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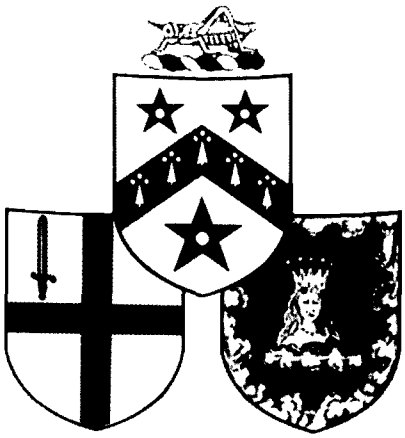

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ELECTRONIC ETIQUETTE IN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

A Lecture by

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16 April 1998

GRESHAM COLLEGE

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Electronic Etiquette in the Global Community

Professor Lynette Hunter

What I hope to begin to address in the course of this lecture is the impact made by the electronic revolution on the relationship between the writer and the reader. This revolution has altered so many aspects of our lives over the past few years, whether or not we actively sit down in front of a computer: It has changed the way we interact with libraries and banks, it has changed the length of queues in shops, and it has also changed many of the ways we think about using words, most obviously in the effect it has had on newspapers and magazines. But the focus of my discussion will be on the effects this revolution has had on the etiquette or courtesies of the writer/reader interaction, both in terms of the ways texts are made and received, and in terms of the local, specific display of words on a background, whether it be page or screen.

A brief but precise example from an email correspondence I held with an Asian colleague, now working at a Canadian university, will illustrate some of the issues. The very first email that this colleague sent, was to me, last year, in preparation for a conference I was running last summer.

> Dear Dr. Hunter:
> Thank you for your recent letter.....
> I have – I hope – figured out how to use my e-mail account on my new computer :-) and even learnt some of my daughter's hightech icons, such as
> :-) !!!
> Uma Parameswaran

Note that my colleague ends the email with a curious typographical convention, :-), which is called a smiley or emoticon. In my experience, not many people use smilies. Their most consistent use is among groups of computer afficianados, or, among novice email users who have been told about them and feel that they should use them. Now if we visited the world wide website for Netlingo, which is concerned with gathering information about techniques and devices for communicating in type but via electronic means, we would find a couple of pages listing frequently used smileys. Under their list of definitions for these devices, they note that the smilies 'compensate for the absence of non-verbal clues'. Implicitly the definition indicates that the medium thinks of itself as akin to oral communication, which also brings to texts a wealth of non-verbal clues. Elsewhere in this site we can find lists of acronyms, such as WB: for Welcome Back, or WTG: for Way to Go, or -> for 'sarcastic tone of voice', much in same way that we might find the phrase TGIF: Thank God it's Friday, in a magazine article. But if I receive a message saying: dear Lynette WB WTG -> George

do I react differently from receiving a handwritten memo, perhaps even a card, with the words:

Dear Lynette, Welcome Back, Way to Go, Yours George

....?

Part of the difference is of course the terseness of the computer message, which may be due to the fact that all email conversation takes place over telephone lines at the moment, and hence costs money. It may also be due to the way that email encourages brief 'hailings' of others, that are not intended to develop

into more extended dialogue. They are similar to meeting someone on the street or in a corridor and exchanging passing words, which is an event even more curtailed than 'chat'. They are also part of a world of small group cultures that has emerged on the Web. I'll return to this area, but suffice it for now to say that while one response from people using the enormous panorama of the Information Highway that the Web has become, is to form discrete communities with a shared interest, another response has come from those people who find the Web an ideal site for the construction of club cultures – cultures of enclosed sets of assumptions that build the illusion of a self-contained world within which, as within most other club cultures, codes of communication are not there simply for ease and utility but to increase the illusion of completeness, and the exclusion of others.

