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Project Literary Re-do: Change an Old Adventure

Literature is traditionally categorized into two forms: poetry and prose. In the past decade, however, the digital technologies have introduced many diverse methods of accessing, displaying, and interpreting information. The various mediums-- such as film, television, Internet, social networking, and games— change the way literature is read and understood in the modern era. There are many discourses between these forms because critics argue “deformative scholarship is all but forbidden, the thought of it either irresponsible or damaging to critical seriousness”. Academic critics disparage the use of distant reading, proposing that explicating historical or sociological data to influence interpretation is not innovative or creative in understanding the meaning that the author originally intended to convey. New criticism and the deformed humanities are two theories that emphasize different approaches to analyzing texts. New criticism emphasizes the intrinsic values of a work, focusing on the significance of close reading in analysis. Deformance literature is the way in which information is extracted through distant reading and deconstructed through interpretation. These concepts surround the discourse of gaming as a valid source of literature, suggesting that meaning of the work is diluted when articulated through different mediums. An undergraduate research team from the University of California, Santa Barbara analyze this relationship between gaming and literature in a project called *Literary Re-do*. Team members Julian Bustos, Felicia Scott, and Sarah Yim utilize fundamental game design concepts and digital tools to convert his or her own interpretation of a

pre-existing work of literature. Each member is designated to one text that will be analyzed, translated, and published onto a game book website. The purpose of this project is to discover the similarities between games and literature by experimenting with a genre that combines both: interactive fiction. Team members analyze the different tones, themes, and outcomes that arise with game books, and use this information to establish how this experience differs from a traditional text.

The steps needed to facilitate the project consist of three parts: planning, extracting, and creating. First, the team members prepare by gathering digital and literary resources that provide background information on the topic of study. Articles such as “ Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals”, Graphs, Maps, and Trees, and “New Criticism” are explored to enhance the team members’ overall conception of games and distant reading. In addition, the team members focus on his or her own individual text, extracting certain themes, messages, and character development to use as a basis for his or her game book. The final part is the creation of the game book and website. Bustos handled the design component, choosing specific images in the novel to portray the fragmentation and deconstruction of the works. Scott wrote the introductory and gallery information on the pages, using particular language to attract an audience. Finally Yim has utilized hyperlinks and mark ups to easily display and navigate through pages. This website is not confined specifically to the project audience; the working page demo and free software allows the website to be active through an accessible link. The team members conclusively analyze their experiences and collectively determine what this means for the digital humanities.

The digital resources needed to design the website and game books are programs called Wix and Inklewriter. Wix is a free online program that allows users to create and publish a website. The program gives the user control to change colors, text, backgrounds, images, and

links accessible through simple navigation on the mouse. This successfully displays the visual component of the project, which also includes hyperlinks and mark up language to accessibly organize the information. Wix allows the team project to be accessible online with a simple home page link, giving the user digital freedom to share the website to any audience. In addition, the gallery includes pre existing templates that are categorized by the type of website the user is trying to create. For example, some categories include: business and services, music, entertainment, online shop, restaurant and hospitality, photography, creative arts, design, and retail. The website features simplify the design component of the team project and allows the project to expand beyond the scope of project. Inklewriter is the program that permits users to create, save, and publish a game book. This tool is especially significant because it gives the team members creative freedom when writing the game book. The program organizes the story and the choices into separate sections, thereby allowing the user to focus on the writing of the game book rather than the technical details. Users are able to return to specific sections and delete with a click of the cursor—there are no limitations on editing. Most importantly, the link and unlink option permits the user to link sections to other parts of the story. There are three tabs that help navigate the page: contents, write, and read. Under contents, the user is able to refer back to the game book in an outline format; the tabs expand and collapse to simplify this process. The writing tab allows the reader to write over the template, branch the story with choices, and link the paths together. When the user is finished, the read tab constructs a polished game book where the reader is able to actively play online and share their interactive story. They can also review the choices on the map link, where the different branches are represented in a tree diagram. This program is a perfect tool for drafting and publishing interactive content. Similarly to Wix, Inklewriter is very versatile and has expanded across many fields as a template for

writing interactive stories—examples include the transition to apps and Kindle. This suggests that the use of this as a learning tool can definitely be explored across an academic audience. One disadvantage is the process of saving the game book-- Internet connection can disrupt the creation of a story and delete the contents up until the last save.

Furthermore, literary texts enable the analytical portion of the project. “ Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals” by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman give the team members background information on the aspects of game design that are useful in creating a game book. This source discusses rudimentary concepts-- such as game, design, meaningful play, choice, frame, and systems—that are informative on how a game is constructed. First, it critically implies that the sign for successful game design is the creation of meaningful play. Meaningful play is difficult to define because play comes in a multiplicity of forms. Despite this, the most common characteristic between all the different variants is situation within the context of a game. It is the interaction between the game and the player that constitutes meaningful play, and not the object or rule the game entails. The article also explores two kinds of meaningful play. “Meaningful play in a game emerges from the relationship between player action and system outcome; it is the process by which a player takes action within the designed system of a game and the system responds to the action. The meaning of action in a game resides in the relationship between action and outcome.” (Salen 61) This stipulates that all games create meaning by just experiencing it, however the second type of meaningful play focuses on how certain games create *more* meaning. “ Meaningful play occurs when the relationship between actions and outcomes in a game are both discernable and integrated into the larger context of the game.” (61). Discernible, in this sense, means that the outcome of the game has impacted the player in memorable way. For example, in Super Smash Bros Brawl a player is more likely to be

affected through sound effects and effective visual stimulations than just a simple flick on the screen. Integrated is another concept that defines game play. It implies that certain choices intertwine to create more significant meaning, even at a later part of the game. Each choice determines the overall experience because it is integrated into the overall system. An important topic is framing systems within a game. A system can affect the player's choice, as well as be affected by the player's choice. The frame of the game is responsible for the distinction between reality and the artificial world. For example, in interactive fiction the player is aware that the choices that they make in the book are separate from real life consequences. These boundaries are defined and regulated by rules, but within this framework the player is both limited and limitless. That is, they are able to enter a different kind of space in which they are engaged in only two things: their attention and the game. The article further explores the anatomy of a choice with five questions that are useful references when creating choices in the game book.

