

Hypertextuality and stylistic Experimentations in Michael Joyce's *afternoon, a story* and Megan Heyward's *day, of night*

Abstract

*In response to the challenges posed to cultural production by digital technology, this study examines the fluid and experimental nature of textuality in the digital culture. Two hyperfiction texts (*afternoon, a story* and *day, of night*) are selected for the study. The study employs both qualitative (descriptive) and quantitative (statistical) methods of analysis that are based on the theoretical orientations of the Hallidayan Model of Systemic Functional Linguistics and Postmodern Literary Theory. SFL is adopted on the basis that it provides an elaborate account of the relationship of text and context, while PLT provides the basis for explaining the experimental nature of textuality. The texts continuously portray the signature of cyberspace and hypertextuality that parented them by providing multiple reading pathways, locating the "finishedness" of the texts in the process of reading rather than in writing, and jettisoning the linear logic that has erstwhile guided the production of texts in Gutenberg technology. Features such as fragmentation, collage, repetition, playfulness, deconstruction of linear time, and the deliberate denial of the senses of closure characterize the style and language of the hyperfiction texts. Where Joyce arrived at these features through his deliberate deconstruction of linguistic and narrative materials within the limits of technology, Heyward's exploration of the affordances of digital technology for the production of an interactive narrative mostly accounts for these stylistic features in her text. It follows that digital technology has provided enough grounds for the actualization of the goals of experimental writers. The affordances of digital technology will not only indicate the emergence of new texts and textuality, they will reveal the centrality of language to all human endeavours as well as the extent humans can go in creativity and experimentation when they are technologically empowered. The onus is therefore on researchers in English Studies to investigate how digital technology is redefining linguistic and literary representations.*

Key words: Hyperfiction, Text, Michael Joyce, Megan Heyward, Technology, Language.

1.0 Background to the study

Today, we live in a digital world. The computer, the Internet, and their attendant potentials and possibilities, are all pointers to the high level of digital technologies available in the present century.

Digital products and potentials like CMC, MUD, SMS, email, digital games, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Weblogs, and Chartrooms, amongst others which are available to techno-savvy users in this age will not only reveal the extent of digitization in our world but will equally indicate how technology is determining, redefining, and reshaping cultural activities and our senses of personality, selfhood, and identity.

As digital technology is reshaping and redefining culture, it becomes clear that the contemporary is not just a digital culture but, by most accounts, a new intellectual age with new cultural products that demand new methods and models of theorizing. In view of these seismic changes, various disciplines are developing new methods for characterizing, describing, and theorizing the world, its constituents and its materials. It is in this regard that Rheingold (1993, par. 30) submits that:

Because of its potential to change us as humans, as communities, as democracies, we need to try to understand the nature of CMC, cyberspace, and virtual communities in every important context – politically, economically, socially, cognitively. Each different perspective reveals something that the other perspectives do not reveal. Each discipline fails to see something that another sees very well. We need to think together, across boundaries of academic disciplines ... if we hope to understand ... the way human communications are being transformed by communication technologies.

Given the multidisciplinary discourse revolving round digital technology, it becomes apparent that English Studies too cannot afford to stand aloof for two main reasons. One, language (especially English) has always been central to every form of development taking place in the world. Two, digital technology has been the most fundamental change in textual culture since Gutenberg. The emerging revolution of digital technology is merging several key technologies like telephones, sound recording, movies, radio, television, book/print, and the computer and is offering various facilities for experimenting with textuality such that the idea of composition/writing is widened from being mere assemblage of orthography and the proper ordering of words in mental space to being the interweaving of visual, aural, and textual materials and meanings within the rubrics of the text (cf. Delany & Landow, 1993:5).

One deduction that can be made from the foregoing is that new forms of text and textual representations different from those obtainable in Gutenberg technology are emerging from digital technology. This digital textuality is not page-bound or book-defined. Because cyberspace has no fixed centre, no edges, or boundaries, it turns out that hypertext, the evolved digital text, is broken loose from the strictures of linear writing and is, as a result, redefining our basic and traditional notions about the concepts of text, textuality, composition/writing, and reading. The traditional notions we hold about text, textuality, writing, and reading presuppose a physical and tangible object, which contents are embedded in linear movements from the beginning of a sentence to its period, from top of the page to the bottom, and from the first page to the last one in a predetermined design and order imposed by both the author and the technology of the book.

Unlike the conventional stable physical text that enjoys the pleasure of the tactile, however, hypertext is a simulacrum of text chunks on the computer screen. The flexibility and malleability innate to cyberspace will enable readers of hypertext to enter the text based on choice and preference rather than through the logic of linear pagination. As experimental writers like Raymond Federman, Ronald Sukenick, and John Barth have long agitated for a breakaway from what they considered the tyranny of book technology and linear logics, hypertext will bring alive many of the various forms of textual experimentations and representations that experimental writers had struggled to achieve in print technology. Consequently, digital textuality will redefine the notions that concepts like text, textuality, writing, and reading usually generate in traditional textual analysis.

2.0 The aim of the study

Taking hyperfiction, literary variant of hypertext, as the object of analysis, this study examines the nature of text and textuality called forth by the emergence of digital technology. More specifically, it explores the ways in which the “liberatory” space of cyberspace has made it possible for hypertextuality to coincide with and enable many of the experimental turns postmodernist writers have long struggled to invent in print technology. By revealing the stylistic nature of the two selected hyperfiction texts, the study shows the implications digital textuality has for both writing and reading and indicates that a dramatic turn greater than that of Gutenberg technology may be around the corner in the field of textual analysis.

3.0 Basic research questions

The study seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- (a) In what ways do the materials of the hyperfiction texts reveal the possibilities in cyberspace to justify the claim that ‘context’ plays a significant role in the stylistic shape of a text?
- (b) How does the hypertextual nature of the selected hyperfiction texts implant them (the texts) in the tradition of rebelling against Tradition? To what extent does this rebellion challenge and/or re[de]fine the traditionally pre-conceived nature and notion of text and textuality?
- (c) How central is language to the various experimentations in the works of Joyce and Heyward?

4.0 The data

Two hyperfiction texts are selected for this study: *afternoon, a story* (1987, 1996) by Michael Joyce and *of day, of night* (2004) by Megan Heyward. The two texts are CD-ROM-based and are created with Storyspace™. The selection of CD-ROM-based texts is due to their accessibility. Unlike web-based hyperfiction texts which, though highly dynamic, could have their accessibility hampered by Internet connectivity and host/server domains, the CD-ROM-based hyperfiction texts are easily accessible for researchers.

In its formation, *afternoon* is a multiply malleable story that practically demonstrates the potentials of hypertextuality for various forms of literary experiments. With this possibility of variable structures, *afternoon* traces, from the memory shards of Peter, the uneven and fragmentary story of a car accident that occurred, seemed to have occurred, may possibly have occurred, or simply did not occur on his way to work early on in the morning. Peter's ex-wife and son are involved in the accident, could have been involved, or are simply not involved in it. Believing the duo died or are seriously injured in the accident, Peter is in a frenetic search for them. In some other readings however, Peter goes about his normal day-to-day activities, nothing having happened. Because of the machinery of indeterminacy at work in *afternoon*, this interactive narrative embodies all these possibilities as well as many others. From this, we understand that *afternoon*, like many other hyperfiction texts, typically requires readings and re-readings in order for the readers to be able to construct their own meaning and text, however provisional, from the fragments making up the text.

of day employs written text, speech, music, still pictures, video, animation, and graphics in telling the story of Sophie, a young woman of 35 years who is suffering from the uncommon condition of an inability to dream. The text contains two parts – “day” and “night” – and traces how Sophie wanders through the “day” as she sets herself a series of creative tasks across her environment to help her spark her unconscious into dreams again. The reader is only able to proceed into the “night” part only after the wanderings through the “day” and the reader's active participation in Sophie's activities. Interactivity in the text is participation and submersion par excellence. It turns out that as Sophie explores her immediate environment in search of objects which histories she imagines for the restoration of her dream, the explorations immediately transcend the borders of Sophie's personal salvation task and transform into the reader's own search and wanderings. The reader's interaction gradually shifts away from the physical contact with the computer interface into a conceptual and emotional plane where Sophie's journeys and wanderings become those of the reader thus making the reader responsible for whatever woes or wins Sophie may encounter.