As noted, the implicit ground in the definition for some of these terms is that electronic communication is closer to the oral than the written. Certainly there is a common currency in the phrase that calls such communication 'secondary orality'. I want to argue that electronic texts are just as allied to writing and to printing as to orality. To do so, and before I move on to a selection of electronic texts, I will take a bird's eye view of 600 years of non-oral verbal texts, written, printed and electronic – let's call them transcribed verbal texts. The discussion that follows dips rather eclectically into the medieval as the age of manuscript, the renaissance as that exciting period juggling the oral with manuscript and print rather as we are juggling the oral with print and electronic, and the nineteenth century, as the flowering of print. I will be asking, have things really changed? and if so, what?

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Medieval texts

In the introduction to this lecture contained in the Gresham College brochure, I defined the printed book as something sold to the public by way of a bookseller, a fixed physical object. However, in the medieval period none of this applies in a recognisable way. For instance, there is not necessarily more than one copy of a book, particularly within one geographical region. If we imagine a small group of houses nestling in the Dales, it is unlikely that we will find copies of the same book in each house. Hence the community that circulates around the knowledge conveyed by the book, also circulates around it as a physical object. For example, rather than half of this audience having a copy of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and being able to discuss it among ourselves, there will be one copy of the book held in a particular place to which we must go if we want to read it. Once there, it is likely that we will meet others who are there for the same reason, and the community for discussion will circulate around that specific copy. Books are rarely treated this way any more, except perhaps the family recipe book which is often in manuscript, with inserted pieces of print or other handwritten recipes, and to which people turn for traditional receipts like christmas cakes, or, interestingly, for receipts for preserves like pickles and marmelades. And there are vestiges of this veneration of the book as a physical object in the still frequently heard injunction to children 'never to hurt a book'. In this day and age, when we replace broken cups and plates simply by going out to buy another, why not do the same for books? Yet many of us still find the ill-treatment of indivdual books shocking.

In the medieval period, copies of books were constructed by the scriptoria of many monasteries and some nunneries who must have made a substantial living from the work. These copies may have been commissioned by individuals who had the money to purchase them, but may also have been part of the world of intellectual dissemination of the time. After all, these locations were also the sites for considerable thinking and debate. A monastery may have wished to circulate the ideas of a particularly distinguished thinker in the group, or people visiting may have wanted to take copies of his [sic] work away. Let's say 20 copies are made and sent out to receiving libraries, these libraries will in turn become partly identified by them in a way more substantial than the casual judgement of today that says 'Oh yes, she reads detective fiction', but will go on to form intellectural communities around them.

Remember too that the copies are made by writing out by hand from handwritten text. We only have to think about the idiosyncratic nature of handwriting to understand some of the issues that would come into play, from difficulties in reading the original manuscript, to the temptation to correct statements that the copier knows to be untrue, to recognise the instability of the process. And medieval texts, famously, are often elaborately illustrated and displayed, again a function of the physical intimacy that people may have felt toward them. Certainly, when they were read, they were frequently written upon: with introductory material, with intertextual notes to sources or quotations, with intratextual notes to other places in the same manuscript that might be of interest to other readers, and with straightforward commentary. Sometimes the commentaries became so long that they were copied out into their own books, and in turn gave rise to other commentaries.

The story from these ideas that I would like to tell here, is really one of readers who feel that they are part of a community that legitimates physical interaction with the page in front us. The knowledge on the page is never in isolation, and the text, although written, is flexible.

Renaissance texts

What these issues of production and medium indicate is the on-going concern that the written page may be immoral because it cannot respond to its audience directly. Hence the reader may read out of context, receive the wrong impression and act on the wrong idea. This worry has informed all the lectures that I have given in this series, and will continue into the next lecture on Hypertexts. During the renaissance, in England from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, the concern about the 'absent writer' was at the heart of literary debate, probably exacerbated by the clash of manuscript and print cultures. If we look at the early printed books of the late fifteenth century, it is clear that they are trying to look like manuscripts, but they have very little marginalian commentary – it is as if the reading communities have been erased from the printed page.

