

The End of Books—or Books without End?





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Books without End?

Reading Interactive Narratives

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*Ann Arbor*

The University of Michigan Press

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Published in the United States of America by  
The University of Michigan Press  
Manufactured in the United States of America  
⊗ Printed on acid-free paper

2003 2002 2001 2000 4 3 2 1

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*A CIP catalog record for this book is available  
from the British Library.*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for  
ISBN 0-472-11114-0 (cloth: alk. paper)



## Acknowledgments

In 1986 John McDaid, then a fellow graduate student at New York University, suggested I meet Jay Bolter, who arrived bearing a 1.0 beta copy of Storyspace. When he opened the Storyspace demo document to show McDaid and I a cognitive map of the *Iliad* represented as a hypertext, my fate was clinched in under sixty seconds. I had seen the future, and it consisted of places, paths, links, cognitive maps, and a copy of *afternoon, a story*, which Jay also gave us.

Within a week, I had upgraded my Macintosh, changed disciplines, and begun work on a dissertation proposal using the same 1.0 beta version of Storyspace, the equivalent of volunteering as a crash-test dummy to check the safety of cars during head-on collision.

After weeks of alternately immersing myself in *afternoon* and losing data to system crashes every ten minutes, I admitted I needed some direction and began frantically trying to locate Michael Joyce, listed on the Storyspace startup dialogue box along with Bolter and William Smith as the authors and developers of Storyspace. The third Michael Joyce in the Jackson, Michigan, white pages answered the phone with a deep, resonant voice.

"I'm looking for the Michael Joyce who wrote *afternoon*," I said quickly.

"Yes, but you can't know that," he said, first, not realizing I had a copy of *afternoon*, then: "And who are you?"

The rest, as they say, is history—and also the beginning of this book.

Even the most haphazard reader of this book will recognize that, without Jay Bolter, Michael Joyce, and Stuart Moulthrop, my work would not exist. Their ideas, interactive texts, critical writings, and work on interface design have long provided me with both rich fodder for my research and an abundance of ideas, methods, and critical and theoret-

## *Acknowledgments*

ical approaches to interactivity in general. Together they have inspired me in every sense of the word.

To Gordon Pradl I also owe several debts: for his insights on the distinctions between “inner-” versus “other-directed,” for introductions to many of the sources that have informed my entire outlook on reading and interactivity, and for giving me the right shove at exactly the right time.



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## An Interactive Narrative Timeline

- 1759 Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* first appears in print.
- 1776 Samuel Johnson declares, "Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last."
- 1914 James Joyce's *Ulysses* first appears in print.
- 1915 Ford Madox Ford publishes *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion*.
- 1938 Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* argues for the importance of the transactions between readers and texts.
- 1939 Roosevelt's science adviser, Vannevar Bush, describes a hypertext-like device, the Memex, in "Mechanization and the Record."
- 1949 Jean Paul Sartre's *What Is Literature?* introduces readers to the central tenets of what later becomes known as reader-response theory or reader-centered criticism.
- 1960 Marc Saporta publishes *Composition No. 1*, a novel on cards.
- 1962 Douglas Engelbart's paper "Augmenting Human Intellect: A Conceptual Framework" describes the document libraries, multiple windows, and links between texts that later become parts of the AUGMENT system.
- 1963 Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (Hopscotch) includes alternative orders for reading its segmented text.
- 1965 Ted Nelson coins the term *hypertext*.
- 1967 The *Atlantic Monthly* prints John Barth's "The Literature of Exhaustion," which suggests that "intellectual and literary history . . . has pretty well exhausted the possibilities of novelty."
- 1990 Michael Joyce publishes *afternoon, a story*, the first hypertext novel.
- 1992 Robert Coover introduces mainstream readers to the possibilities of hypertext fiction in the provocatively titled essay "The End of Books," in the *New York Times Review of Books*.
- 1997 W. W. Norton Company includes two hypertext fictions in its *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology* alongside works by Barth, Burroughs, Gass, and Pynchon.
- 1998 Flamingo, a British imprint of HarperCollins, publishes Geoff Ryman's *253: The Print Remix*, a print version of the hypertext narrative *253*, first published two years earlier on the World Wide Web.