

## **Hyperdrama as a New Kind of Dramatic Texts**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to examine a new form of theater known as ‘hyperdrama’. Unlike traditional dramas, hyperdramas are written and produced on a computer using hypertext, the digital language of the Internet. The research examines how the employment of hypertext technology in writing plays affects the concept of drama by modifying the method in which the dramatic text is written, and adding new rather unfamiliar features to a dramatic text. The dramas under study in the research are The Bride of Edgefield (1994), The Last Song of Violetta Parra (1996), and The Seagull Hyperdrama (2004). The three dramas are written by the American writer Charles Deemer, who is a pioneer in the field of hyperdrama. Like all works written in hypertext, the dramas are created on a computer device and can be read on one as well. The action in the first two plays revolves around themes of greed, torn family relations, theft, and murder. While the last play The Seagull Hyperdrama is Deemer's biggest hyperdrama, where he adopts Anton Chekov's famous masterpiece The Seagull (1896) and adds many scenes to the original text. Like most works of hyperdrama, the three works are situated on the Internet and employ technology to create a new reading experience to drama. In examining hyperdrama, the study uses poststructuralist as well as postmodern theories.

The objective of the research is to show the extent of the effect of digital technology on theater. The research would prove that the employment of computers in producing dramatic works might be an innovative addition which expands the concept of theater and expose its capabilities in an age dominated by digital technology.

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## هابير دراما كنوع جديد من النصوص المسرحية ملخص:

الغرض من هذا البحث هو دراسة شكل جديد من المسرح يسمى بالـ "هابير دراما". على عكس الاعمال الدرامية التقليدية، تتم كتابة الهابير دراما وانتاجها باستخدام الكمبيوتر، ولغة الانترنت المعروفة بالنص التشعبي او الـ "هابيرتكست". تتناول الدراسة تأثير استخدام تكنولوجيا الهابير تكست على الدراما من خلال تحليل التعديلات التي تطرأ على النص الدرامي عند استخدام لغة الهابير تكست. ويستخدم البحث منظوري ما بعد حداثي وما بعد بنوي في دراسة الهابير دراما.

يقوم البحث بدراسة ثلاثة اعمال من الهابير دراما للكاتب الامريكي تشارلز ديمر وهى عروس ايدجفيلد (1994)، الاغنية الاخيرة لفيوليتا بارا (1996)، والنورس (2004). يقوم كاتب الدراما بكتابه هذه الاعمال على الكمبيوتر وعرضها للقارئ من خلال شبكة الانترنت. تدور احداث المسرحيتين الاولتين حول مواضيع مثل الطمع، والسرقة، والعلاقات الاسرية الممزقة، بينما المسرحية الاخيرة هي اعادة للحفلة انطون تشيكوف النورس، حيث يقوم الكاتب باضافة عدة مشاهد الى العمل الاصلى. وتوظف تكنولوجيا الكمبيوتر في الثلاث اعمال من اجل خلق تجربة جديدة في قراءة الدراما. هدف البحث الاساسى هو اظهار مدى تأثير التكنولوجيا على المسرح ، وكيف ان توظيف الكمبيوتر في انتاج الاعمال الدرامية قد يمثل اضافة مبتكرة توسيع مفهوم المسرح في عصر التكنولوجيا.



## **Hyperdrama as a New Kind of DramaticTexts**

Culture of the late twentieth-century and the new millennium witnessed a great shift in perceptions due to the gradual transition from an industrial to a digital society in which computers have embraced almost all fields of life. During the past few decades, computers were used to produce works of literature, in the field of theater, several playwrights started to employ computer technology in the making of dramatic works. The notion is not very new, as for the past forty years, digital technology has been used in theater, but mostly as an unseen tool which partly contributes to the general production. However, since the eighties in specific, computers were used as a basis for the creation of works of drama .

Hyperdrama is an example of the effect of digital technology on theater, these works are produced on a computer device and situated on the Internet, on the World Wide Web (WWW), the vast expanding Internet web in which all cultures and people from around the world meet. Thus, the medium in which these works are produced is greatly different from the print medium in which a drama is usually produced. Unlike a printed drama produced in the material form of a book, hyperdrama is a digital dramatic work created within the digital environment of a computer device and written using hypertext, the language of the Internet used by Internet users worldwide. This new medium adds certain unfamiliar features to a dramatic text, such as the ability to transform, move, and other features related to the new digital context. The concept, though enriching and expanding to the potentials of theater, sophisticates and alters the meaning of a dramatic text profoundly.

