when we are talking about digital fiction is that the medium is used to show or present to the reader the subject matter in a visual or metaphorical manner or to engage the reader with the work in ways that are not possible with print works.

The new literature benefits from the old but also from its medium, which as I have attempted to show is a component of great importance. When the characteristics of the medium embody the narrative, it is then that we feel the full effects of digital fiction and can maintain that it is an original means of expressing oneself. I approached these works with scepticism, doubting if the computer was a suitable medium for presenting serious literary works but at the same time I hoped that I might encounter something new and exciting which was going to change my expectations about literature. The experience was accompanied by both frustration when a path I followed suddenly stopped or when I had difficulties in reconciling all the conflicting voices telling me their thoughts, ideas and philosophies about life, or when I could not follow the associations of the narrator. On the other hand the more I read and re-read the works, I felt gratification when I suddenly found a lexia which gave me an insight to something new or when the story slowly opened up a new way of seeing the world and human experiences. The diverse “natures” of the works kept my curiosity going, I could never predict how the story was going to be presented or what my role was going to be in uncovering it. This element of surprise is an important feature of digital fiction enabled by the materiality of the medium which if used correctly can open up to the readers an entirely new literary experience.

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