A DIGITAL ANALYSIS OF UNCLE ROGER USING VISUAL METHODOLOGIES

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Paper Information

Abstract

Digital literature has given rise to an amalgamation of traditional literature with technology that leads us to enhanced text. It is a new form of literature that is read through clutters, gutters, and the touch of the screen rather than laboring through pages. The reader gets engaged with the text through creativity, self-direction, and experimentation with the technology, the role of a reader is transferred from being passive to active. It enhances the text and makes it alive by using multimedia tools and enhances the reading experience by immersive reading, aggrandized experience through amplification, and creates partial-authorship and a better-than-real version through simulation. Uncle Roger is text containing hyperfiction, magic realism, and non-linear narrative using hypertexts, simple images, and basic graphics. It consists of three chapters, A Party in the Woodside, Notebook, and Terminals, each chapter contains various hypertexts and hyperlinks that help in creating the plot of the story. The text combines textual and visual materials including colors, pictures, sound, etc. that enhance the digitization of literature. Uncle Roger has been analyzed using the textual method of analysis and by employing three modalities as digital methodologies devised by Gillian Rose; technological modality, compositional, and social modality to comment on the use of magic realism in this digital text and its contribution in meaning-making. This research opens a new dimension of research for the future and provides researchers with new areas of exploration in the digital world as the digital world is ever-lasting and never-ending with various loops and nodes.

Keywords: Digital, immersion, simulation, amplification, multimodalities.

Introduction

Digital literature has made the use of technology easier as it incorporates literature on the digital medium. Instead of laboring for hours on pages of traditional text, readers prefer to play with the text and take the partial authorship through just a click on the screen. It allows the reader to minimize the time and cost of purchasing and reading printed text to download, read, and immerse through the text easily. It allows the reader to get straight to the plot or get tangled in finding the plot through hypertexts. It combines various narratives and provides a lot of points of view of the audience in new forms of new literature like blogs, twitter-fiction, twitterature, network fiction, etc. A lot of text has been produced and immersed in digital media and yet continues its broadening of the genre. *Uncle Roger* is one of the most multidimensional digital texts which provides multiple narratives within a story. It has been written by Judy Malloy. Judy Malloy is a renowned American poet, author, and researcher. She is the editor of The New York Foundation of Art (NYFA) and currently teaches at Princeton University as a professor. Her works have been internationally published and exhibited in various museums, libraries, exhibitions, and universities. She also has a keen interest in computer programming as well which is reflected in her book *Ats@50: Art and Technology Studies 1969-2019*. She started her career with *Uncle Roger* in 1986. An amalgamation of hyperfictional, magic realism, and non-linear narrative using hypertexts, simple images, and basic graphics makes *Uncle Roger* a unique piece of digital literature. It consists of three chapters, A Party in the Woodside, Blue Notebook, and Terminals. The color scheme of the text is simple using black as a background and presenting text in contrasting red, blue, and yellow. As far as the initial production of *Uncle Roger* is concerned, this digital text has been created using 1986 Apple BASIC software and incorporates two main genres of conventional literature: poetry and fiction. It uses a simple form of hypertext links called lexis. All lexias in the story contain separate scenes that can stand alone to provide meaning or create a mixed narrative when they occur in combination with each other. Malloy intended to produce non-linear narratives with key phrases and words to present a basic, simple, and non-complex structure of units. However, these key phrases and words can be apprehended in a linear narrative, they were initially designed to be non-linear, combining words and pictures in a way that neither the words describe the pictures, nor the pictures illustrate the words (Malloy, 1951). The researcher has selected *Uncle Roger* as a text. It is not only an immersive experience but also a virtual experience. The sounds, meanings, themes, and images will be studied in the light of textual analysis. It is assumed that due to the presence of hyperlinks, the text blurs the boundary between the digital and the actual world.

Statement of Purpose

The study aims to analyze *Uncle Roger* in the light of Rose's Visual Methodologies to discuss the elements of magic realism in its chapters, *A Party in the Woodside, Blue Notebook,* and *Terminals.*

Research Objectives

1) To discuss the use features of visual methodologies such as technological modality, compositional, and social modality inculcated in *Uncle Roger.*

2) To analyze the elements of magic realism in the digital text *Uncle Roger* using visual methodologies.

3) To analyze and discuss immersion through multimodalities in A Party in the Woodside, Blue Notebook, and Terminals.

Research Questions

1) What are the features of visual methodologies inculcated in *Uncle Roger*?