### **1. The Nature of Hypertext**

Because hypertext language forms the main difference between printed dramas and hyperdramas, one finds it necessary to first reveal the nature of hypertext, as it represents the fundamental element which



twists the rules of dramatic writing in hyperdrama.

Hypertexts are digital texts written on a computer device. These texts have certain capabilities that extend them beyond the concept of traditional static texts. Charles Deemer\_ the author of the three plays examined in the study\_ explains that in hypertext :

The prefix means "over" or "above," and early in the century was used in physics to describe the strange new kind of "space" that was being defined by Einstein's relativity theory - "hyperspace." Einstein's space is space seen in a new way, a new kind of space - hyperspace. So with text, hypertext is text seen in a new way, a new kind of text. ("What is Hypertext")

The 'new kind of text' Deemer refers to is found in the digital nature of hypertext; unlike a printed text which is written using a type writer, hypertext is an electronic text written using a word processor. This kind of text is written in computer codes, which makes it rather flexible. To write a drama using this new form of digital writing, the dramatic script becomes a 'digital' dramatic text with new features that extend it beyond a printed written script.

The American philosopher Ted Nelson (1937), who coined the term 'hypertext' in 1963, defines it as “ non\_sequential writing\_text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways” )qtd in Baetens and Looy 19). Hypertexts are popularly known as texts written in a non-linear form, they consist of "chunks" or blocks of texts connected by what is known as 'hyperlinks', which are computer links usually in the form of underlined notes at different areas of the hypertext document, those links refer to a certain data, such as a document or a part of one. Instead of the page-turning method used in printed works, a reader of hypertext in this case moves forward through the text by clicking those links on his computer. The method



of hypertext reading is actually a model for reading the Internet, where readers navigate through those links using their computer cursors .

Written in hypertext language, hyperdrama is structured in the same way ; the drama consists of different texts displayed simultaneously for readers to choose from. Each text is usually a scene, an action, or a character's path in the drama. Because these scenes are displayed at the same time, readers of hyperdrama must choose one of them to read, instead of following a linear path where scenes are revealed in a progressive order. In the three dramas, readers are constantly offered options such as "follow this character," "go to this" ( scene or space) ( Deemer 1994,1996, 2004). As readers choose a certain link, the text transforms, leading to the scene chosen .

It is evident enough that one is facing a rather unfamiliar kind of dramatic texts, one might add that the digital element in hyperdrama forms a high degree of difficulty in trying to analyze these works. However, it also forms an attracting feature in the drama; the employment of digital technology produces an innovative look to dramatic texts and expands the meaning of writing drama.

Professor George Landow had a great role in clarifying the nature of hypertexts and how they affect writing profoundly. His books about hypertext are actually cited in most books of digital texts. In explaining the nature of electronic texts, he writes that: "The electronic text, whose appearance and form readers can customize as they see fit, also has the potential to add an entirely new element\_ the electronic or virtual link that reconfigures text as we who have grown up with books have experienced it" (Landow 45). Landow refers to hypertext documents as 'electronic' texts, as they are basically digital texts created on a computer. The "electronic link" Landow mentions is the hyperlink which is found in most hypertext documents. This is very common in reading on the Internet, as users must click on these links to read the rest of the document or other texts connected to it. This linking element reconfigures the concept of text to a great extent



and produces an unfamiliar type of dramatic texts different than that of printed dramas.

## **2. The Effect of Hypertext on the Concept of Dramatic Structure**

As just explained, hypertexts are digital texts which consist of sets of texts, or blocks of texts connected by links. By using this structure in writing the drama, the linear dramatic text is turned into a fragmented non-sequential text .

The fragmented structure of hypertext language in which the drama is written enables the dramatic text to take a simultaneous form rather than a linear one, where all scenes are displayed at the same time at different areas of the text. At the introduction of The Bride of Edgefield, Deemer addresses his readers, saying that "Welcome to the hypertext version of the simultaneous-action play, The Bride of Edgefield" (Deemer 1994, web). Deemer describes his play as the "simultaneous-action play" because in these kind of digital plays, the text is arranged simultaneously, where all actions, characters, and scenes are displayed at the same time within different areas of the digital text. This method is usually the one used in most works written in hypertext. The drama, which is the story of a cult wedding taking place at a mansion, is presented in the form of simultaneous scenes played at different areas of the stage. Instead of a linear sequence, the drama is divided into four parts, each part is a block of hypertext represented in the form of an underlined link:

Scroll down for links to begin the play

(Part 2 Part 3 Part 4 (Deemer 1994 )

The concept might seem new to writing drama, however, as early as the seventies, Roland Barthes perceived of a text similar to that which hypertext technology produces. In his *S/Z* (1974), Barthes speaks of a text which is 'cut up' into different reading units or fragments, he refers to these fragments as 'lexias', writing that: "we shall therefore star the text, separating, in the manner of a minor earthquake, the blocks of signification... The tutor signifier will be cut up into a series of brief, contiguous fragments, which we shall call



lexias, since they are units of reading" (Barthes13). Barthes perceives of a text that is divided into different blocks of texts, each block containing certain signifying codes, the plurality of these codes are what forms a plural text in Barthes's opinion.

Despite the fact that Barthes was not referring particularly to works written in hypertext during that time, but rather to a printed literary text: Serrassine (1830), by the French novelist Honore De Balzac ( 1799\_1850), yet his notion is manifested in works written in hypertext. David Bolter, one of the pioneers in the field of digital writing, explains that: "A hypertext is like a printed book that the author has attacked with a pair of scissors and cut into convenient verbal sizes" (35). Unlike a unified printed text, a hypertext document is a text which is broken down into fragments of different texts, this is one of the reasons why critics of hypertext usually use the metaphor of cutting when describing a hypertext document. In the three works, Deemer 'cuts up', or divides the dramatic text into different reading units displayed at the same time, each unit is a different part of the drama with a different meaning, forming an example of a Barthian 'broken text' (S/Z 14). In the previous example from The Bride of Edgefield , the text is divided into four parts. However, each part is also divided into different other parts, part two, for example, consists of several units of reading, each unit is represented by a link that leads to a specific scene or a character's pathway inside the drama:

#### THE BRIDE OF EDGEFIELD - Part 2

:To begin, choose a character below

Jack

Trudy

Justin

Lylla (Deemer 1994)

Each of these underlined links is a different block of hypertext, inside each block is a different scene. Thus, instead of the linear arrangement of scenes, the scenes in hyperdrama are arranged simultaneously and readers in this case must choose a character or a certain scene to read next.



One might notice that while Barthes was speaking symbolically, hyperdrama achieves Barthes's words on both the symbolical and the actual levels. Barthes perceives of printed texts as blocks of texts, or what he calls 'lexias', each lexia generates different meaning to readers. While Barthes was speaking symbolically, with hypertext technology and the digital capabilities of the computer device, the text literally turns into blocks of texts, as just explained. Barthes was among those critics whose progressive vision had a great influence on the concept of literature and writing, he was "committed to the destruction of commonly held ideas" ( Allen 10). Together with critics such as Derrida, Foucault, and Kristeva, Barthes re-conceptualized the basic assumptions that were taken for granted in writing. The four of them rejected the concept of language as a "signifier of a signified" or as a representation of a fixed meaning, as was established by the Western episteme since antiquity, and tried to reveal new dimensions to writing as well as reading. His works since the sixties and seventies have proved indispensable to theories concerned with texts and writing. Throughout his writings, Barthes showed a rejection of traditional concepts of writing such as form, technique and authorship, he saw writing as a 'space' or a rich field in which different meanings interact together, producing a dynamic unstable kind of textuality .

Concepts such as structure and meaning to a text are regarded by Barthes as ordinary and traditional, he writes that: "there is a belief that great structures, serious symbols, grand meanings are built upon an unimpressive foundation off ordinary acts that the discourse notes as a matter of form." (S/Z 51). According to Barthes, these concepts are inadequate in containing the dynamicity of texts, which are plural by nature. He says that: "if we want this plurality, we must renounce structuring this text in large masses, as was done by classical rhetoric... no construction of the text: everything signifies ceaselessly and several times, but without being delegated to a great final ensemble, to an ultimate structure" ( S/Z 11-12). As a new form of digital writing, hyperdrama does not conform to an 'ultimate structure', instead it employs hypertext technology to produce a dramatic text which is rather flexible, written in the form of blocks of horizontal



texts. This form disrupts the concept of a dramatic text as having a beginning, middle and end, as in this type of writing, the drama is displayed in the form of simultaneous units of reading, readers in this case read the drama in a non-orderly method, having the freedom to choose how to read the text and form their own meaning rather than receiving the meaning intended by the author.