The choice of *afternoon* for this study is premised on the fact that it is the first hyperfiction text. Thus, *afternoon* reveals the creativity inherent in digital textuality even at its initial stage and charts the path for subsequent digital texts especially because it is a highly experimental digital fiction. *of day* explores the multi-dimensional nature of cyberspace by engaging video, sound and text for its creation. The multimodal textuality of *of day* not only sets it in contrast with *afternoon* which is basically alphanumeric, it also reveals the advance in hypertext systems since the first hyperfiction text was created and exhibits the move towards the convergence of written text, cinema, television, and computer games in literary experimentations.

5.0 Literature review

The consensus in hypertext theoretical circles is that hypertext originated from Vannevar Bush's conception of the Memex machine and the follow-up work of Douglas C. Engelbart, Theodor H. Nelson, and Andries van Dam. However, Theodor Nelson was the first to use the term. Nelson will define his neologism as

“non-sequential writing – text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. ...a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways” (cited in Landow, 2006: 2-3). Nelson’s definition brings out some salient points on the texture of hypertext; three of which are considered here. One, unlike the conventional stable physical text that enjoys the pleasure of the tactile, hypertext is a transient image/simulacrum of text blocks/chunks on the computer screen. Being intangible, hypertext exists in a virtual space which cannot exist without the presence of the computer. Two, unlike the conventional text which is linear because of its top-to-bottom, and page-upon-page presentation, hypertext is presented as several non-linear text chunks which are related only through links. This will define “nodes” and “links” as the basic elements in a hypertext and project a major difference between traditional texts and hypertext. Three, hypertext is non-sequential. According to Landow & Delany (1991:3), this third factor indicates that hypertext “can be composed, and read, non-sequentially ... [having] a variable structure.” With this non-sequential structure, hypertext gracefully presents the reader with several reading options or orders and the individual readers have the absolute power to determine how to read meaning into the text based on the path they choose at the time of reading the text. This ability of the hypertext readers to shape the discourse of the text in hypertext through their reading decisions conflates hypertextuality with Barthes’ notion of the “death of the author,” since the readers seem to now possess the prerogative of the sequential order of the “final” text.

One other factor that marks hypertext away from traditional print text is hypermediality. According to Yankelovich, Meyrowitz, & van Dam (1991:60), hypermedia “denote the functionality of hypertext but with additional components such as two- and three-dimensional structures graphics, paint graphics, spreadsheets, video, sound, and animation.” With hypermedia, therefore, the author is able to create links to diagrams, text, still picture, video, audio recordings, and the like. As a matter of fact, hypermediality plays a major role in effecting the reconfiguration of text, authoring/writing, and reading. Bolter (1991:114) specifically submits that “hypermedia simply extends the principles of electronic writing into the domain of sound and image ... to create a synaesthesia in which anything that can be seen or heard may contribute to the texture of the text.” With hypermediality, therefore, the idea of composition now transcends representing knowledge/message with only words. Knowledge/message representation now takes place at visual, aural, and textual (alphanumeric) levels which consequently call for real “hard work” not only from the author but also from the reader of the new text.

Although there have been several works theorizing hypertext and hyperfiction, few of them, however, attempted the in-depth investigation of the implication of hypertextuality on narrative conventions in available hyperfiction texts. In his year 2009 online essay, “A four-sided model for reading hypertext fiction,” Rustad investigates *of day* with the mind of establishing that hyperfiction texts prefigure four kinds of readings: semantization, exploration, self-reflection, and absorption. Koskimaa (2000, online) too, in his thesis titled “Digital literature: from text to hypertext and beyond,” explored many experimental print texts in order to establish that the postmodern and experimental turns

in hypertext fiction have been anticipated by much earlier works. Although Koskimaa touches on *afternoon*, his main focus is *Patchwork Girl* and *Califia* while a greater part of the work is dedicated to the nature of experimental print texts. While Douglas' (1994) examination of *afternoon* is basically to show how she is able to arrive at four different senses of closure in the text, Walker (1999) examines the various strategies employed by Joyce in confusing readers as well as those that may be employed in sticking together the pieces that make up the matrix of *afternoon*. In this way, Walker identifies Nietzschean repetition, destabilizing narrators, and the labyrinthine nature of the texts as principal befuddling strategies. No doubt, the works of these scholars have gone a long way in providing insights into the nature of the hyperfiction texts. However, there are gaps left unfilled by these studies. Further studies may need to show the centrality of language to the stylistic distinctiveness of hyperfiction texts, examine the extent to which linguistic theories can provide explanations for such features and their implications on textuality, explain the peculiar features of the text using postmodern literary theory, amongst others. This study attempts to fill these gaps.

6.0 Theoretical orientation

Two theoretical orientations adopted for this study are the Hallidayan Model of Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) and Postmodern Literary Theory (henceforth PLT). M.A.K. Halliday developed SFL at the University of London in continuation of the work of his teacher, J.R. Firth which was in turn influenced by the work of Malinowski, an anthropologist, who while conducting field work on the Trobriand Islands, came to recognize and conclude that "context" was highly important and primal in the interpretation of any text. Against this backdrop, SFL holds that language is a natural part of the process of living and therefore gives very high priority to the sociological aspects of language. Because language exists in context, SFL prescribes that it must be studied in "the environment in which text comes to life" (Halliday, 1978:109). This is because context defines the meanings likely to be expressed in language and the language likely to be used in expressing those meanings. SFL is therefore not syntactic and formal in orientation but 'semantic' (concerned with meaning) and 'functional' (concerned with how language creates and expresses meaning). Building on this concept of language function, SFL identifies three fundamental metafunctions, that is, the intrinsic functions language performs – ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The three functions are integral to the semantic stratum of the lexicogrammar which are grammatically realized in the system of the clause as the central processing unit in the lexicogrammar. The three metafunctions respectively correspond to the notions of "clause as representation," "clause as exchange," and "clause as message."

Context, being crucial to meaning, is taken as a language's higher-level semiotic system. Since language usually interfaces with the non-linguistic world before it provides the theory of human experience and interactions, the metafunctions language performs are realized in the clause as a result of these contextual considerations. Every text is considered an instance in the meaning system determined by a particular context. The text does not just evolve.

There is a **cline of instantiation**, a set of contextual considerations that work for the production of a meaningful text. As illustrated in Plate 1 below context is the ecological matrix for the general system of language and for particular texts. Language is embedded in a context of culture or social system while every text is the instantiation of language embedded in its own particular context of situation.