2) How are the elements of magic realism incorporated in all three chapters of *Uncle Roger?*

3) How does the reader experience immersion in all three chapters of the selected digital text?

Research Methodology

Literature studies are mostly carried out with the help of textual analysis. However, there are other methods of research available for the research. The research will be using textual analysis as it fits the scope of this study. The text will explore through various angles by keeping in mind the Textual analysis by Catherine Belsey (Tarquin & Lucreta 1571). Three steps of Belsey's model will be used to analyze the data, the steps include reading, re-reading, and analysis of the text including both visual aids and texts. Therefore, the text will be read, reread, and analyzed to explore the text through various angles including multimodality and magic realism. The text will be taken into account visually which means the color coding, images, structure, and how meaning is conveyed in *Uncle Roger* will be the scope of the study. The primary text is *Uncle Roger* and will be treated visually.

Significance of the Research

This study is innovative and significant for researchers looking to explore digital literature, its features and its characteristics. It explores a new dimension of digital text by not just reading it but also looking at the enhancement of text using visual methodologies. The study is significant because it opens new avenues for research in digital literature. The research will be used in the discussion of digital research and will be used in the literature reviews of the upcoming studies.

Literature Review

Uncle Roger by Judy Malloy initially emerged from 1986-88, fixing it amongst the nascent generation of born-digital works—preceding the preliminary iterations of Micheal Joyce's "Afternoon: A Story". There are presently six digital renditions of the work: Version 1 (1986-87), the serial novel for the net; Version 2 (1986-87), the interactive narrative for the net); Version 3 (1986-88), the boxed version as standalone artists software in database programming in AppleSoft BASIC; Version 4 (1988), the boxed version as standalone artists software in database programming in GW-BASIC; Version 5 (1995, 2014), the web version; Version 6 (2014), the DOSBox emulator Version. Malloy considers the online version to be the official version, with content differences from its four previous iterations resulting from the shift from The WELL's upscale and creative audience to the larger and more accessible online audience. Furthermore, a seventh iteration emerged in tandem with the creation of a card catalog between 1986 and 1988. Looking back, it might seem strange that Malloy had not thought of using computers in her work. Still, her conception of computers was firmly rooted in the picture of the massive mainframes she had first seen—imposing devices subject to curtailed operating hours, supervised by gatekeeping personnel, and dependent upon the complexities of punch cards. Even though personal computers became widely available in the 1980s, Malloy, who was going through a divorce and juggling parenthood, had a hard time rationalizing her decision to buy a computer of her own. She didn't get a used Apple II until 1985, and that was more for her son's schooling and Infocom games. She explored using commercial database software, but using the computer appeared to be a diversion from her other obligations. Now that she was getting close to 45, the idea of a dramatic change in her career path didn't seem possible. The inaugural form of the original BASIC variant of Uncle Roger is run in DOSBox, an emulator made to mimic the original DOS command line/DOS environment. Uncle Roger functions have been evaluated using the Windows version of DOSBox,

demonstrating adequate performance. We welcome feedback on how it operates on different versions. It's worth noting that DOSBox fails to replicate the eye-catching glowing green or yellow letters found on DOS-powered PCs in the 1980s. While adding color to the program would help it come closer to the original experience, this improvement hasn't been applied yet. The application has undergone minor alterations to simulate the formatting of the original version as it was seen on computers in the 1980s, but no color tweaks have been done. When Uncle Roger was being translated for the web, some of the original lexis were changed. Since the online version is now recognized as the official version of the work, I, the creator, felt it appropriate to use this approved version. It's critical to differentiate this issue from program modifications. However, to guarantee compatibility with the text editing procedure, some modifications to the DATA statements became necessary during the reproduction of the work.