The conditions of producing and receiving the books change dramatically with the introduction of print. Scriptoria are replaced by printing presses, and the people who work in the printshop may have nothing at all to do with the writer whose book they are printing. Instead of a lot of people constructing different copies, there are relatively small number of people producing large numbers of near-identical items. What does this do to the status of the text? Think of a painting in the National Gallery and the

posters downstairs in the Gallery Shop. Think of Philip Sidney, who never permitted any of his poetry to be printed, prefering the more prestigious medium of manuscript. Think, indeed, of people today who take publication in electronic form less seriously than publication in print....

On the whole, instead of individually commissioned copies, for an intimate community, print allows for much wider distribution of texts. It is easier to produce copies, and much cheaper, although not yet within the reach of many labourers. Furthermore, the reasons for producing the copies changes. Print is a capital intensive business, a risk venture with all the money for production up front before sales can be predicted let alone guaranteed, and with a lot of money tied up in space and equipment. Printers will be assessing their audiences, doing basic market research, needing to make their money back. An essential ingredient for this new set of relations is the bookseller, sometimes one and the same with the printer but often an independent operator. The booksellers in London during the sixteenth century worked alongside their printing colleagues, in a remarkably compact area of London. Side by side with their competitors, booksellers and printers trying to distribute their wares may well have developed personal relationships with their customers, acting in effect as editors of a list of books that the buyer could depend upon. Nevertheless, instead of communities of people able to discuss a small number of texts in detail, print encourages individual reading, possibly without any outlet for discussion. Despite the fact that the books become public, are published, the relation to the text becomes rather private.

Other attendant difficulties included censorship, patronage and copyright. With a medium capable of producing and circulating large numbers of books, there are obvious issues of government and social control. For the first two centuries of printing, this was effected by way of licensing the printers, and the printer was clearly at the centre of the hub. Writers did not necessarily earn anything from their efforts, and when they did so, it was often by way of their patron. Copyright resided with the first printer to get the book into print, or the first to register the book with the Stationers' company. The writer only received copyright to their work in 1711, and even then, up until the middle of the nineteenth century, usually sold it on to the printer in order to get the work into circulation. All of these issues inflected the relationship between the reader and the writer, but most of all, the private act of reading. Texts even not are never written in isolation, and rarely read in isolation – we usually buy books on the basis of recommendations. And during the period 1475-1695 there are growing responses to the need for discussion and interaction.

Let's return to marginalian comment once more. Gradually during this period you can find more and more marginalian comment creeping into the book, but it's *printed*. That it was significant is indicate by the sheer extent of marginalian comment in the mid-seventeenth century. Milton, for example, had to be courageous not to put in marginalia. Don McKenzie notes that printers tried to recreate the spatial dynamics of speaker and audience in a number of different ways, and quotes Milton saying that he had 'to club quotations with men whose learning and belief lies in marginal stuffings... and horse-loads of citations'. He also quotes one Thomas Blake apologising that 'Some will complain of a naked Margin' but that he was away from his books when the sermon was being prepared for the press. And further, that the quotations would either have been 'friends' to his argument and therefore challenged, or else 'adversaries' and

provoke personal offences and distaste. Hence the marginal note was partly equivalent to the challenge and provocation of oral debate, as opposed to the conventional use of the footnote in the twentieth century, which is to close down debate.