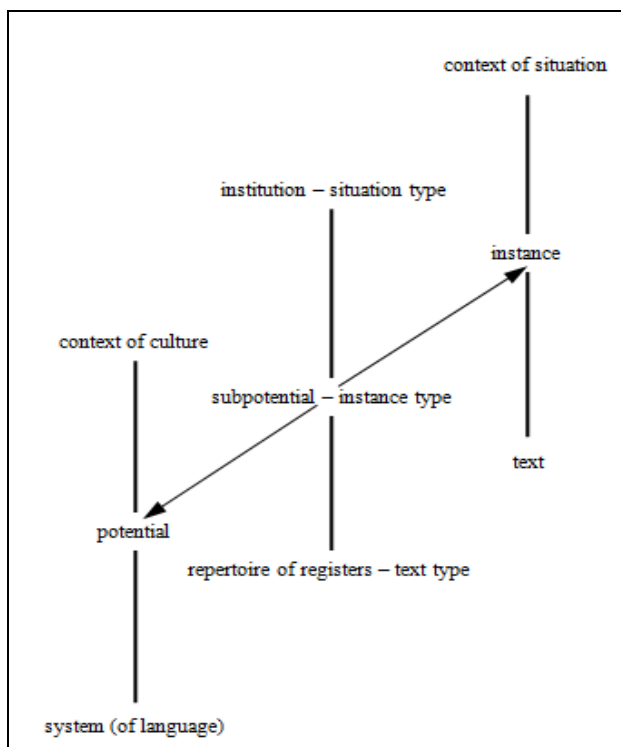


Plate 1: The cline of instantiation (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 28)

System (overall potential provided for by culture) and **text** (particular instance resulting from situation as context) are the two poles along the cline of instantiation while **register** represents the intermediate level between the two poles. From the instance pole, as the Plate shows, every single text is language in the context of situation. When the samples of such a text are examined, they manifest certain identical patterns which describe the **text type**. Thus, a particular **situation type** is the 'window system' through which the text type associated with it can be viewed. By identifying a text type, we move along the cline of instantiation from the text pole to the system pole which refers to the overall potentials a language has within a specific cultural context. The theoretical implication of the foregoing is that texts vary systematically according to the nature of their individual contexts. In this instance, recipe, weather forecasts, media interviews, advertisements, text books, bedtime stories, amongst other cultural semiotics are text types indicating how language is used in different contexts.

The need to perceive language along the cline of instantiation is fundamental to the theoretical grounding of SFL. The cline of instantiation helps SFL to describe the system as it relates to actual instances of language. In this way, SFL will provide the means for investigating a text not just as a window on the system but also as an object in its own right. A focus on the text as an object will reveal why the text means what it means and why the text is valued as it. Focusing on the text as a window will be asking what the text reveals about similar texts and the system of the language in which the text is produced. These two angles of exploration are, nevertheless, complementary because “we cannot explain why a text means what it does, with all the various readings and values that may be given to it, except by relating it to the linguistic system as a whole; and equally, we cannot use it as a window on the system unless we understand what it means and why” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004:3).

PLT, the other theoretical stance adopted for the study, is a major branch of the general theories of postmodernism. Postmodernist theories generally hold that modernist culture’s metanarratives cannot be divorced from injustice on the ground that totalization/consensus is easily and quickly achieved through repression, or worse still, oppression. However, postmodernism advocates justice and freedom which defines the “pragmatic and experimentalist attitude” of postmodernism and provides for the ability of the postmodernist philosopher, artist, or writer to create and “work without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done *after the event*: that is to say thinking was to be radically experimental and ostensibly undirected in order to allow for the unpreprogrammed, for the unforeseen, to take place” (Docherty, 1998: 479).

Invariably, postmodernist fiction will put to question the entire series of interconnected concepts associated with modernism – autonomy, transcendence, certainty, authority, unity, totalization, system, universalization, centre, continuity, closure, hierarchy, origin, *et cetera* and challenge the mainstream realist aesthetic ideology in modernist fiction (cf. Woods, 1999:50). As a result, postmodern fiction subverts narrative continuity and pits narrative as fragments. This is not only an inquiry into the nature of narrative but also into the very nature of subjectivity. As subjectivity is challenged, postmodernist fiction privileges a decentred and fragmented subject that undermines the concepts of order, causality, space, time, narrative sequence, narrative closure, and genre boundaries. Since the centre no longer holds, decentred narration and plot; fragmented subjectivity, space and time; multiple and wandering points of view; and digressions become the fashion in postmodern fiction.

For a neat analysis, we contextualized the selected hyperfiction texts within SFL by readjusting the cline of instantiation. For this, we recognize cyberspace, hypertextuality, and experimental tradition as obtainable in PLT as the “context of culture” on the system pole. On the text pole, the data selected for the study (*afternoon* and *of day*) are configured within the contextual situation of hyperfiction. At the intermediate pole, the ‘aesthetic characteristics of postmodernist and hypertext fiction’ stand in place of ‘registers.’ The rationale is that the aesthetic characteristics will serve as the window system through which the selected postmodern hyperfiction texts can be properly examined such that SFL will be able to provide an elaborate account of the

relationship of text and context, while PLT will provide explanations for the experimental nature of the hyperfiction texts.

7.0 Data Analysis

7.1 Wreading the texts

Although *afternoon* is basically alphanumeric, this does not underscore the fact that the dynamics of digital technology at the time of creating the text were maximally utilized in creating the text and in making exploration options available to the reader. While readers have the prerogative of deciding how to move through the text in the ways most appealing to them, the text still provides the option of a “default reading path” which is pursued by continuously pressing the return (ENTER) key. Pursuing the text of the default path creates a feeling very much similar to that which reading traditional print texts will generate since the reader follows the reading path so designed by the author and continues tapping the return key as if opening book pages one after the other.

Apart from the default reading path, there are several other facilities for traversing the text. One way is for the reader to explore the possible outgoing links in a particular node. In another way, the reader can respond “yes” or “no” to questions in the readingspaces. Each answer will determine the nodes the reader will thereafter encounter. For example, the node titled “[begin]” ends with the question “Do you want to hear about it?” If the reader answers “yes” s/he is immediately led to the node titled “[yes]” while s/he moves on to the node titled “[no]” if s/he answers “no.” In lexia “[her hand]” as well, answering “yes” to the question “Everything begins there, don’t you see?” which ends the lexia will lead the reader to the node identified as “[here]” whereas a “no” leads the reader back to “[begin]”.

One significant and unique navigation facility in *afternoon* is the “words that yield.” The “words that yield”, as Joyce indicates in “[read at depth],” are those words which have “texture”. Although the “yielding word” is not cued or demarcated from the other words in the nodes, a click on a yielding word will automatically lead the reader away from that current node into a new one. The workings of the “yielding words” build on the logic of invisible links among the nodes of the text. Ordinarily, every word in the text would lead the reader to another node when clicked upon. However, the “words that yield” are differentiated from those other words in the text in that where the other words lead the reader to the consecutive node in the default path, the yielding words lead the reader to nodes entirely different from that node which the default path would have led the reader to. The implication of this is that the reader must be conversant with the default path to be able to differentiate the yielding words from the non-yielding ones.

The multimodal nature of *of day* will mark a great departure from that of *afternoon*. At the coming up of *of day*’s map, the reader is provided with three nodes: “[before],” “[realise],” and “[halfway].” Because of its design, the map wears a cold face as the traces of the nodes disappear as soon as the map comes up. However, when the reader rolls the mouse over the places where each of the nodes is located, the node will become visible and will glitter in an inviting manner. Although there are thirteen nodes within the map, the reader only gradually gains access to the other nodes of the texts as reading progresses. In the instance of the first three nodes, the reader must read any two

before the map can update to open up the spaces of nodes “[act]” and “[collect]”. Immediately the reader clicks on either of these two new nodes, the map will further be updated to make nodes “[market]”, “[street]”, “[café]”, and “[river]” available to the reader. To enable the map update further, the reader is required to visit between two and three of the four new nodes and take active part in Sophie’s task of searching for, collecting, and examining objects. It is only after then that the node “[describe]” will come up. By the time the reader traverses the “[describe]” lexia, the reader will be able to gain access to lexias “[peruse]” and “[arrange]”. Immediately the reader arranges the objects collected into the dreaming space of the cabinet located in “[arrange]” s/he is launched into the night map.

