

“The Effect of Migration on Michael Joyce’s *afternoon, a story*”

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While the 4th Edition of Michael Joyce’s *afternoon, a story* published on 3.5-inch floppy disk for Macintosh computers in 1992 has been called the authoritative edition (Kirschenbaum, “Editing the Interface,” 31), all editions released in other media formats from 1997 onward vary textually and/or structurally in some way. A study of five of the 13 editions shows a significant number of structural changes relating to work’s hyperlinking strategy and choices over paths to follow that affect the reader’s experience.

Variations among versions and editions of electronic literature are not unusual. Judy Malloy, for example, has maintained her creative digital output begun in the 1980s by migrating works like *Uncle Roger* and *its name is Penelope* to more accessible formats, efforts that have resulted intentional textual and structural changes needed to address technological constraints (Grigar, “The Many Faces,” 98-105).

My study, however, focuses on *unintentional* variations, looking primarily at the editions of Joyce’s novel because as a pioneering work, it is regarded as the touchstone for early born digital literature, one that has influenced both the formation of a genre and the field. Additionally, because of its stature, the novel has been maintained through 33 years of technological innovations that include 13 Editions released on three media formats, published on the web and in print, and recently made available via cloud-based technology as a downloadable digital file. Thus, *afternoon, a story* affords insights into the ways in which migration may lead to variations of a work of born digital literature and, ultimately, readers’ experience with it.

The methodology for this study involved comparing multiple readings of the work, one of which is recorded in Appendix A, via five different editions—the 1990 (3rd) and 1992 (4th) Macintosh Editions, and the 1994 (7th) Windows Edition, all three released on 3.5-inch floppy disks; the 2001 (10th) Edition for computers running the Classic operating system and the 2007 (11th) Edition for computers running MacOS X 10.5 or higher, both on CD-ROM format; and the 2016 (12th) Edition

released on USB Stick. Because the 4th Edition has been viewed the authoritative edition, I used it as my control edition and noted any changes to the work in the later editions. I also used with the 3rd Edition as the means for identifying patterns relating to intentional changes to the text and structure since it represents the first edition published by Eastgate Systems, Inc. and is reported to vary slightly from the authoritative edition that followed two years later (Kirschenbaum, "Editing the Interface" 29).

After collecting my data, I synthesized the differences among the editions by type. Deviations include: 1) text that should link to another text but does not—what is generally known as a dead link, 2) text that links to the wrong text, and 3) text that exists in one edition but is missing in another. I then matched these deviations against the operating systems and media formats to determine patterns involving these deviations.

I arrived at three findings.

First, each migration introduced variations in the linking structure that resulted in narrowing reader choices. The most significant migrations were 1) the migration from the expansion to Windows, which changed the interface and functionality, evident in the 7th Edition and possibly in the 5th; 2) the migration from the Classic operating system to MacOs X in 2007, evident in the 11th Edition; 3) and the migration to the MacOS 10.5 and higher, which eliminated the Tool Bar, evident in the 12th and 13th Editions. So, to Matthew Kirschenbaum's and Terry Harpold's comment that *afternoon, a story* is "unruly" (Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms*, 161; Harpold, "Conclusions," 638), I would say that the culprit does not just lie in a novel that offers readers so many reading paths to encounter, but also in the way the novel has been manifested due to the systems needed for maintaining access to it. When Kirschenbaum says "there are many *Afternoons*," (*Mechanisms* 162), I would say, there are by today's count 13 different ones.

Second, because electronic literature is, at its heart, computational and upgrading is a feature of computational systems, authoritative editions of born digital media are difficult to maintain. Even with special care paid to maintaining an ideal copy of the work, system variations will occur.

Third, because variations not unusual for works of born digital literature, scholars should provide exact information in regards to the edition used for study so that it is clear how interpretation may have been impacted by it.

Let me provide one example of the variations found in *afternoon, a story* that led me to renumber the editions and arrive at 13. For information about the ways in which the editions of the work have been previously, see <https://dctc-wsuv.org/afternoon-with-afternoon/index.html>.

If you look at Appendix A, you will see that in the 3rd and 4th Editions the lexia, “Lolly4”, contains two hyperlinks, which are reflected in the “links” option on the Tool Bar. The word “poet” goes to the lexia, “published poet”; all other words in the lexia takes readers to the lexia, “Faulkner”. The 10th Edition, the CD-ROM published in 2001 for the Classic operating system, follows the 3rd and 4th Editions, but the 7th produced for the Windows on floppy disk in 1994, as well as the 11th Edition, the CD-ROM published in 2007, and the 12th Edition, published on USB Stick in 2016, both requiring Macintosh computers running MacOS X 10.5 or higher, differ. In those editions, all of the words take readers to the lexia, “Faulkner,” and are missing the hyperlinked word, “poet.” That said, in the 7th and 11th Editions readers can still access the missing link through the “Browse Links” function in the “Storyspace” item in the Menu and the “links” option in the Tool Bar, respectively; however, the 12th Edition, does not offer a Tool Bar, but readers can access the missing link in the “Browse Link” in the View item in the menu.

While not an exhaustive study of all of the possible deviations from the authoritative 4th Edition, this research does show that following the publication of the 1994 Mac and Windows 3.1 Editions—the 6th and 7th—no other editions offered the work without changes to its text (9th Edition) or its structure (8th, 10th, 11th, 12th Editions). Moreover, the lack of easy access to the 4th Edition makes it difficult to consider it any longer the authoritative edition. What is an authoritative edition if one cannot access a copy of it for comparison? The challenge of claiming an authoritative text is a general one facing many first-generation works of electronic literature.

As mentioned in the introduction of my talk, my study highlights the need to pay attention to variations in editions. As Kirschenbaum points out in *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*, the novel “is typically cited without any

acknowledgement or awareness of the differences between its versions, or even the fact that multiple versions exist" (195). *afternoon, a story* exists in 13 manifestations and, so it, is important to clarify which is used when publishing research about it.

In conclusion, over its 33-year history *afternoon, a story* has been presented in six different formats—floppy disk, website, excerpt in a book, CD-ROM, USB Stick, and downloadable digital file—withstanding technological upgrades to both hardware and software. The question is we all should ask is, “how in the world could it have survived these 13 migrations *without* error? Studying the historical arc of the novel as I have done demonstrates the problem with relying solely on migration for maintaining access to born digital media. As Stuart Moulthrop and I argue in our book, *Traversals*, it is important to embrace all three preservation methods—migration, emulation, and collection—in order to ensure the integrity of a work. My study also provides scholars with a good understanding of the evolution of hypermedia over time: the loss of physicality of the object, the move away from features and attributes associated with book and print culture, and the changing nature of publishing in the Digital Age. *afternoon, a story* may have been considered a "*postmodern* classic" in the 1990s, but today in the second decade of the 21st century it endures as a *literary* classic, timeless and significant, not in spite of but rather because of all of its variations and manifestations.