

## Chapter 9

# E-Literary Text and New Media Paratexts

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter aims to explore the role of the hybrid reader-viewer-listener as the user of electronic literary projects that demand more complex interactions, including sophisticated ways to navigate. Rather than taking into account just the reader's role in decoding meaning and linguistic comprehension, the new-media-shaped literary text stimulates even more sophisticated reader response, addressing both software recognition and bodily activity. For such an approach, the use of new-media-shaped paratexts as the devices and practices that enable and facilitate one's orientation and navigation within new media contents is also essential. Interfaces, instructions, menus, statements, reviews, blog posts, and documentation belong to the new generation of paratexts, which broaden Genette's original concept relating to print-based literature.*

### INTRODUCTION

The basic hypothesis of this chapter is that the reading of e-literary texts is a sophisticated activity that presupposes corporeal arrangements, participation in algorithmic culture, new media literacy, and the consideration of traditional and new media paratexts. The reader/user of e-literary pieces is not safe; she is challenged by non-trivial tasks related to navigation skills and the hidden algorithms. The paratexts as accompanying productions of electronic literary texts are professional and, demanding rather than facilitating meaning decoding, they enable the reader's basic orientation and navigation within the mediascape. When we approach electronic literature as an emerging field of writing in new media, we need to emphasize that this textual practice has outgrown its early phase of hyperfiction (e.g., Joyce's *Afternoon, a Story*, 1987) and has begun to articulate itself through textual practices characterized by new media specificities. Here, hypertextuality is merely one of the features co-existing with a number of other qualities, forms, and processes, including state-of-the-art software, textual instruments, gam-

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ing, VJ-ing, remixing, mash-ups, virtual reality, special effects, social networking, virtual architecture, Second Life's poetics, and mobile and locative media.

The stable text of printed literature organized with regard to the spatial grammar gives way to the text as event, which deploys temporal syntax and refashions various media from video and computer games to net art and software art. Such text raises essential issues for the paratext theory, due to its fluid and flickering nature, which disables simple application of the paratext devices developed in the print paradigm to the field of new media contents. While the book belongs to the paradigm of material production controlled by literary intellectuals (Snow, 1959), the new media contents are embedded in the digital, software and algorithmic culture (Strehovec, 2013). Such culture also presupposes the blurring of boundaries between the inside and outside that are essential for Genette's paratext theory.

In contrast to hypertext criticism (from the 1990s), this chapter refers, in terms of methodology, to approaches based on media studies, software studies (Manovich, 2008), e-literary criticism, philosophy of technology, and paratext theory. It involves several data gathering and analytic methods as well as the deployment of theoretical apparatuses developed within contemporary media studies. E-literary text intersects various fields, from new media art and writing in new media to Internet culture and algorithmic culture; because of this, the research in this field demands the adoption of various methods generated within several disciplines. It is important to note that e-literary text is deeply contextualized; therefore, when it comes to its analysis, the gathering and collecting of contextual information related to the e-literary world as a referential framework of electronic literature (Strehovec, 2012) is essential.

The new generation of e-literature (presented, for instance, in *Electronic Literature Collection*, 2006, 2011; *Anthology of European Electronic Literature*, 2012) encourages new ways of reading that intervene in a broader field of perception and comprehension of new-media-shaped textual creativity. In order to enjoy a text shaped by a poetry generator, as well as to read a text organized as a film of words that enter the visual/reading field from various directions, it is not enough to understand hypertext effects (e.g., hyperlinks, the labyrinth-like textual organization). For a suitable explanation of poetry generators, one would need at least a basic grasp of software, while understanding a text-film may well require turning to cinema theory (Strehovec, 2010).

When the e-literary text is on-screen, it is opened up for reading with the aid of a computer mouse, scroll bar, and other instruments that can manipulate it. It is also important for the reader to enter it with a cursor, a textual avatar, which demonstrates the reader's movable presence in the text. When the reader is in front of the screen, surrounded by steering and controlling devices, she is in a nomadic cockpit (this term, coined by the author of this chapter and mentioned for the first time in "Digital Poetry beyond the Metaphysics of 'Projective Saying'," published in *Regards Croisés: Perspectives on Digital Literature*, in 2010, refers to the present individual armed with mobile screenic devices), which means that what is in front of her is also accessible in kinesthetic and motor arrangements.

*The new media image is something the user actively goes into, zooming in or clicking on individual parts with the assumption that they contain hyperlinks (for instance, image-maps in Web sites). Moreover, new media turn most images into image-interfaces and image-instruments. The image becomes interactive, that is, it now functions as an interface between a user and a computer or other devices. (Manovich, 2001, p. 183)*

Images mentioned by Manovich are the new media images and, as such, are digitally coded and placed in the new media contents.

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