Unlike the situation in *afternoon*, links in *of day* are immediately visible. The mechanism employed for the presentation of links in the text perfectly matches that of words-that-*yield*. The yielding words are cued with animated glitters and they produce sound effects whenever the cursor touches the words. Most of the time, the sounds produced by the words have a direct relationship with the meanings of the yielding words. Apart from the yielding words, there are two other categories of animated words in the text. The first category is that of the words-that-bounce which are always visible but the touch of the cursor causes the words to glitter more, bounce on the screen, and to produce related sound effects. Unlike words-that-*yield*, words-that-bounce do not lead the reader into new nodes. The other category is that of words-that-float which are not always visible on the screen. Only the reader’s painstaking mousing over the textual space would reveal the words floating over the text space.

For example, the reader’s traversal of “act” illustrates how the various semiotic resources function for multimodal coherence in the text. A click on “act” leads to the screen of the text: “By now it’s clear I need a different approach. I have worked out a series of small tasks.” “Tasks” is cued as a link which when clicked on leads the reader further to a new screen showing a sheet of paper where the different tasks which Sophie will undertake appear in handwriting. As the node appears, a voice-over in a woman’s voice is heard saying: “By now it’s clear I need a different approach... I have worked out a series of small tasks.” Mousing over each of the tasks listed on the sheet of paper will bring up floating sentences. Mousing over “wander to places that you haven’t visited before” for example brings up a floating sentence which repeats the written task with emphasis and specificity: “wander through unfamiliar places and location.” The emphasis created by the emergence of the floating sentence is further enhanced by the utilization of multimodal resources such that the sound of footsteps accompanied the floating sentence. For the task “collect objects or things which appeal”, a mouse-over produces the floating sentence “find and collect objects... things which appeal” accompanied by the sound of someone rustling through items and thereafter placing the object on a hard surface.

7.2 Fragmentation

The author mode of Storyspace™ environment is a structural editor which enables the author to create fiction as a network of textual units. Usually, the editor presents the authors with the diagrammatic view of the hyperfiction text they are creating such that the authors can both install and manipulate relationships among the textual units. This structural experiment challenges the traditions of literature and mentally defines the hyperfiction texts as a creative object evolving from the events of sticking shards together. In this perspective, fragmentation is the epistemology and existential foundation of hyperfiction texts. Fragmentation is not just intrinsic to hyperfiction texts; it is the nature and quintessence of the texts.

Apart from being the nature of the hyperfiction texts, fragmentation equally serves as a major postmodern literary device deployed in the selected hyperfiction texts. For example, the opening lexia of *afternoon*, that is “[begin],” has a total of 15 “words that yield” two of which are “shrapnel” and “fragments”. The readers’ interactions with “shrapnel” and “fragments” lead on to 67 and 203 highly significant lexias, respectively. The 67 lexias from “shrapnel” coincide with the last 67 lexias of the 203 lexias evolving from “fragments”. A closer view at the form and function of the 203 lexias unveils the fact that the lexia “[begin],” more than being a concern with the description of what could be remembered of the nature and experience of winter, is a figurative leap into the aesthetics of fragments which the text dwells so well upon:

By five the sun sets and the afternoon melt freezes again across the blacktop into crystal octopi and palms of ices—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.... (*afternoon*: “[begin]”, para.2)

The metaphors of the “oaks exploding in series,” the “shrapnel settling like relics,” the “echoing thundering off far ice,” and the “fragments saying” all build up to impress the image of the fragment on the text. The 203 lexias significantly fit into the fragmentary nature of *afternoon* in many ways. One, all the 203 lexias exist within the path named “fragments.” Two, all the lexias, except six, contain just one word and each word is a repetition of the node title. Three, the contents of the lexias do not, in any way, proceed out of either coherence or causality. Four, the 203 lexias appear as the mental picture of the scattered shatters of the total 114 words which make up “[begin]” as a lexia. Since many of the 114 words are repeated for the evolution of the 203 lexias, it is therefore implied that it is the text itself, rather than the “oaks,” which exploded with its shrapnel echoing and settling as fragments. The text therefore turns out as the relics of these fragments.

Of the 203 lexias, only 16 lexias link to lexias other than their default links: “[yesterday?],” “[not],” “[and?],” “[another],” “[beneath],” “[crystal],” “[fragments?],” “[crystal],” “[fragments!],” “[moaning],” “[boots (adv.)],” “[echoing],” “[fragments],” “[way],” “[<],” and “[it?].” Interestingly, the other links of these 16 lexias further stress the fragmentary implications of the text and reinforce the fact that the poetics of destruction and recombination is at work in the text. For example, the path names of some of the destination lexias include “escape frag0,” “frag escape4,” “fragments,” and “sub f r a g.” If one pursues the “sub f r a g” path from “[fragments!],” for example, the successive nine lexias of the reading path – “[t] → [a] → [m] → [n] → [r] → [s] → [g] → [e] → [f]” – demonstrate the reality of something more fragmentary than the fragments. This is corroborated by the fact that the rearrangement of the letters making up the titles of these nine lexias forms the word “fragments.”

of day evolves from the deployment of what could be termed “piecemeal” narrative technique. Before the reader is launched into the map for exploring the work at all, the narrative has established this “piecemeal” technique. The first screen that appears is accompanied by instrumental music and introduces the title of the work in a descending fade in, dim, and fade out animation style at the background of the video clip of a walking young woman. After this first screen, six others with motion and still pictures follow in quick succession. Thereafter, another screen with the inscription: “a new media narrative by Megan Heyward” fades in and then disappears. The next screen appears with the text: “this is a story for wandering” which is accompanied by instrumental music and a voice-over of a woman saying “I have a sense of where this comes from.” Thereafter, the text fades out and is replaced with the text “I have a sense of where this comes from” which is accompanied by the voice-over of “though I’m not sure where it all ends.” Immediately after the voice-over, another text “My story starts somewhere in the middle” joins the previous text on the screen, coincidentally accompanied by a voice-over repeating the same text. The map for traversing the text eventually comes up. Further explorations of the narrative indicate that this “piecemeal” narrative technique was employed throughout the text.

One major implication of the foregoing statements about *Of day* indicate that the text experiments with the borders of time since the text continually evolves according to a preprogrammed passage of time which makes the text to seemingly have a mind of its own. For *Afternoon*, the design is such that the reader’s previous action or non-action will determine the text to be encountered in successive reading sessions. Take for example, Table 1 below. We have the instances of time-determined reading paths. The “yes path 1” indicates the succession of nodes encountered with a continuous click of the “Y” button immediately the text comes up. “Yes path 2” designates the succession of nodes one would read if one opts out of the circuitry path of “yes path 1”, re-negotiates to the cover page, and re-reads the text with the yes button. If after the default path 2, the reader re-negotiates to the cover page and re-reads the text using the “yes” button, the nodes in “yes path 3” are the ones the reader will encounter. Although paths 1 and 2 are very much alike, a keen consideration will reveal that the nodes 13-16 of path 1 are replaced by the node titled “[obligations]” in path 2. Thus, path 1 ends in 34 places where path 2 ends in 31 places.

