

HGGS

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“New Forms of Literature in a Digital Age”

The thesis will examine digital literature with a particular focus on differences and similarities between digital and traditional forms of literature and the relationship between literary theory and digital texts. This includes actual written text, such as online fanfiction (stories created by fans based on a preexisting canon by another author) or hypertext fiction, but also storytelling podcasts (essentially a type of online radio play), computer games, text-based online roleplaying, commentary threads, and other digital forms.

In the past 30 years, as digital literature has risen from the first hypertext stories to the many different forms that exist today, academic interest in this field has equally grown: Online storytelling has been the subject of studies by linguists as well as sociologists and literary theorists. However, while a number of significant theoretical contributions have been made, there is still little in the way of practical application: Digital texts are seldom analysed as actual literature, despite their popularity, cultural relevance, and availability. Additionally, different forms of digital literature are often treated as their own, isolated sub-fields and rarely examined side by side.

This thesis will outline similarities as well as differences between various types of digital and traditional literature and examine the origins of different phenomena. One fundamental assumption that will be tested in the course of the thesis is that digital forms of literature are not only highly relevant and can be compared with traditional forms of literature, but that digital literature is in fact not a separate field from traditional literature at all and thus can and should be studied to a similar extent by literary critics.

The aim of the thesis is to provide the methods required for analysing digital literature, which will be tested through a number of case studies.

Keywords: digital humanities, computer-based and computer-generated texts, new (fringe) forms of literature, paraliterature, hypertext, online storytelling, author-reader relationships