Slightly earlier, but part of the same concern, you may find typography being used to differentiate between speakers, or between different kinds of argument or poetic. George *Puttenham's Arte of English Poesie* (1589) argues that diamond-shaped text, or lozenge-shaped text, or parallel texts, all have different argumentative weight for the reader. More well known are George Herbert's typographic experiments with verse in such poems as *The Temple*. Other typographic techniques were also developed. About 100 years after the introduction of print, books begin to be paginated partly, I suspect, because it made reference to specific passages easier when two or more people were discussing a text from their own copies. With pagination came the flourishing of indices, at first simply tables relating to the progress of the pagination, but soon developing into alphabetical indexing, and becoming quite sophisticated by the middle of the seventeenth century, and imposing particular structures of knowledge on the text. The book also begins to acquire a title-page, a table of contents, and sometimes a list of subscribers; and there were the various addresses to the patron, the reader, the colleague, each conveying various degrees of flattery and seduction. By the early seventeenth century it is common to find a lot of introductory material by other people, affidavits like the quotes on the back covers of books today, indicating an intellectual community at work into which the reader is invited. And on a larger scale, it is notable that the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries are filled with discussions about genre: Partly a response to the arrival of classical learning, but also a response to the work that genre does in acting as a handshake between the writer and the reader that orients the reading of the text. I have mentioned Puttenham who writes extensively on genre, and in the next lecture I will look, briefly, at the development of the 'essay' as an early form of hypertext.

The push toward involving the reader, or, dealing with the writer's absence, came to a head in the late seventeenth century with developments in newspapers and particularly in magazines. Newspapers, because of the built-in local community audience and the lowered financial risk, became the way that printing spread from London throughout England. With that spread came the regional English book trade and the slow evolution of the magazine which is, after all, a community of writers within one issue, and usually addresses a specific community of readers. An important change was the relationship the magazine offered between the reader and the editor, for example Addison and Steele in their Spectator, which introduced a familiar editorial voice. Readers were also encouraged to write in to correspondence columns, and were even used as a source of free copy, often contributing articles, as well as serialised fiction which, frustratingly, they were under no obligation to complete.

Nineteenth Century texts

The nineteenth century saw the relationship between writer and reader, often by way of an editor, addressed rather sharply in the periodical press. From the 1840s to the 1880s printing and publishing went through technological changes at least as extensive as those we have seen over the past 30 years of the electronic revolution. Possibly the most important of the changes, which included the break up of linear text, was the

gradual sophistication of the visual image. By the 1890s millions of illustrated magazines were selling each week. In a country with a population less than 25 million, *The Boys Own Paper* sold over 100,000/week, *Home Chat* and *Tit Bits* each sold between 600,000 and 1,000,000/week. In order to manage the volume of material, the type of magazine proliferated: there were magazines for boys, for girls, for the housewife, for the lady, for the travelling salesman, for the sportsman, for the angler and so on. Another vital element in managing the volume of print was the growing role of editors. The period was the heyday of the editor, the one person who 'managed' all the disparate voices that were becoming available. From Samuel Beeton to Charles Dickens and William Thackeray, the editorial voice was at the centre of the relationship with the reader. Laurel Brake tells the story of Oscar Wilde who took over from Arnold Bennett, the 1880s editor of *Woman* known to the readers as 'Isabel'. Wilde is credited not only with turning *Woman* into a magazine of ideas and reviews for women, which was most unusual, but also with constructing a parallel readership within the male homosexual community of London encoded in the pages of the periodical by the visual display of women's clothes being modelled by men and boys.

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As with change of any kind, novelty and strangeness will initially encourage the participants to an interactive exchange as they learn about how things work. The difficulty comes when people have become habituated to particular techniques, because the engagement often loses imaginative energy. We can recognise this quite clearly in the contemporary attitude to magazines as of subordinate aesthetic value compared with the book, even though they developed in the way they did precisely to engage readers rather than to impose upon them. Just so, many developments in computing have grown out of the attempts made in books to encourage an active relationship between the writer and the reader despite the fact that writing opens a space between them, and yet they inexorably move toward conventions that are not welcoming to the reader. For example, databases: databases are elaborations on indices, and as such are there to make textual material more flexible; yet they are also structures that are used to grid down upon material, fix it within categories that are assumed rather than questioned. Similarly spreadsheets and statistics: statistics offer elaborations on visual argument close to Puttenham's lozenges and diamonds; they deal with probable results, and produce shapes like bar charts that seem immediately to suggest significance through their physical shape. But, as we all know, they also manipulate and re-structure material into desired significance. The more disengaged they become from the context of the reader or the writer, the less interaction goes on.