Even though it is well known that readers were not permitted to alter the text's layout or structure, interactivity continued to provide readers with a degree of autonomy and the chance to collaborate in its development. In terms of immersion, this idea was limited by the author's aim and associated with the sensation of immersing oneself in the narrative or as a consequence of a reading experience predicated on a "willing suspension of disbelief," as proposed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. As a result, interactive content was seen to be counterproductive to readers' ability to fully engage with the material. The fragmented and combinatory structure of these works seemed to create a "clash between ergodic and narrative layers" (Eskelinen 104) of a text, which was relevant because narrative was generally associated with coherence and linearity. However, new reading and writing experiences were offered by the growth of the World Wide Web, new software, and mobile devices. The emergence of technology has expanded the methods by which a narrative may be created or told. Old or new disputes started to (re)surface since computers could now offer an environment where many media kinds were able to grow and prosper. The idea of immersion-interactivity required an all-encompassing viewpoint that could tackle the multimodal nature of electronic literature. Otherwise, this Uncle Roger is rather similar to what spectators who visited the traveling show by Art Com Software or bought it from Art Com would have seen. Interactive fiction has had a noticeable impact on software engineering, interface design, online communities like MUDs and MOOs, and other digital and non-digital media, as stated by Nick Montfort (Montfort 2). The "style of at least one important work of hypertext fiction, Stuart Moulthrop's Victory Garden," Montfort continues, has also been affected by them (226). Storyspace hypertext fiction and interactive fiction were mostly authored in spoken language. But as previously noted, as the WWW grew, digital texts evolved into multimodal objects that included several semiotic languages. Now, viewers of digital works may discover various metaphorical dimensions (Zuern) that readers of previous hyperfictions could not. Texts can also be responsive or animated, as shown by pieces like Ingrid Ankerson's Cruising (2001), a cinematic flash poem that describes itself as "an excited oral recitation of a teenager's favorite pastime," and Brian Kim Stefans' Dream Life of Letters, which transforms letters into dynamic shapes. A wide range of texts created using new software and seen or experienced on new platforms necessitated the expertise and vital resources accumulated by several academic fields, including computer science and cinema studies. The idea that a literary work is only verbal was also contested by these writings, which also called

into question any hierarchical relationships between words and images. However, as we all know, a clear division between text and picture had already been eroded long before electronic literature emerged.

Research Gap

Some of the other aspects of digital literature have been explored in various ways including the narratives it produces, the use of themes and symbols in meaning-making, amplification through audio-visual aids, and so on. While *Uncle Roger* has been explored based on its themes and rhetorical devices, however, it has not been explored through different angles such as magic realism employing visual methodologies. The researcher will focus on magic realism employed in *Uncle Roger* using the visual methodologies of Gillian Rose to comment on the enhancement of the digital text and the immersive experience of the reader using these visual methodologies in the world of digital literature to give a new angle to the study. It amalgamates two fields of studies including digital literature and magic realism employing the use of Gillian's multi-modalities using textual method to give rise to a new angle for research.

Theoretical Framework

Debates emerge over the social dynamics that surround these visual depictions, with continuous conversations centering on the consequences of simulacra. In particular, Baudrillard has come under fire for supposedly supporting simulacra without giving enough credit to the sometimes uneven social ties that they might portray. Many people consider Donna Haraway's (1991) to be a helpful reminder of the serious consequences that come with modern ocularcentrism (see also Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Lister & Wells 2001). Like many other researchers, Haraway (1991) notes that visualization tools are becoming more and more commonplace in both scientific and non-scientific settings. She

defines the associated scopic regime as follows: "Vision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all perspective gives way to infinitely mobile vision, which no longer seems just mythically about the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice" (Haraway 1991: 189). Nonetheless, Haraway is interested in defining the social power dynamics that are expressed through this specific visuality. She posits that extant, unchecked visual polyphagia is available to only a handful of people and institutions, specifically those that are part of the 'history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy' (Haraway 1991: 188). She contends that this visuality creates particular conceptions of social distinction, such as class, 'race', gender, sexuality, and so forth, while simultaneously asserting its non-participation in the hierarchy and consequent universality. Haraway argues that this ordering of difference is closely tied to the oppressions and tyrannies of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and other systems because it is predicated on a division between those who assert to see with universal relevance and those who are seen and categorized in specific ways. Haraway's critical work entails a careful investigation of how certain organizations utilize certain types of visuality to understand and organize the world. Alternative approaches to visualizing social differences are disregarded by the dominant visual paradigm, but Haraway contends that there are other ways to view the world. Projects that aim to understand social differences in non-hierarchical ways particularly fascinate her. She makes the same argument as many other academics: the prevailing scopic regime of (post)modernity is neither a given historically nor uncontested. Differentiating between the social impacts of various worldviews is crucial since there are various perspectives on the world.