S/N	YES PATH 1	YES PATH 2	YES PATH 3
1	start	start	Start
2	a hypertext	a hypertext	a hypertext
3	read at depth	read at depth	read at depth
4	in my mind	in my mind	in my mind
5	work in progress	work in progress	work in progress
6	begin	begin	begin
7	yes	yes	yes
8	yes1	yes1	yes1
9	yes2	yes2	yes2
10	yes3.	yes3.	Checker
11	yes4.	Yes4.	Faulkner
12	scars	Scars	she wasn't sure
13	yes6	obligations	remoulade
14	Lovers	self-destruction	out law
15	touching myself	The Good Soldier	anchoring devices
16	monsters	dream pools	Blowup
17	self-destruction	star wars	
18	The Good Soldier	Lolly's monologue	
19	dream pools	1/	
20	star wars	2/	
21	Lolly's monologue	white afternoon	
22	1/	4 what I see	
23	2/	5	
24	white afternoon	staghorn and starthistle	
25	4 what I see	fenceline	
26	5	relic	
27	staghorn and starthistle	can I help you?	
28	fenceline	No, I say	
29	relic	transcript	
30	can I help you?	I call	
31	no, I say	fenceline	
32	transcript		
33	I call		
34	fenceline		

Table 1: Time-determined threads evolving from the exploration of the text with the “yes” button

7.3 Playfulness

Postmodernists' rejection of literature as the vehicle for knowledge will eventually lead to a playful attitude in postmodern literary works. In view of this rejection, postmodern works will, many a times, display open-ended play with formal devices and fictional conventions, pursue illogicalities for no intelligible reasons, and play with language and its rules for its own sake rather than for moralistic or realistic purposes. In a text like *afternoon*, several features will portray that a playful attitude is an important current in the text. The text's concealment of words-that-lead demands a playful attitude from any reader that aims at their discovery. This is because the reader must pick and click on each word in the node in order to discover yielding words. In this circumstance, the reader becomes a player whose main focus is not the pursuit of semantics but play.

The manipulation of the language system of the text through the employment of repetitions, cycles, and re-cycle motif will equally indicate the author's intention to chart a playful attitude in the text. Also, the incorporation of questions, computing language, bricolages, and non-narrative materials cutting across diverse fields portrays a playful attitude rather than a serious one. Other forms of playfulness can be noted in narrative digressions, authorial intrusion and commentorial discourses, and in sarcasm. The last sentence in "[Pysche]" "You go directly to jail and do not pass Go" is sarcastic of monopoly game and will therefore reveal the playfulness at the heart of the text. Other forms of playfulness in *afternoon* will manifest in the area of phonetic and orthographic games. Examples of these are easily recognizable in many of the links and their path names. One of the links available from "[1]" is "[Art Worlds]" and it has "and drew" as its path name while "Andrew's" is the Guard Field. In this, the author playfully brings a connection between the name "Andrew" and the act of drawing. From "[ax player]" two of the available links are: "[Desmond]" and "[Thisman]." The two link destinations have their titles as their path names while "Desmond Leary" and "Thisman Larry" occur as their Guard Fields, respectively. The occurrence of "Thisman Larry" is an indication that the author is here mimicking the developing nature of Andrew's childhood phonetics.

In *of day*, a playful attitude will manifest in the way the reader rolls the mouse over the cold surfaces of the map to discover where the available node links are located. Another way in which *of day* assumes a playful attitude is evident in the discourse of many of the pages of the handmade note located in "[peruse]." An example is shown in Plate 2 below. Indeed, the text plays on the IQ and the perceptive ability of the reader in deciphering the ambiguity inherent in the picture depicted in the page. Apart from the ambiguity in the pictures, the authorial comments on the discourse of most of the pictures, which manifest through words-that-float, will show the sarcastic way in which the author plays on the cognition of the reader and makes the text to assume a playful attitude.



Plate 2: One of the pages of the handmade notebook illustrating playfulness

of day will in fact expand the repertoire of literature with alternation of game play with novelistic components through the employment of still and motion pictures, animations, music, visual arts, and graphics, amongst others. In the same vein, Meyward expands the issue of play with a game-like situation which invites the reader to arrange items in the dream space and is afterwards rewarded with the transition into the night.

7.4 Collage

Collage is a concept appropriated from a practice in art which is the style of making a picture from juxtaposing and gluing together, on the pictorial surface, items such as photographs, fabric, and pieces of paper. From this perspective, Montgomery, Durant, Fabb, Furniss, and Mills (1992, 2000: 205), maintain that collage features in literature whenever “different genres (or features of different genres) are placed alongside one another and so implicitly joined together.” The employment of different media such as still pictures, video, music, voice-over, and written text amongst others contributes to the effect of collage in *of day*. This new media strategy is alien to the traditions of the printed page which proceeds from a two-dimensional level. With the facilities of digital technology, however, literature is smoothly transiting into three- or more-dimensional textual possibilities which give adequate room for the incorporation of every information-capable media into the matrix of the text.

Apart from the utilization of different media, *of day* also project collage at the visual level. The screenshots of four different lexias shown in Plate 3 indicate how Heyward masterfully mix and juxtapose different items to effect visual collage.



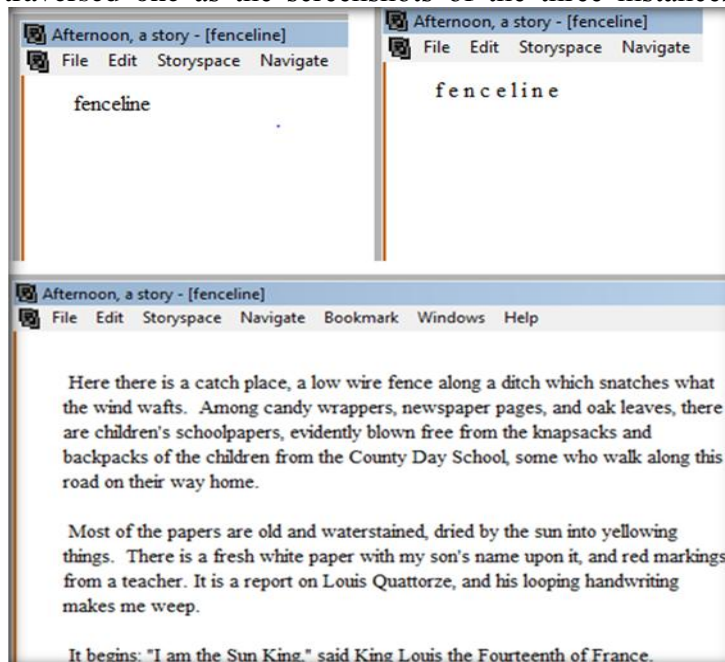
Plate 3: Four screenshots exemplifying visual collage in *Of day*

In *afternoon* the aesthetics of collage is achieved basically through the deployment of multiplicity of genres. Genres encountered in *afternoon* include prose narrative, poetry, instructional materials and quotations cutting across different disciplines such as science, philosophy, literature, and agriculture. One other means through which the mechanism of collage is pursued in *afternoon* is the incorporation of blank spaces. Lexias “[backlink],” “[backlink3],” and “[bad fiction]” are handy examples of these blank spaces.

Apart from the employment of blank spaces, *afternoon* also utilizes the stylistic device of “bricolage” in achieving a collage-effect. According to Wales (1989: 53) bricolage refers to the “distorted interweavings of words and phrases borrowed from various languages, registers, and genres.” The content of the lexia “[via]” demonstrates the employment of bricolage in *afternoon* thus: “... in der weg... (Charles)”. Another example is the eight-line text in “[litany]” which reads thus: “Fuck bubble./Cunt wafer./Tower of Ivory./Star of Lamentation./Juno Pronuba./Juno Domiduca./Juno Nuxia./Juno Cinxia.”