At the heart of these elaborations are ideas about the relationship between the writer and the reader. Database programmers probably don't want a relationship with their readers, but readers ignore the assumptions of the program at their peril. Until very recently people writing in computer-aided genres avoided the literary, and stuck to what appeared to be 'hard facts' which needed no relationship. The early twentieth century use of data for the Census, and the developments from mid-century by for example the United States Defence Department, were in fact using techniques developed to make books more flexible – like indices. However, in their claims to isolation and neutrality, in their denial of any relationship with

their readers, these techniques became mechanistic and alienating. Anyone who has worked with computers for more than 10 years will remember the appalling vestiges of that attitude in the vocabulary of 'command', 'execute' and 'abort'; some of these, like 'kill file', are still with us.

Many different factors intervened to change this relationship, but, I would suggest, the most important of these has been the Internet, what we now tend to refer to as the Web. One of the reasons that earlier applications could deny a relationship with an audience, is that they were made by and used by people with similar backgrounds and outlooks who could infer enough of what they needed to know. The Web has changed all that. Many users are computer novices who know little about programming and nothing about hardware. Also, and possibly more to the point, Web readers pay each time they use the facility, so if it doesn't keep on engaging them in pleasant or at least acceptable ways, they will stop using it. I would like now to take a look at an early experiment in making the computer a place where writers and readers could interact in an environment conducive to the verbal arts.

SwiftCurrent

SwiftCurrent was an experiment run by Fred Wah and Frank Davey from 1983 to 1987, and a brief transformation into Swiftcurrent 2 occurred shortly after. As such, it was one of the first experiments in the field, and set a number of parameters for future developments. They used a database structure as a tool to enable writers to 'talk' to each other about work in progress, to refine their writing, to 'publish' it electronically and eventually to publish it in book form. Users could define which members of the electronic community (there were between 40-60 subscribers) could read their work in progress, which could comment on that work, who could then read subsequent polished drafts, and who could read the final end-product (usually all the subscribers). At the same time, users could also define whose work they wanted to read, so that you could eliminate writers whose work you didn't want to be bothered with looking at, in effect acting as editor of your own personally selected magazine of writing. One of the requirements of SwiftCurrent was that subscribers had to already have published at least one book. With SwiftCurrent 2, this no longer held. The second version of the site attempted to be more responsive to the need for community building, and to the potential of the interchange for the supportive development of new work and new writers. Both versions offered an overarching structure of generic categories like 'poetry', 'criticism' and so on, to make it easier to move around all the information, and in this, as well as many other elements, they anticipated the structure of sites now operating on the Web, by which SwiftCurrent has been superceded.

Frank Davey, one of the founders, has pointed out in a number of articles that the electronic structure fundamentally changes the reader-writer-editor relationship, especially in the conditions governing the production and reception of the texts. The reader is actively involved, even able, when permitted by a writer, to change the words on the page – this, of course, is not unusual in the pre-publication phase of any writing in which friends and relations often get involved, but it is a radical departure for a 'published' text. The writer is not sacrosanct -- not that they had not previously realised this, but the experience of the medium sharpens its intensity. Davey also notes that he suspects writers desire the

more conventional experience of publication which lay at the end of SwiftCurrent, because it idealises the text (and author). Elsewhere he has suggested that electronic sites are often places where novice writers can participate helpfully in communities of other writers; they can learn a lot, and more to the point, they can get some immediate recognition. SwiftCurrent received far more feedback in terms of response and reviewing than any print publication would have done. However, for more established writers the experience may, because of the sheer number of participants, be draining.