Analysis / Discussion

Uncle Roger is a story of pre-computer and pre-internet California. The story moves at the time of a quest to make the fastest working semiconductor chip in Silicon Valley. The two main characters are Uncle Roger and Jenny. Roger is an eccentric CEO of an electronic chips company and Jenny is a young girl who works at his house (Malloy, Uncle Roger). It has three cataloged file databases, all of them storing a bundle of information regarding the mind process and retrospections of characters. The story does not present a turn or a specific beginning or ending but unfolds new aspects of the character's life within these databases. Within the boundaries of these files and their stored information, the reader becomes in charge of recreating his own stories by infusing his personal experience into the narration. The basic aim of the author was to create a digital text in which a reader could create a fictional environment with the help of existing databases and information emerging from the narrative (Malloy, Uncle Roger: The Blue Notebook). In an interview, Judy Malloy revealed that *Uncle Roger* is still her best creation because of the interactive co-authorship of the reader. The popularity of *Uncle Roger* can be assessed through the fact that with the evolution of technology, six versions of this digital hyperfiction also emerged as the need of the hour and in response to public demand. The basic reason for this demand was the ultimate control of narration and shaping the story by marking its beginning and end. Another factor was the variety of choices and the vast number of outcomes. From 1986 to 2014, *Uncle Roger* was programmed with new algorithms like Apple Soft BASIC, GW-BASIC, DOS Box Emulator, etc. and its uniqueness never grew old. According to Malloy, the 5th version is the most interesting and is of utmost importance because it became accessible to mainstream users of the World Wide Web. Previous versions were not that accessible to the public and were in the grasp of only a few elites. The WELL website played a vital role in its propagation and production (Malloy, The Process of Creating New Media). Gillian Rose has devised three modes to analyze a digital text i.e., technological modality, compositional, and social modality. These provide a framework for analyses in the realm of digital literature (Ownby). Considering all these, a reader needs to know when, how, and why some features are used in a text. He needs to have the ability to look inside a text, analyze the content, and observe its effect. He must observe the colors used in a text and finally look at the framing of the text. When she talks about the ability to look inside a text (The Good Eye), it means to have a clear vision and an ability to sense and understand the text. It suggests looking at content using compositional interpretation. (By looking at the author/artist, publishing date, society of that time, etc.) Similarly, it is vital to know the site of the production itself to understand its significance. It involves the analysis of the content including words, images, sounds animated characters etc. Its importance depends on the type of text (e.g., in films: mise en scene, sounds or dialogues can be important depending on the scene), whereas in a text like Façade by M. Mateas & A. Stern, content is based on animation and involves interactive fiction. Similarly in Star Wars, letters are typed one after another by giving the sound of a typewriter. So, the reader needs to read, observe, and understand the importance of a text. Nothing in a digital text is spontaneous. A reader must look at its minute details and perform a detailed analysis (Rose). Colors also have a very important purpose in a digital text, the reader needs to understand and interpret the purpose behind color coding because mixing/blending colors helps in deciphering the meaning. For instance, the black background in *Story Land* by Nanette Wylde highlights the colorful text on it. Whereas in *Ask Me for The Moon*,

black just gives the work a mysterious feeling as the work looks dark, complex, simple, and rich. Moving forward, Gillian Rose talks about the framing of a text. The frame is what appears in front of a reader. The analyst needs to focus on the frame along with text and information. Like in films, the director intentionally uses close-ups, pedestals, dolly shots, etc. and the audience interprets the scene accordingly. The reader needs to observe every minute detail using a good eye. In this selected text, *Uncle Roger*, we can find a twined element of magic realism with a Silicon Valley semiconductor chip war. As it contains three files, all these files are pioneering hyperfiction. In this story, the narrator, Jenny, tries to recall all the things that have happened to her before. She tries to remember most of the events that happened at a birthday party but cannot distinguish between reality and dreams, hence magic realism plays a part in it. When the reader navigates through the text, he feels like a guest walking here and there at the party and hearing the conversations of different people like friends and even strangers. At some points, it feels like Jenny herself does not know who that person is, she is unable to recognize them and hence reader feels the same. Therefore, Malloy calls it a fragmented picture of the party which is told through individual memory. In the production mode, she provides a variety of keywords and links to link one file to the other parts of the narrative and presents a link between hyperfiction and interactive fiction (IF) adventure. In the compositional mode, the hypertext, images, and navigational tools help the reader to link different parts of the narrative like parties or offices, etc. which include the keywords listed in the Lexia. Whereas in social modality, the reader is given the freedom to jump on several pages providing him different paths to begin reading. He has the partial authorship to choose which story to read first. As the artist mentions her