7.5 Repetition

Repetition is one major strategy that builds the aesthetics of the jumble and fragmentation in *afternoon*. In the perspective of Bernstein, Joyce, and Levine (1992:163) repetition in hypertext is not a defect, rather “repetition provides a powerful structural force, a motif which helps readers synthesize the experience of reading.” For these theorists therefore, repetition produces rhythms which announce the patterns of meaning. Although *afternoon* has 539 nodes, many of the nodes maintain similar titles which are distinguished by numerals or some other symbols. Such lexias include “[Giulia]” and “[Giulia?],” “[fragments!]” and “[fragments?],” “[me]” and “[me*],” “[Love]” and “[Love...]” amongst others. For some other 207 nodes in *afternoon*, they bear exactly the same names especially in groups of twos and threes although a lexia like “[she]” occurs nine times while “[the]” occurs 15 times. The aesthetics of repetition is engaged further as many of the 207 nodes have the same contents, although their structural layouts will always indicate in such situations that the reader is traversing a new node different from the previously traversed one as the screenshots of the three instances of “[fenceline]”



show in Plate 4.

Plate 4: Screenshots of the three instances of "[fenceline]"

As the third instance of “[fenceline]” shows, some of the similarly titled lexias have different contents. One such case can be noticed in the two instances of “[yes]” illustrated below.

1. “[yes]”

There is an end to any mystery. <Why don’t you call – she says – and then you will know...> It is good advice. Even so, I wish I could lie back on the white sofa and think. I wish I were the Sun King.

2. “[yes]”

She had been a client of Wert’s wife for some time. Nothing serious, nothing awful, merely general unhappiness and the need of a woman so strong still to have friends. It was all very messy, really. For they did become friends, Lolly and Nausicaa, very early eighties kind of thing when you think of it, appropriately post-feminist and oddly ambiguous. ...

One very likely effect of these repetitions is the disorientation of the reader who may decide not to traverse nodes in the thinking that s/he had earlier visited that node and that it would be unwise to revisit the node especially when there are other nodes that are yet to be traversed. In another dimension, the reader may become befuddled about the logic of repetition working in the text to the extent that s/he ascribes god-like powers to the text. Without a very deep scrutiny, the reader is tempted to believe that the text has got a mind of its own which determines what to reveal to the reader within a particular node at any given reading session. Immediately the reader utilizes the short key “F9” on the interface and the list of all the 539 nodes making up the text are made available to her/him, s/he comes to understand that though the dynamics of hypertextuality and digitization are utilized in the text, the dynamics were employed for the skilful and calculated recombination of different nodes bearing similar titles.

Inversion is another repetition strategy utilized in *afternoon*. Inversed repetitions are evident where the contents of a node are falsely repeated through the subtle inversion of certain phrases. In such circumstances, it takes a very sensitive reader to notice the differences existing between a node and its inversed form as both nodes maintain similar structures and patterns. The texts of “[begin]” and “[false beginning]” illustrate inversed repetition thus:

“[begin]”

I try to recall winter. <As if it were yesterday?> she says, but I do not signify one way or another. 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. < Poetry > she says, without emotion, one way or another. Do you want to hear about it?

“[false beginning]”

I try to recall yesterday. <As if it were winter?> I say, but she does not signify one way or another. By five the sun rises and the night freeze melts again across the blacktop into crystal rivers – octopi beset by fear, and we walk out to the car, the snow exploding beneath our boots and the oaks moaning in series, echoing off far ice. This was poetry, she says, without emotion, one way or another. Do you hear it?

Whereas repetition occurs in *afternoon* across nodes and along different reading paths, repetition in *of day* occurs within the same node. Because *of day* employs different media resources, it is the case that repetition serves for the reinforcement of one media by another media. In this regard, the aesthetic and rhetorical values of repetition in *of day* are quite different from those of *afternoon*. The need to maintain multimodal coherence among the various media resources employed in *of day* resulted in elaboration and specification of the message of one media by another media which invariably functions as repetition. An example can be found in the node “[realize].” Immediately the reader clicks on the link, s/he is led into a screen with the following three-line text: “A few months ago, I came to realize/ slowly, quietly, without any great drama/ that I seemed to have lost the ability to **dream**”. While the text appears on the screen, the word “dream” is cued as a link into the inner part of the node. On the reader’s interaction with the link, the screen depicted in Plate 5 immediately comes up. With the appearance of this screen, a voice over is heard repeating and elaborating on the text of the first screen thus:



“A few months ago, I’m not sure exactly when, but I think it was during the autumn, I began to suffer from an illness, a problem. It was around this time that I came to realize slowly, quietly, without any great drama, that I seemed to have lost the ability to dream. At first, I thought I was just sleeping moderately between the sleeps of cold nights and a warm blanket. But as the nights passed, I felt I was not so much asleep, but unconscious or worse. I would wake up

Drained like the life was

sleeping out of me slowly,
each night. As weeks went by,
alendous took hold of me that I

Plate 5: Screenshot of the inner node of “[realize]”

couldn’t shake. I visited the doctor, and after ruling out drugs and drink, she said that the problem was unusual, but not serious. She advised me to get up more, get some exercise in the hope that it would right itself.”

As Plate 5 shows, the screen has an inset video of Sophie. At the background of the video, there is the animated script: “problem concerning dream” playing on continuously. In addition to the animated script are faintly scribbled texts written on the blanket background. From the upper left side, the reader could manage to decipher the words “drained... life is” while “dreamless sleep of cold winter night under warm blanket” could be gleaned from the lower left side. With the logic of repetition for elaboration working in the text, the fragmentary text in the upper left part is clearly understood as it is working in a close relationship with that part of the narrative of the voice-over which says: “I would wake up drained like the life was seeping out of me.” In addition to the foregoing are the four sets of words-that-float on the screen: “drained,” “dreamless sleeps of cold night,” “drink,” and “a problem concerning dreams” which all repeat and emphasize the messages of the other texts. As significant as the messages of the other media, is the connotative value of the pictorial of the blanket which is the background of the screen. As the word “blanket” occurs both in the spoken and the written texts, the reader cannot but map out a link between the verbal forms of the word and its pictorial representation. The selection of the picture of the blanket as the background of the screen bears the message content that the narratives in the screen are founded on and informed by the events residing in the beingness of the blanket. In this understanding, the blanket has the story and is the story. Whatever is told by any of the media resources is thus a repetition of the narrative of the blanket.

7.6 De[con]struction of linear time

Postmodernist rejection of metanarratives will usually also manifest in the manner in which clock or linear time is handled in postmodern literary works. The postmodern attack on linear time is not totally unexpected since linear time is one major modern construct for measuring and perceiving history, progress, and reason. The attack is thus to challenge, twist, and thwart modern concept of time and to introduce imaginary and local concepts of time. It is in this line of reasoning that the reader of *afternoon* encounters Peter in the text saying in the lexia titled “[no]” that: “In this time and season the day has two long hours.” The concept of time as held in the text is also reiterated in “[The Garden]” which is a quotation from Borges: “In contrast to Newton and Schopenhauer, your ancestor did not believe in a uniform, absolute time. He believed in an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent, and parallel times.” Clearly then, the text rejects the absolute and totalizing nature of modern construct of time.