Editors, Gatekeepers, and Navigational Aids

What Davey's account, and the structure of SwiftCurrent, leaves out is the editor (it also leaves out the designer, but I'll get to that in a minute). Editors working for publishing houses are there precisely to sift through all the submissions and to decide on the appropriateness of selected items for the larger list that the house is trying to present. They do an immense amount of work for their readers, although they may also act as authoritative gatekeepers who restrict what can be published. It is interesting that the 'draining' quality of several large listservers for writers, is modulated in the recently constructed 'Literature Online' website from Chadwyck Healey, by the employment of a professional writer. This person offers tutorials on poetry, feedback on submitted poems, a moderation of the responses to the tutorials, and they also select once a week one poem from among the submitted poems, for study by any of the subscribers – these responses also being moderated. Effectively this writer is acting as an editor and a teacher, and is certainly in a position of authority and power, rather than being just another user. A different kind of casual relationship builds up among the subscribers which is far more free and easy. But this begs the question: who is the writer? Chadwyck Healey: because the website is a text in itself? the person who writes the program? the professional writer? the writer-subscribers? And who is the reader? the subscriber who responds to the professional writer's work? to the other writing? or the visitor who responds to the site as a whole?

Electronic publication has the potential for the first really radical shift in reader-writer relationships since the periodical of the eighteenth century, and is possibly more revolutionary than any shift since the introduction of print in the fifteenth. Electronic media make it possible to be your own publisher at relatively little cost, and the overall financial risk of publishing is considerably diminished. Going into a bookshop may be like going into a mail-order shop, where you flip through the pages of a catalogue, possibly look at the 'sample copy', or listen to it, and then order it. You could get your book on disk, on paper and unbound, on paper and bound, or on tape. You could even design it yourself, choosing a practical large print edition, or a gift designed version. And 'out of print' would have no meaning, there would be no more risk of producing too many copies, no more storage costs, no more shipping costs. And of course, you wouldn't even need to go to a bookshop: we can already visit AMAZON.COM to order a book via the Web, or view the literature lists to check out the first chapters of the most recent novels before purchasing. Eventually we will be able to print out books in our own homes.

All of this could be liberatory and participatory, but with such open access to the verbal arts what happens to the 'author', to contracts, copyright and censorship? The 'author' is a concept that comes with

capitalism: a writer able to earn enough from their writing to live is given *authority* over the text so they have the right to profit by any copies that are made: copyright. Both ideas are wrapped up in the concept of the individual as articulated by liberal democratic politics. For many writers, patrons gave way to contracts, especially as authorship became a viable profession in the nineteenth century. If writing is so easy to get access to on the Web, who will pay the writer? Will they be able to live from their earnings? When Davey suggests that writers crave the idealisation of their work in the printed book, do they not also crave the potential for earnings that comes with the contract with the publisher? It is certainly the case that for the moment, because of the extensive powers of publishing houses to select and reject, the fact of print publication allows a writer to call themselves an author, to line up for grants, for promotion, for reward. If they are not paid much directly for the book, a selected few may earn a lot indirectly. But writers on the Web are two-a-penny, a dime a dozen.

Perhaps this is the way the democratising of writing has to go. At the moment, reading writing on the Web is frustrating just because there is so much of it. A student recently asked me what was the difference between a book that was difficult to read because it was badly written, and one that was difficult to read because it was innovative and challenging us to new experiences with words. An isolated reader cannot tell the difference. In effect, enterprising readers often have to take the chance that the effort they are expending on a new text will, after a month or longer, have been a waste of time – although I personally think any reading engagement teaches us something. We each have to have a reason for committing our time and energy to an interactive reading, especially since the Web makes it possible for people to make public, writing that print publishers would never touch because it doesn't fit into their generic categories. Indeed, the Web has already devised its own equivalent to the bookshop, with its generic categories inherited from the renaissance, in the navigational browsers that are available to move around it: Netscape, Alta Vista, Yahoo, etc. Go and visit one: they demonstrate the same problem as any subject guide in a library: the categories never seem to fit exactly what it is one wants to know. They are helpful, but they fix knowledge into areas that construct particular views on how society works; they define the environment for our thinking and hence for our actions. Faced with the volume of information, no doubt we need them. But we run the risk of being enclosed within parameters over which we have little control.