In the previous example from the Bride, if a reader chooses the first link: "Jack", he or she would open a block of hypertext with a scene between Jack and Maxine, a rich son of a brilliant doctor, and the maid whom he suspects as the murderer of his father. However, because the drama is fragmented into reading units, the gradual unraveling of the scenes leading to this one is broken down, and readers never really consume the whole story, instead, they move in and out between the different textual fragments or reading units in a disorderly manner. Instead of the gradual sequential movement of an action leading to the quarrel between those two characters, the scene of the quarrel, just like the rest of the scenes in the drama, is displayed as a separate block of text:

YIN MAXINE :I don't have more to say, Jack. If you  
won't believe me-

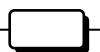
JACK (grabbing her):You have a hell of a lot more to say.

YIN MAXINE: Let go of me!

JACK : Not until you tell me the truth.

(etc, till the end of the scene, Deemer 1994)

One important fact about hypertexts is that \_ unlike linear printed texts\_ they are spatial texts, with an architectural form rather than a linear one. The employment of digital technology in their creation enables these texts to take a spatial form of blocks, or Barthian lexias, thus in hyperdrama, these blocks appear in the form of separate reading units. Landow explains that: "A hypertext version of a note differs from that in a printed book in several ways. First it links directly to the reference symbol... Second, once opened, it appears as an independent, if connected document in its own right " (5). Unlike a



printed text in which a note refers to a part of the same text, a hypertext footnote note opens a different text which is separated from the original text, this text is displayed as a separate scene on the computer screen rather than a part among the rest of the drama, like in printed texts. In this context, readers use the underlined hyperlinks provided to move between those different blocks of texts or scenes .

In his *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes that: "The end of linear writing is indeed the end of the book" (86). Derrida's insightful words echo to one's mind while examining the new form of writing which hypertext technology introduces. Derrida, who attacks the traditional form of the book, maintains that certain new forms of writing are striding away from the concept of linearity which informed the writing of books for a long time, and in doing so, these writings threaten the traditional concept of the book as linear and unified. Hypertext represents a new form of digital writing which departs away from linearity and sequence, and introduces a form of non-sequential texts which are arranged simultaneously. This is why critics of hypertext\_ as mentioned above\_ regard hypertexts as spatial texts, which are traversed using hyperlinks. Indeed, as Derrida insightfully adds: "That is why, beginning to write without the line, one begins also to reread past writing according to a different organization of space" ( *Of Grammatology* 86). It seems as if Derrida anticipated the concept of hypertext, unlike printed texts which are read using the page-turning method, the reading in hypertext takes the form of 'navigating' the text, where readers move between the different digital texts. The Internet medium in which the drama is placed enforces a new perception of reading associated with the new digital medium, Micheal Heim, one of the important contributors to the field of digital writing, says that: " hypertext supports the intuitive leap over the traditional step-by-step logical chain. The jump, not the step, is the characteristic movement in hypertext" (30 -31). What Heim refers to is the fact that we read hypertexts through 'navigating' or 'jumping' between different hyperlinks, as in the case with reading most documents on the Internet. In hyperdrama, links are used instead of page numbers, and readers must use their computer cursors to click on



a certain link to read the play .

The non-linear form of hypertext thus alters certain habits of mind which we have taken for granted in reading and writing. It might represent the tension between two ages of writing which Derrida mentions, where writing moved from linear to spatial, Derrida writes that: "If today the problem of reading occupies the forefront of science, it is because of this suspense between two ages of writing. Because we are beginning to write, to write differently, we must reread differently" (Of Grammatology 86). Perhaps this tension is evident when writers of printed dramas try to write in hypertext language, Deemer, in one of his essays, explains the difficulty he faced while writing the drama in the form of hypertext: "For two weeks I sat staring at the computer screen... if there is no linear story\_ if many scenes are going to happen at the same time but in different areas.. how do I number the pages?" ("How Do I Number the Pages" 278). Because hypertext has no linear sequence or a reading order, writing literature in this form becomes rather hard. Moreover, the digital element also forms a new yet a difficult one in hypertexts.