In *of day*, incursions are equally made on linear time as time is divided into the two broad dichotomies of day and night. Although Sophie performed several tasks and visited a number of places during the day, there are no temporal markings to indicate whether the activities and the visits took place in a day or in several days. This same situation applies to Sophie's night. With the restoration of Sophie's dream life which manifested in eight lexias of the night map, nothing, however, will indicate to the reader that the dreams were experienced in just one night or over a period of nighttimes.

As clearly demonstrated in the selected texts, the deconstruction of clock time is concomitant deconstruction of history. Since the concept of plot is crucial for the chronological order of history, we find many postmodern literary works attacking tradition from this perspective. From this, it is understandable that the nonlinear structure at work in the discourse of *afternoon* is not just a rupture of the traditional concept of plot but a consequential rejection of the linear order for the presentation of both time and history. Really, the purpose of undermining and demolishing the logical sequence of events and stable chronology in postmodern fiction is to eliminate, distort, and deform linearity as well as temporality and history (cf. Federman, 1981:310). Thus, the fact that a reader may institute a preferred reading order on the text of *afternoon* means that the text can be ordered any how since there is no recognized stable chronology.

The consequence of the rejection of stable chronology in fiction, as Federman (1981:310) explains, is that "... the characters are no longer centered in a network of precise relations with one another, in space and in time, or within a definite sequence of historical or social events. Consequently, the characters ... are usually set in motion, set in a state of constant wandering, and as such are liberated from what was determining them." This, in essence, explains the divergent and disorienting narrative voices in *afternoon*. Since the text has blurred the boundaries between the past and the present in rejection of linearity and chronology, it therefore becomes difficult differentiating between reality, dreams, troubled memories, flashbacks, and imagination. With no chronology, linearity, and temporal markings, the reader is set within unguided and unmarked paths which could help in the recovery and reconstruction of the story. For all of this, the characters, their marriages and affairs, the accident and the therapy as well as the lunchtime and the office hours could all belong to the realms of dreams and imaginations.

The deconstruction of time and history are further noticeable in the constant merge of the voice of Michael Joyce, the omniscient narrator with the thoughts and voices of Peter, Lisa, Lolly, and Nausicaa which is reinforced in the constant and unexpected changes in settings. For example, the conversation between Peter and Lolly at one time translates into a conversation between Michael Joyce and Lolly in another setting. In one setting, one sees Peter and Wert in the place where they had both lunched for three years whereas, the same lunchtime, in another setting, came up at that instance when Wert was interviewing Peter for a job in his company. In this place, Peter was married to Lisa and, as a dutiful husband, he was eager to call his wife and inform her that he had got the job.

This context, no doubt, stands in contradiction to that setting where one hears Peter telling his story and regretting his lack of commitment and care to Lisa while their marriage lasted. The reader encounters both Lisa and Andrew several times in the text. Yet one sees Peter in a frenetic search of the duo because of his conviction that they were the fatal or near-fatal victims of the accident he witnessed on his way to his office earlier in the morning.

With the triumph over temporal and chronological significations, the reader is left at the mercy of the text for the retraction of the story. Of course, in a situation where chronology is rejected, settings are not clearly marked, and narrative strands are guided by choice, chance and coincidence, it becomes very obvious that *afternoon*, as a typical postmodern fiction, is reiterating that “to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and in history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological” (Hutcheon, 1988:110).

In *of day*, there is the obvious blurring of the boundaries between the past and the present. In *lexia* “[before]”, one hears Sophie saying “I’ve always just lived a typical sort of life...before these started.” Here references are made to the far past and the immediate past. That being the case, it implies that Sophie’s resolutions, wanderings, and salvation tasks encountered in the *lexias* succeeding “[before]” all transpired in the day of the past. In this wise, the text relocates the reader into the past to re-determine the past, howbeit in the present. This postmodern perspective to the representation of time and history conjure a great deal of temporal complexity in the text because the reader in the present is relocated into the past to continuously change and re-write history thereby breaking down the boundaries separating the past from the present.

As the reader participates in the collection, description, and arrangement of objects in order to help save Sophie’s past in the present, it becomes obvious that delineating and differentiating between what happened in the past, what is happening at present, and what will happen in future is highly problematized in the text. In this regard, neither the day nor the night of the text can adequately be captured in terms of the usual and traditional notions of past or present experiences.

7.7 On closure

From the Aristotelian terms that a narrative is made up of the aggregates of ‘beginning’, ‘middle’, and ‘ending’, it is made obvious that narratives are naturally about movements. Narratives are born out of and sustained by this anticipation, this movement towards the next event and on to the conclusion. This is why Brooks (cited in Douglas, 1994:161) submits that “the telling” in any narrative “is always *in terms* of the impending end.” At that point where the reader recognizes that movement has reached its ultimate and anticipated expectations have either been affirmed or disproved, a narrative is said to have achieved closure. In this regard, Barbara Herrnstein Smith (cited in Keep, McLaughlin, and Parmar, 2000: par. 1) notes that “absence of further continuation [is] the most probable event” when closure has been achieved. As Smith (cited in Landow, 2006:228) clearly puts it, closure is “the sense of stable conclusiveness, finality, or ‘clinch’” which can be perceived either spatially or temporally.

As has earlier been indicated, the moment hyperfiction texts employ and engage the affordances of technology, narratives have been pushed beyond the confines and conventions of print technology hence many narrative concepts are pushed to the limits and they demand re-definition. In many ways, *afternoon* and *of day* render problematic this traditional definition of closure as a sense of stable finality. The two texts would rather demonstrate that the traditional attitude to the concept of closure considers only print narratives. There is therefore call for the expansion of the concept if it will accommodate the narrative reality of hyperfiction texts.

In the traditional print text, readers are usually supplied with both ending and closure. For this singular reason, readers anticipate towards the physical end of the text on the ground that such a physical end ensures that reading can no longer proceed; hence no further turn is expected or anticipated in the narrative. The physical ending thus suggests a suspension of all expectations and an arrival at the conclusion of all events. However, in an experimental hyperfiction text like *afternoon* where malleability and multiplicity define the structure of narrative discourse, the reader faces the challenge of re-construing and reconsidering the interpretation of that integral relationship that once existed between a physical end and the sense of closure. Since *afternoon* will not, in the characteristic nature of traditional works, provide a singular determinate meaning and ending, the submission of Umberto Eco (cited in Douglas, 1994:183) on what he terms “open works” which appears more like a hypertext becomes highly relevant in describing the discourse of *afternoon*, especially as it relates to the issue of closure:

Multi-value logics are now gaining currency, and these are quite capable of incorporating *indeterminacy* as a valid stepping-stone in the cognitive process. In this general intellectual atmosphere, the poetics of the open work is peculiarly relevant: it posits the work of art stripped of necessary and foreseeable conclusions, works which the performer’s freedom functions as part of the discontinuity....Every performance *explains* the composition but does not *exhaust* it. Every performance makes the work an actuality, but is itself only complementary to all possible other performances of the work. In short, we can say that every performance offers us a complete and satisfying version of the work, but at the same time makes it incomplete for us, because it cannot simultaneously give all the other artistic solutions which the work may admit.

A critical juxtaposition of the foregoing with the indeterminate malleable multiplicity obtainable in *afternoon* will explain why Harpold (1994:192-3) concludes that in the text, “it is possible only to arrive at a *contingent* conclusion. Any ending will be marked by the punctuality of interruption. (Thus the purest paradigm of a hypertext ending: you can just stop reading, decide that you’ve had enough, get up from the computer, and walk away.) But you cannot come to a definitive ending....” Thus, closure in *afternoon* does not rest on the author’s preconceived or singular sense of ending. Since the text provides for several points of traversal, it implies that the reader’s passage through the text is unlikely to be the same during every reading session.