Furthermore, I have no doubt that soon, the Web will hold sites that offer to act as Guides/Gatekeepers to the verbal arts. They may work by sifting through readers' responses obscurely placed in the highways and byways of the Web and the listservers, by hiring professional readers/critics/reviewers to assess work on the Web, by acting as an editor and collecting on one site the 'valued' writing they have chosen. It is perfectly possible to charge a subscription fee for entry to a site, and this would be a simple way of paying some of the costs. Printing off from the site could also be charged for, and yield income. Yet while writers could be paid according to how many times readers visit their work, or how long they spend there, this would be likely to cause problems. Perhaps the Web Guides to Literature will become the new patrons, instituting communities of readers around the physical object of

the website, the text we read that has supplanted the library, the printer and bookseller, in order to get access to the written word in the first place. Whatever else, the status of 'author' will be in flux for a while.

The Web also makes possible far greater reader/writer interaction and engagement: Not merely as part of a word-game that is technically loosened up by the electronic possibilities of choosing the hero's hair colour, but integrally in the work itself. This latter activity is so fundamentally alien to western readers and writers that I suspect that there will be enormous resistance to it. Some people have argued that the Multi-User-Dungeons, MUDs, which are sites where users adopt and construct characters that then play out narratives devised by the actions of each member of the group, are a new form of integrated writing and reading. They may well be. However, guidelines for their use are far from clear; the etiquette is not elaborated, and users have been abused and hurt. To avoid this, many users stick to fairly conventional role-playing that offers the satisfactions of genre, but this is hardly interactive engagement that extends the boundaries of our experience of life and ability to value and act.

Censorship is, notoriously, one of the largest issues concerning the Web precisely because we do not yet know the guidelines for behaviour. There is, for example, an enormous amount of pornographic material on the Web, and it is not always clear what to avoid. One of the problems is that the Web is global, and there are not only different attitudes to what is acceptable in other societies, but also different ways of portraying experience. The issue is particularly acute in the area of satire and irony, which can be heavyweight political tools. Critiques made in either of these generic modes necessarily have to deal with the material that is being criticised. The closer the critique comes to mimicking the structure and patterns of the criticised, the sharper it will be, the more telling the commentary. Yet to an outsider, in very many cases, the critique can look like the activity being criticised. For example, in the late 80s and early 90s the pop singer Madonna made a number of videos satirising sex, religion and violence, but a large proportion of her audience thought she was endorsing them. If censorship enacts a society's 'bottom line' or tolerance level, as much will have to do with the interpretation of the art form as with the subject matter itself. And censorship draws on specific ideas of human 'rights' which may or may not hold from one place to another. The Web is still fairly open, although it is not as democratic as it used to be, and if there is a case for guidelines about acceptable behaviour, we must tread very carefully. Over the past 500 years of printed media, one consistent fact is that the more censorship there is, the more people will produce material to be censored.

Design, Typography and Poetics

However, this is all about the way that the electronic revolution has shifted the larger terms of engagement of production and reception, what about the medium itself? I will look in my next lecture at one of the more interesting structures that has been introduced by the electronic revolution: hypertext. But I would like to end this discussion with a brief look at design and the ways in which the facilities of computers have changed our approaches to the layout of the page. If SwiftCurrent operated in a fairly standard format of the typed page, the Web sites of a decade later look far more like magazine pages. SwiftCurrent resembled a cyclostyled or mimeographed piece of samidzdat literature, whereas the format of Chadwyck-Healey's

Literature OnLine is a sophisticated display of 'visual bites', analogous to the short, digestible-in-seconds, sound bites of television and radio reporting. In fact, sites such as the recent Arden Shakespeare website, self-consciously attempt to display status by finding a half way house between sophisticated visuals and an analogue to the printed page. It is significant that the Netlingo site, which is acutely aware of the impact of the written on the eye, offers a lot of white space around the typed sections, and plays with colour rather than typeface. Many sites are wildly excessive, as was Victorian typography in the flush of the new and easy methods for producing novelty designs.