Deemer's hypertext drama The Seagull Hyperdrama (2004) is a huge project where he spends ten years in re-writing Chekov's masterpiece The Seagull (1896). The original play is a portrayal of different conflicts between four main characters: the fading actress Irina Arkadina, and her son the playwright Konstantin Tréplev on the one hand, and the conflict between the famous middlebrow story writer Boris Trigorin, and the ingénue Nina, a young actress, on the other. However, Deemer adds several of what one might regard as 'extensions' to Chekov's play, offering new multiple perspectives to the same play. These scenes are presented in the form of choice able links leading to different places inside the drama:

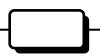
#### Act I

:Where do you want to start the play? Choose from the list below

[Go to stage area for Chekhov's scene](#)] Masha and Medvedenko]

[Go to dining room for Deemer's scene](#)] Irina, Trigorin, Polina and Dorn]

[Go to study for Deemer's scene](#)] Treplev, Sorin and Ilya]



[Nina's entrance] (Deemer 2004)

As in the case with his play mentioned earlier\_The Bride of Edgefield\_each of those scenes is a block of hypertext which appears on the computer screen as a separate scene. As the reader clicks on the underlined link, the scene immediately opens. If the reader chooses the first link for example, Chekov's scene is displayed on the computer screen:

(Chekhov)

(Masha and Medvedenko enter after a walk along the lake ).

MED: Masha, tell me - why do you always wear black?

MASHA: Because I'm in mourning and miserable .

(Etc, to the end of the scene, Deemer 2004).

In this kind of reading, the linear structure is replaced by a spatial one, where readers move or 'walk' between different blocks or scenes, using their computer cursors as the tools for navigating the text, because scenes are placed simultaneously.

Derrida actually used this idea of placing blocks of texts side-by-side in his Dissemination (1981), where he uses the method of displaying texts in a simultaneous manner, just like hypertext authors. In the section entitled: "The Double session", Derrida places two different forms of texts on the same page, both different in length, making readers' eyes move between them. He puts a passage from Plato's dialogue the Philebus ( composed between 360 and 347 BC )\_ in which Socrates discusses the concept of mimesis and other topics\_ side-by-side with a passage from Mallarme's Mimique (1945), thus forming an earlier version of writing which hypertext technology introduced only recently. Derrida criticizes representation in the history of Western philosophy and literature (Disseminatio, int. xxiv), his Dissemination is actually a collection of different essays, in which Derrida attacks the traditional form of the book and the historical schemes of representation. He "undertakes a finely (dis)articulated meditation on the problematic of presentation and representation in the



history of Western philosophy and literature" (*Dissemination* xxiv ).

Derrida is in fact regarded by critics of hypertexts as one of the forerunners of digital literature, Landow calls him a "hypertextual Derrida" (1), maintaining that his ideas have found certain translations in recent works of hypertexts or digital fictions. His writings are regarded by several critics of hypertext as early versions of electronic writing, his "Double Session" according to some critics of digital literature :

foregrounds the playfulness of text and, in many ways, is a precursor to the digital logic that interlinking one text with another renders meaning indecipherable because there is no longer any way to determine which is primary and which is secondary. It turns the text into a side-by-side and nonconfrontational logic, in which two arguments exist simultaneously in a post-dialectical frame without resolution, hierarchy, or synthesis. ( *The Digital Condition* 135)

Derrida's "Double Session" is a play on form and meaning, where he breaks away from traditional rules of writing and embarks on a "dance of duplicity", playing with words to show the ambivalence of writing and the undecidability of meaning. (*Dissemination*, int.: xii). Like hypertext authors, Derrida introduces the concept of a text in the form of simultaneous side-by-side blocks, challenging the concept of a linear book form, introducing texts which have no order or a fixed meaning.

Like Barthes, Derrida rejects concepts such as structure or form in a text, regarding them as limitations on writing. Like most poststructuralists, he rejects the concept of writing as merely a signifier of meaning, maintaining that this idea was formed by the Western episteme since antiquity. However, Derrida's project is perhaps the most broad and complicated than the other critics; he takes a long and difficult task in reading the texts which formed the foundations of the Western episteme and re-conceptualizing them by showing the certain fragilities in their writings, a process he calls "deconstruction". In his influential essay, " Structure, Sign and Play

in the Discourse of Human Sciences" (1978), he says that: "It would be easy enough to show that the concept of structure and even the word "structure" itself are as old as the *epistémé*—that is to say, as old as western science and western philosophy—and that their roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language" ( Writing and Difference 351). Derrida perceives that the concept of structure is as old and traditional as the Western episteme which founded the concept. The concept of structure according to him was made by this episteme in order to give a certain balance or a fixed meaning to a text. He adds that this: "structure—or rather the structuralism of structure, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin" (Derrida 351-2). The function of this center according to Derrida was to "orient; balance, and organize the structure" ( 352). Like most poststructuralists, Derrida rejects such concepts which restore a text to a certain origin or a center. His main argument in this essay is that the structuralists were trying to seek unity in all aspects of human activities by trying to combine inherent contradictions and ambiguities and imposing a false sense of complacency (Gaston and MacLachlan 2011). Derrida, however, criticizes the structuralists' idea of a stable center , as well as criticizes the Western metaphysics as a whole, and instead, he tries to show the fragility of this discourse by revealing that the traditional notion of a structure as having a stable center is actually a 'myth' ( Writing and Difference 356), an illusion which is constructed by the West .