In this regard, it means that the closure arrived at during a particular reading session may most likely differ from that reached during subsequent readings. For this reason, Douglas (1992:6) avers that within the indeterminate structure of *afternoon*, “[d]eciding when the narrative has finished becomes a function of readers deciding when they have had enough... or of readers understanding the story as a structure that can “embrace contradictory outcomes.....” In essence, the first step towards perceiving closure in *afternoon* lies in the reader’s recognition of the fact that *afternoon* is a structure of structures and a structure for structures; hence the reader cannot come to a definitive ending.

As a matter of fact, the major force that drove Joyce in writing *afternoon* explains the intended experimentation with the concept of closure that will be encountered in the text:

I wanted, quite simply, to write a novel that would change in successive readings and to make those changing versions according to the connections that I had for some time naturally discovered in the process of writing and that I wanted my readers to share. In my eyes, paragraphs on many different pages could as well go with paragraphs on many other pages, although with different effects and for different purposes. All that kept me from doing so was the fact that, in print at least, one paragraph inevitably follows another. It seemed to me that if I, as author, could use a computer to move paragraphs about, it wouldn’t take much to let readers do so according to some scheme I had predetermined (cited in Landow, 2006:216).

Given the foregoing, *afternoon* will, on many occasions, continue to reiterate several closures and meaning possibilities exist in the text aside that particular one which the reader may be arriving at a given point in time. One very relevant example here is found in the lexia titled “[Work in progress]” where the reader is reliably informed of the indefinite and multiple fictive possibilities in *afternoon*:

Closure is, as in any fiction, a suspect quality.... When the story no longer progresses, or when it cycles, or when you tire of the paths, the experience of reading it ends. Even so, there are likely to be more opportunities than you think there are at first. A word which doesn’t yield the first time you read a section may take you elsewhere if you choose it when you encounter the section again; and sometimes what sees a loop, like memory, heads off again in another direction.

In the same vein, we may take the case where a reader, after coming to “[I call]” in the default path goes on to pursue the link “[then I woke]” as another example here. Though the reader comes to interpret the narrative in the reading session so far in as a dream, s/he is however made to understand that there is more to the narrative than it ending exclusively at that instance:

I keep wanting it to be of those stories in which one wakes up – not as a cockroach, not from a trance of twenty years, but rather in the way you wake to your mother when you are a child, still hesitant about the propriety of having such a dream, yet vastly relieved that it is over. There is no mystery, really about the truth. **You merely need to backtrack, or take other paths. Usually the silent characters yield what the investigator needs to know. It isn't over yet, by any means, this story. ...** (emphasis mine)

Consequently, as the reader arrives at this lexia s/he knows that whatever conclusion and sense of closure reached is, by no means, the definite end of the narrative of *afternoon*. Already, the reader knows that even if s/he would not pursue the reading of the text further, s/he cannot categorically refer to the sense of closure s/he arrived at in the reading session as being definite or absolute. Though the reader has the absolute discretion of deciding when s/he has arrived at a satisfying end in a reading session, closure is still further problematized in the text in that the closure arrived at does not define the end of the text in an absolute term. At best, it is “an ending marked by the punctuality of interruption.”

The strategy employed for problematizing the concept of closure in *of day* is quite different from that of *afternoon* since *of day* is basically axial in structure. Right from the outset, the reader of *of day* has been psychologically prepared to locate and identify closure in the discourse of the “night” map. In this way, the reader’s ultimate goal is to move through the text on to the “night” which finalizes and concludes the activities in the “day”. The various tasks and activities in the “day” have all built up the expectations of the reader for a definite and single conclusion. On the contrary, however, the reader reaches the “night” map to discover that the narrative ends in eight (8) lexias: “[in the river I could see]”; “[on the balcony, a man and a woman]”; “[something was written]”; “[slowly, the brush traced]”; “[from the earth I pulled]”; “[an urn filled with]”; “[backward and forward]”; and “[she spoke in a voice]”. Whether the discourses of the eight lexias are to be taken as alternative or simultaneous conclusions of the story being followed from the “day” are some of the questions and tasks the reader will have to tackle. This multiplicity not only disapproves of the reader’s anticipated coherent, stable, and unique conclusion of the story but also institutes a different order for the interpretation of closure in spatial, temporal, and psychological terms.

Equally, the titles of the eight night lexia portray the sense of incompleteness and fragmentation which connote a deliberate and absolute denial, defiance and rejection of every sense of closure. This lack of the sense of closure in the titles of the nodes will further be enhanced by the discourses of the eight night lexias which do not in any way demonstrate the will to achieve closure for the text. The storyline of each of the eight lexias, rather than satisfy the reader’s anticipation for finality on the story building up from the “day,” only stirred up new anticipatory moods in the reader as new characters, places and issues are introduced without the reader being offered details or information about their identities/natures.

The fact that the narrative of the “night” came up entirely as a dumb show without any complementing voice-over helps in concealing suggestive clues to the narratives. In this way, the lexias are deeply enshrined in suspense and they call up the reader’s desire to know and see more without the text offering any assistance. Rather than appear as the closure of that story progressing from the “day,” the eight lexias in the night mode appear more as beginnings of new narratives.

8.0 Conclusion

The provision of several navigational strategies; the insignificance of linear logic in reading the texts; the facilities of the words-that-yeild, words-that-bounce, and words-that-float; the inclusion of other semiotic resources like motion picture, still picture, sound, music, and animations within the matrix of the text of *of day*, amongst other peculiar features of the two texts reveal the textual possibilities attainable within the vast, fluid, and malleable space of cyberspace and indicate that context cannot be divorced from the stylistic shape of any text. Right from the titles of the two texts – *afternoon, a story* and *of day, of night* – which both undermine the usage of capitalization and the proper employment of punctuation marks, the reader becomes aware that the two texts not only deliberately rebel against Tradition, but that they also deconstruct language in the process of this rebellion to indicate the centrality of language to the experimentations in the texts. For this reason, the aesthetics of fragmentation, collage, bricolage, repetition, playfulness, deconstruction of linear time, and reconfiguration of the sense of closure reveal how the affordances of digital technology influenced experimental edges in both texts. Whereas Joyce exploited the new textual space of digital technology in deliberately experimenting with linguistic and narrative materials, Heyward’s desire to maximally utilize the affordances of technology for the creation an engaging interactive text that will require the input of the reader for its fullest manifestation brings about the stylistic peculiarity of her text. The fact that the different styles and strategies of the two writers result in virtually the same effects shows the interrelationship between the desires of experimental writers, especially as ingrained in postmodernism, and the textual possibilities and implications inherent to the textual space of cyberspace.

Significantly, the stylistic peculiarities of the texts have a number of implications for the field of textual studies. We now have a text that is a simulacrum which existence is premised on the presence of a computer. Writing for the screen is not the same as writing for print. Digital writing requires a level of programming skills which could facilitate, at least, the chunking and linking of texts. Reading digital fiction requires a minimum knowledge of the computer. Reading experiences in the digital require interacting with computer interface to make decisive moves in the text. For this, the reader of the digital text is transformed into a “wreader” whose wreading experiences places her/him on a certain pedestal with the author since s/he is responsible for the evolution of the text encountered at any reading session. Where hypermediality is engaged, reading will invade into the borders of listening, watching, interactivity. In all of these, it is being demonstrated that an explosion in the field of textual analysis is here before us and the onus is on us, researchers in English Studies to make available

necessary methods and models for theorizing and investigating the nature of text, textuality, and linguistic/literary representation in this digital culture.

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