

# ***Hypertext***

**LITT 3224-001 (w2)**

**Spring 2006**

**MWF 12:45-2PM**

**Room: AS234**

**Scott Rettberg**

## **About this course**

Hypertext fiction is a new literary genre that has developed at the juncture of rapidly developing technology, critical thought, and literature during the late 20th Century. During this course we will develop an understanding of hypertext as a 21st Century literature derived from innovative literatures of the 20th Century. Students will engage in the critical study of hypertext literature, and will write hypertext fictions of their own.

Attendance for this course is mandatory. Students missing more than three scheduled class sessions will lose one letter grade step for each absence thereafter. Any evidence of plagiarism will be grounds for failing the course.

## **Website**

The paper syllabus is not the “live” version. Our schedule is likely to change over the course of the semester. **Page numbers of assignments**, paper topic assignments and modifications to the class schedule will be posted to the class website. You are expected to check the site at the start of every week for this updated information.

## **Contacting the Instructor**

The best way to get in touch with me is via email. Please note: when emailing me, be sure to include your name and a brief statement of the email’s topic in the subject line of the email. For example: JOHN DOE MISSING CLASS TOMORROW. I will make every effort to respond to email in a timely manner, though you should not expect an instant response.

## **Required Texts**

Required texts for this course include

*Hypertext 3.0* by George Landow

*Cybertext* by Espen Aarseth

*Patchwork Girl* by Shelley Jackson

*Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley

*V: WaveSon.nets / Losing l’Una* by Stephanie Strickland

## **Position Papers and Final Paper**

Students will write six short weblog position papers, produce a Storyspace hypertext, write a collaborative web hypertext with the rest of the class, and write a 7-8 page final paper. If class participation shows that not everyone is keeping up on the reading, there may be periodic unannounced quizzes, which will figure into the class participation grade. Position paper assignments will be posted on the website. There will be eight opportunities to write these brief (approx. 600 word) papers. Each student must complete six. The final paper will be a close reading of a hypertext. The paper should both perform what Katherine Hayles calls “media specific analysis” – that is develop a reading of the text in its technologically specific context – and should be a close reading – analyzing the hypertext in the same way as one would a

literary text in any medium.

### **Creative Projects**

In addition to reflecting critically on works of hypertext, students in this course will write two creative hypertext projects: one written individually using the Storyspace software used to create the classic pre-web hypertexts, and a branching path hypertext for the web.

### **Evaluation**

25% Position Papers  
25% Final Paper  
15% Storyspace Hypertext  
15% Web Project  
10% Presentation  
10% Attendance, Participation and Quizzes

### **Schedule of Classes**

#### **January**

Fri 13 Course Intro  
Mon 16 Martin Luther King Day – No Class  
Wed 18 Vannevar Bush "As We May Think" Handout  
Fri 20 Ted Nelson Handout, Set up weblogs  
Mon 23 Jorge-Luis Borges "Garden of Forking Paths" Handout  
Wed 25 Landow *Hypertext 3.0, Afternoon* by Michael Joyce  
Response #1 Due  
Fri 27 Landow *Hypertext 3.0*  
Mon 30 Landow *Hypertext 3.0, Victory Garden* by Stuart Moulthrop

#### **February**

Wed 01 *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley  
Response #2 Due  
Fri 03 Storyspace Project Lab  
Mon 06 *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley  
Wed 08 *Patchwork Girl* by Shelley Jackson  
Fri 10 Storyspace Project Lab  
Mon 13 *Patchwork Girl* by Shelley Jackson

Wed 15 Storyspace Project Lab  
Response #3 Due

Fri 17 Storyspace Project Lab.

Mon 20 President's Day – No Class

Wed 22 Storyspace Projects due at start of class. Hypertext Demos.

Fri 24 Hypertext Demos.

Mon 27 Shelley Jackson "My Body, a Wunderkammer." Response #4 Due

### **March**

Wed 01 Shelley and Pamela Jackson "The Doll Games"

Fri 03 HTML Lab.  
Response #5 Due

Mon 06 HTML Lab

Wed 08 *Sunshine 69* by Robert Arellano

Fri 10 Hypertext Lab  
Response #6 Due

13-17 SPRING BREAK

Mon 20 *The Unknown*

Wed 22 *V: WaveSon.nets / Losing l'Una* by Stephanie Strickland  
Response #7 Due

Fri 24 Hypertext Lab

Mon 27 *V: WaveSon.nets / Losing l'Una* by Stephanie Strickland

Wed 29 *V: WaveSon.nets / Losing l'Una* by Stephanie Strickland

Fri 31 TBA. Response #8 Due

### **April**

Mon 03 *Cybertext* by Espen Aarseth

Wed 05 *Cybertext* by Espen Aarseth

Fri 07 Hypertext Lab

Mon 10 Web Hypertext Presentations

Wed 12 Web Hypertext Presentations

Fri 14 Hypertext Lab

Mon 17 Web Hypertext Presentations

Wed 19 Web Hypertext Presentations

Fri 21 Hypertext Lab

Mon 24 Collaborative Hypertext Lab

Wed 26 Hypertext Readings

Fri 28 Hypertext Readings

**May**

Mon 01 Paper Draft Workshop.