vision was to create a computer-mediated novella in which the reader himself recreates a fictional environment by continually retrieving and searching narrative information and hence experience differs in every case (Judy Malloy, Uncle Roger, and the hyper-textual narrative). *A Party in Woodside* is the first file of this text that narrates the events of a framed formal birthday party. This party was organized in a hotel dining room for a microelectronics company's president in Silicon Valley. As Jenny narrates, she remembers the events vividly and mentions an encounter with Uncle Roger. While she sits at the banquet table, she recalls other events that have occurred earlier like a romantic car trip with a former lover and a visit to his house, etc. As the reader navigates through the text the way he likes, he has the freedom to choose which story to read first, so every reader has a different experience. He observes and interprets the text himself. Malloy provides hyperlinks in each section so that the reader navigates through the text using hyperlinks and images linearly through the narrative, simply by clicking on the image to the left. Similarly, as Rose mentioned, color coding is of vital importance. This file incorporates red, blue, and yellow with a black background which makes it hard to distinguish the real from the imaginary. The color coding urges a reader to try a different color every time, no matter how the next story turns out to be. The second file in this fragmented digital text, Uncle Roger, is named *The Blue Notebook*. This file contains what Jenny has written in her blue notebook, but as she narrates the story, she mentions that the way incidents were written in her notebook did not happen in the same way. While the reader navigates through the text the way he desires, he comes across fragmented memories of Jenny again that weave in and out of her mind. It shows the complexity of her life. Each time the reader clicks on the name of a person, he comes to

know what Jenny thinks about him/her. Not only has he realized Jenny's relationship with that person. This file contains more than 75 entries that result in creating hyperlinks and involve more graphics. As Malloy involves both poetry and fiction, therefore, she uses free verse in this text. She creates a bridge between human narrative and written words along with corresponding images. The third file of this text, *Terminals*, contains a keyboard-like set of icons in blue and yellow and they function as a navigational tool. They separate each story section when the reader navigates through them. It gives a feeling to the reader like he is typing on a typewriter in his workplace. In this file, Jenny again has some random thoughts when the narrative follows her to her new job. The reader has no idea about what will appear next as each text is unexpected and unpredictable. Different readers enjoy it through their own experiences. Images at the bottom of this file display the box of a typewriter. Each one of these boxes narrates a part of Jenny's life like where she lived and when she came to San Francisco and started working there etc. Moving forward, these icons and words act as hyperlinks and depict her thoughts while she sits at her desk. The reader feels at ease as all of it is a reality and enjoys even a better-than-real version of it. As far as the social modality of *Uncle Roger* is concerned in the history of literature and its evolution, it does not isolate itself from conventional literature. Non-linearity and stream of consciousness were also present in traditional literature. The only thing that makes it unique is the authority of the reader to alter and create his narration by interaction and achieving the status of co-authorship. This notion is present in traditional literature as the theory of The Death of The Author (Roland), but digital literature has embellished this concept to a higher pedestal and triggered a paradigm shift in society regarding the reception of literature. The sense of authorship seems powerful in digital literature, but it is a part of the electronic design and simulation. An author has prescribed a possible number of predefined outcomes and a reader just has to choose only one from them. For example, all keys of a typewriter in Terminal present a different thought of Jenny, but again, these thoughts cannot exceed the number of keys. The point is that the reader is also a beguiled part of the simulation and just plays his part as a subject, not an author. In Baudrillard's words, the whole notion of co-authorship is just an image (Baudrillard). Whatever it may be, the position of a reader in digital literature has evolved from a reader of conventional literature. The reason behind it is that, with human evolution, his mind is now able to process more complex information and is not content with passive reading experience. A modern reader treats this handling of information and deciphering the codes as an adventure.

Conclusion

In short, digital literature is an endeavor of broadening the scope of conventional literature. Modes of conveying meanings in literature have increased as the creators are not just relying on the text. So, there is a dire need for new methods of analysis and active readers who should not overlook the intricate meanings of digital literature. Now, the digital texts and the amplified versions of traditional literature on screens are an immersive experience for the readers. It can be a fun activity; on the one hand, the reader can click on the digital devices and read the story from anywhere. The stories can be read and interpreted through various angles and techniques. The reader always has a choice of hyperlinks so that he/she may read the story of his/her choice. Reading *Uncle Roger* is a mesmerizing experience as it embarks us on a journey of colors, techniques, and visuals on screen and the text is indeed magic realism as it blurs the boundary of the text and the digital world by using hypertexts and

hyperlinks. It opens the digital world for new interpretations rather than just focusing on the stimulation of the traditional forms, it now opens itself to a new dimension of magic realism as employed in Uncle Roger. This study empowers researchers to look beyond the obvious digitization of the texts and try to interpret the story through various other angles.

Recommendations

The research has paved the way for the upcoming researchers to conduct research on the same text or any digital text and analyze it in the light of digital communicative theory. It provides further researchers with a lot of new dimensions in the digital world to explore and analyze the data accordingly.

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