Just as an early medieval reader would have been faced with a solid block of writing, with no punctuation and no spacing between the words, and would then have proceeded to punctuate it for themselves, today's user of some electronic texts is expected to participate in the grammar, poetic and rhetoric of the text in front of them. The use of smileys or emoticons is remarkably similar to Alexander Pope's use of the asterisk, the bracket, the exclamation mark and so on, in 1723, to indicate to the reader of Shakespeare's texts, points of irony, beauty, or particular significance. Even earlier, at the start of the renaissance, the parenthesis marks ( ) could indicate either a subordinate remark or a point of emphasis, the latter being quite unconventional in modern usage. As products of an education system that has focused on teaching us reading skills from the age of 5 until at least 15, we tend to forget that all these typographic conventions had to be invented, discussed and put into circulation.On a larger scale, but still typographic, George Ryman's Web novel, *253*, offers a guide to the narrative that is shaped like an underground map. But such visual descriptions of story are found throughout printed literature, in for example, the writing of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, in the late eighteenth century.

To return to my Canadian/Asian colleague Uma Parameswaran, and her novice email correspondence: during the barely three-month email exchange we held, her style elaborated incredibly swiftly. She dropped the smileys, but increasingly adopted her writer's voice, with an exuberant fluidity that responds to the loose texture of the medium, moving from

isn't this great that i have figured out (almost) how to get this going....

to:

This e-mail medium is so fast; it makes me dizzy -= with elation or trepidation, I have yet to figure out !

to:

>my muse used to be kindly, it's a bit rough right now but still hangs around
>making life difficult....
re: agreeing to being moved to the 4:45 session, let me think. should I
grant a favour to anyone who refers to the Muse as it and not she?

to:

a loaf of bread a flask of wine and thou beside me on email and even
winnipeg were paradise enow.

And as her confidence grew she also began to use the space of the computer display to good effect:

spoke to rina last night – she was away for three days.
she said the package she mailed to geetha came back, and so
she's mailed it to you – about four days ago.
she said she'd call geetha early morning your time.

The brief clauses, whose endings almost claim the status of sentence, with their pithy factual shorthand and insistent repetition of 'she' that turns into the overload of, 'she' 'she' 'she's' 'she' she's', dramatically reconstruct an almost desperate attempt to pin down an amorphous mass of events, times and schedules. Even the possibly inadvertent central couplet rhyme of 'so' and 'ago', brings all these events into balance around the second and third line, but spinning into the first and out of the second. Although the interlacing of 'three days' (line 1) 'geetha' (line 2) 'four days' (line 3) and 'geetha' (line 4) mitigates this effect a little, the semantic shift from an implicit 'I' and 'she' in the first two lines to 'she', 'you' and 'your' in the second two lines, follows the direction of intention, as if the speaker is now pushing this event away from her and toward the 'you'. Whatever else, this writer has a distinctive and engaging voice that is making the most of the scope that this as-yet unconventional medium confers.

What is interesting is that the writer has returned to the poetic devices of writing as found in texts since classical Greece, and with a particular awareness of spatial arrangement that has informed literature since the sixteenth century and the printed word. The large structures of production and reception may begin to mimic the conventions of oral transmission, particularly in areas of collaboration and the status of the writer. However, unlike the oral, these texts are not ephemeral. There is a record of every version, and this ties issues of the narrative copyright typical of oral societies, into issues of typographic copyright typical of print societies. In addition, although the small communities that form around particular websites, encourage a self-censorship similar to that of the oral performance, the fact of the global audience for texts on the Web, complicates the issue of censorship and calls on many regulatory devices formulated for print.

But at the level of the page, the medium is still by and large resolutely tied to the poetics of the written. Hypertext could change all that.

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