Franco Moretti's Graphs, Maps, and Trees explore the advantages of distant reading in popular culture. He argues that scholars could benefit from the transition to graphing and mapping data, revealing new discourses that one would not be able to experience otherwise. For example, the deconstruction of genres across a historical time line displays information about that work in relation to time and people. The collected information is thorough, precise, and undeniable able to produce interpretations. The map creates connections between all the variables, allowing people accessibility to a simple but also extensive outline of information. Michael Delahoyde's article on new criticism juxtaposes Moretti's argument; he stipulates that meaning in literature arises from the form and words, and not the author's interpretations. He divorces the meaning of the text from the sociological and historical context of the work. These contrasting opinions parallel to the relationship between literature and games. The two authors

propose different ways to approach information, producing arguments that are helpful in constructing the final conclusion of the project.

The three pre-existing works of literature are Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Alice in Wonderland, and Pride and Prejudice. Each team member focused on stories that contain rich character development (to facilitate choice and narrative), broad scope of audience, and an assortment of themes. The prevalence of three texts in modern culture is also another reason; distant reading is general and simplified, so the use of a well-known work provides the writer freedom to explore different outcomes. Team members also used different genres to determine whether or not genre could affect the overall story. Julian Bustos wrote on Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, which is universally known, has extensive character and plot lines, and contains variations of themes such as love, power, morality, and death. Felicia Scott chose Alice in Wonderland because of the branching elements within the story. Finally, Sarah Yim deviated from these fictionalized universes and chose Pride and Prejudice. The translation of the work into a game book was difficult because of the author's original style. It is difficult to write the same way as the author, thereby taking away an important element of experience for the reader. Language can be manipulated but not emulated—the characters and plot became less meaningful when the intricate details of Austen's characters were not addressed.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen is a good choice for a game book because of the depth of each character. The characters embody a distinctive quality that affects his or her fate in the novel. For example, Elizabeth and Jane are characterized as virtuous, dignified young ladies and are both rewarded with an advantageous marriage. Lydia, the wild and selfish younger sister, later falls into scandal and lives in a dishonorable marriage. Austen emphasizes these traits to show that each choice has a message to the overall text. Sarah Yim explored subtle plot lines to

determine the impact of choices. For example, if Jane pursued Mr. Bingley immediately, would Elizabeth have had the opportunity to visit Herfordshire and attract Mr. Darcy? If Elizabeth Bennet did not receive Mr. Darcy's letter explaining his intentions, would she have believed Wickham? Perhaps the most interesting development from this is that by even removing a slight plot line, the choices of other characters are affected as well. The difficulty in selecting choices became a huge issue between all three game books. The team members used the five components designing a choice (in Salen's article) to interpret which decisions to branch off from and which to leave. Some choices did not entail a meaningful result, which establishes that there are complications within the plot lines when working with an existing novel. The biggest limitation of using this novel is the lack of plot development—marriage and social upbringing are the only two consistent features. Controversial issues would better attract and engage the player

Literature and games are forms of storytelling that entail meaning and interpretation. The deconstruction of these stories introduces a new way to understand and analyze information. Branching narratives discover new approaches to the same story, thereby giving artistic and writing freedom to the author to explore and understand. The initial hypothesis for the team project was that gaming did indeed have similarities that coincided with works of literature. The immersive experience could permit the reader to respond differently from the original text, and expand his or her knowledge of the work. However, through careful analysis of how the game book is created, team members have discovered that gaming does not necessarily extract meaning in literature. It is the writer that determines how the story will be affected, and thus, the individual game books created different tones and messages in their respective story. All three team members conferred that despite the amount of creative agency the player has, the game book deviates from certain elements traditional to prose. The choices became priority and the

novel became the background focus. This introduced problems with distant reading; it is difficult to stay true to the original text because the branches interpret new outcomes and meanings. For instance, Julian Bustos revealed many problems with handling a large text, including the amount of choices that he had to analyze and specify in certain contexts. Bustos had to articulate the order of importance of each choice, thereby applying a subjective interpretation to the work. Felicia began in the middle of *Alice in Wonderland*, but stayed true to the actual plot line in order to maintain form with the novel. Essentially, it is impossible to objectively create a game book off a pre-existing text. That being said, the transformation of literature into game books allows different approaches to understanding the text. However, the messages in literature cannot be entirely translated because the process of distant reading limits certain information from being recognized.

Perhaps the use of game books or interactive fiction could expand across disciplinary fields, introducing a new learning tool for creative writing. At the conclusion of this project, team members Julian Bustos, Felicia Scott, and Sarah Yim, have determined that games cannot substitute the same experience as traditional texts. However the creativity and accessibility of this resource is highly recommended for other fields of study. This is a great digital tool for rethinking and creating literature. The use of the website may not produce critically acclaimed works of literature, but it might initiate creative writing processes in students that are more effective than learning through a text book. The digital humanities are the new frontier for innovation and inspiration—it is not a tool that guarantees academic excellence, but promotes the discovery of information. It was once criticized that there are not enough writers and too many readers—with the rise of digital technologies, perhaps players should also be included.

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