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Hypertext and Literature: Facts and Fictions

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
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Abstract

This thesis examines hypertext as a new medium (but not necessarily *the* new medium) for literature, first setting an empirical base and then exploring more theoretical issues. I begin with a definition, identifying what makes hypertext qualitatively different from print text. Using the tools of semiotics I describe the essential features of hypertext as opposed to print text in order to lay a factual basis for further discussion. The second part of my thesis extends the definition of hypertext by describing and evaluating two examples of hypertext practice. The first example is Intext, my own hypertext system for creating hypertext tutorials for students of literature. The working Intext system is provided on floppy disk as a companion to this thesis. The second example of hypertext practice is Stuart Moulthrop's hyperfiction, *Victory Garden*. I follow a critical commentary of this hyperfiction as an essentially reflexive work with some consideration of the challenges hyperfiction poses to literary criticism, focussing on the experiences of reading, writing and criticising fiction in the hypertext medium. The third part of my thesis evaluates the claim, made by current hypertext critics and theorists, that hypertext, as a writing space for literature, is the successor to the medium of print. I background this by tracing the history of hypertext in practice, and by questioning the extent to which experimentation in print fiction can be said to prefigure hypertext. I set forth the rhizome as one possible model for the writing space provided by hypertext. I consider and reject the idea that hypertext embodies certain poststructuralist views of literature; and, by comparing hypertext to the writing space of oral literature, I find some political motivations for the claim that hypertext will succeed print as a medium for literature.



For Verity

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