Wed 03 Final Paper Due

## Position Paper Assignments for Hypertext

### Position Paper #1

In "Proposal for a Universal Publishing System and Archive," Ted Nelson proposed a hypertext system which might have some advantages over the contemporary Internet, such as a persistent archive, access to multiple versions of documents, backwards links and "trails" such as those conceptualized by Vannevar Bush, but which would have been based on proprietary technology. Do you think that Nelson's proposed system, Xandadu, would have been more useful than the contemporary Internet? Discuss positive and negative aspects of the system Nelson conceptualized.

### Position Paper #2

Terry Harpold's "Conclusions," Jill Walker's "Piecing Together and Pulling Apart: Finding the Story in *afternoon*" and Raine Koskimaa's "Reading *Victory Garden*" each offer an analysis of a Storyspace hypertext or hypertexts. Each critic utilizes both traditional methodologies of close reading and strategies of reading that are specific to the new media. Each furthermore discusses ways in which the hypertexts are "inexhaustible." Respond to one of these three essays, paying particular attention to the alternative reading strategies the critic applies to the text. In the absence of a discussion of a text that is clearly framed by linear chronology, what aspects of the hypertext does the author consider? Can the examination of narrative structures such as links, repetition, and intertextual referentiality offer a satisfying interpretation of a text that does not offer easy avenues for its interpretation as a totality?

### Position Paper #3

Although it was produced during the Romantic period, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* shares at least one trait with many works of contemporary fiction (and hypertext fiction) in that it is an "intertextual" work that borrows from a variety of other works of literature, both in borrowing quotations from other texts and in referring to them in the novel. It could, in fact, be argued that the identity of Frankenstein's monster is shaped by the texts that he reads. Do you agree that the monster can be understood as a collection of and/or application of the ideas he encounters in the texts that he reads? Discuss the relationship between the texts Frankenstein reads, his reception by humanity, and the mayhem he unleashes in response.

### Position Paper #4

In what sense can Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* be understood as a feminist reappropriation or retelling of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*? Were there any ways in which Mary Shelley's novel can be considered dissatisfying in terms of the role that its women characters play? Do you think that Shelley Jackson was trying to fill in some gaps left by the original novel and, if so, do you think she was successful in doing so?

### Position Paper #5

In Chapter 6 of *Hypertext 2.0*, George Landow quotes Jay David Bolter who writes that "In place of a closed and unitary structure, they [writers] must learn to conceive of their text as a structure of possible structures. The writer must practice a kind of second-order writing, creating coherent lines for the reader to discover without closing off the possibilities prematurely or arbitrarily." Using *Patchwork Girl*, *Victory Garden*, and *afternoon* as examples, discuss the kind of choices that writers can make in creating this type of "structure of possible structures." How does this notion of

structure conflict with the Aristotelean idea of plot Landow describes earlier in the chapter? Is one kind of narrative structure superior to or "more natural" than the other?

#### Position Paper #6

In "Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis," N. Katherine Hayles asserts that "five hundred years of print have made the conventions of the book transparent to us," and that "literary criticism and theory are shot through with unrecognized assumptions specific to print." What are some of those unrecognized assumptions, and is Hayles' proposed remedy of media specific analysis a good remedy for them? Is there any potential loss in shifting from traditional methods of literary analysis to media specific analysis?

#### Position Paper #7

In each of the three works we've encountered by Shelley Jackson; *Patchwork Girl*, "My Body," and *The Doll Games*, she has utilized links and hypertext structures in a different way, though it could be argued that many of her thematic concerns (for instance, the importance of the body in shaping identity) were consistent in each of the three works. Did you find the narrative strategies in any one of the three works more effective than in the others? How did the linking techniques and structure affect the way you read each work?

#### Position Paper #8

Mildrorad Pavic writes of *The Dictionary of the Khazars* that the reader "can arrange [the dictionary] in an infinite number of ways, like a Rubik cube . . . Hence, each reader will put together the book for himself, as in a game of dominoes or cards, and, as with a mirror, get as much out of this dictionary as he puts into it, for, as is written

on one of the pages of the lexicon, you cannot get more out of the truth than what you put into it." In what ways was the process of reading *The Dictionary of the Khazars* like or unlike the process of reading the electronic hypertexts we have read in class? How did the role of the reader in each case differ from the role of the reader in other print fictions? Do you think the novel offers any lessons for writers of hypertext fiction?