What Derrida is actually doing is re-conceptualizing our notions concerning writing and showing that these notions are actually constructed notions, made by the Western metaphysics. Spivak writes that: "Derrida has reminded us to say it anew, is that a certain view of the world, of consciousness, and of language has been accepted as the correct one, and, if the minute particulars of that view are examined, a rather different picture emerges" (Of Grammatology xiii). Derrida decentralizes the idea of structure to a text in this essay by showing that the center is actually a "contradictory coherence" which expresses a "force of desire". That is to say, the concept of the center of structure



reflects a certain desire by the Western metaphysics to reconcile contradictions and to restore language to a final signified, this final signified is a notion which Derrida rejects. Graham Allen explains it this way: " All ideas of structure, Derrida argues, depend upon the notion of a centre, an origin or foundation from which meaning flows. To take the example of literary works, the centre has traditionally been seen as the author: the source of all meaning, the origin from which the literary work derives." (Allen 67) . Derrida, however\_as Landow explains\_does not claim that the center is a bad thing, but he tries to show that: "the center is a function, not a being\_a reality" (Landow 271).

Derrida perceives that structure, like all language, is a 'freestyle' rather than a fixed entity, the notion of a center thus would limit this play: "The center also closes off the freestyle it opens up and makes possible. Qua center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden" (Writing and Difference 352). Derrida rejects the imposition of a center on structure and destabilizes the idea of center by showing that the center is not actually involved in the play of structure, it is outside this play, although it organizes structure, it does not belong to it. For example, the author is claimed to be behind the work, and meaning is always restored to him, yet he does not belong to the work himself. Derrida thus writes that:

The center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center. (Derrida 279)

One senses a common theme between hypertexts and Derrida's notion of the center of structure. Derrida's revolutionary concepts about structure and writing and reading in general represent a change



or a shift in attitudes rather than merely a change in literary methods. Hypertext technology also represents a departure from traditional literature and de-familiarizes our long-held perceptions about literature. Unlike a printed work written in the form of a book which usually have a certain center, hypertext works have no specific organizing center. The digital nature of these texts moves them beyond the concept of traditional printed static texts with fixed meanings. Instead, hypertexts are texts which have what Landow calls a "transient center" (57), or a shifting moving center. The use of digital technology disrupts the notion of center to a text and produces a rather flexible playful kind of texts, landow states that this element is actually a feature of hypertexts: "One of the fundamental characteristics of hypertext is that it is composed of bodies of linked texts that have no primary axis of organization" (37). As mentioned earlier, the work is written in the form of horizontal blocks of texts, these texts have no primary axis, instead, readers move between different texts through hyperlinks in a random manner, shifting the center of the text in the process, and disrupting the linear structure of the text .

For example, in one of the scenes in The Seagull Hyperdrama, the reader is offered three different links to which he must respond, thus the structure is lost and the matter of center here becomes dependable upon the reader's choice of a certain underlined link:

(.Sorin leaves to go inside. Polina and Dorn also leave, going to the stage)  
stay here  
follow Sorin inside  
[follow Polina and Dorn] (Deemer 2004)

As different readers choose different links, the text is dispersed into different branches, this movement or direction shifts the center of the text, and disrupts the linear structure. Landow explains that: "As readers move through a web or networks of texts, they continually shift the center\_ and hence the focus or organizing principle\_ of their investigation and experience" (56). This concept of the center as shifting is one of the most evident features in works written in hypertext, the fact that readers can decide their paths through the text



creates a moving shifting center, disrupting the concept of linearity in a text. Hypertext thus: "... provides an infinitely recentrable system whose provisional point of focus depends on the reader." (Landow 56 ).

Derrida writes that there is a certain event or rupture has occurred when the very idea of the structurality of the structure became the subject of somebody's thought. Somebody, probably a philosopher, was rethinking the very notion of the center . Then, for the first time in the history of structure: "it was necessary to begin to think that there was no center... that the center had no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non- locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" ( Writing and Difference 360 ). The notion of 'play' which Derrida mentions is one of his most important notions, he maintains that language is a play of meanings which cannot be limited by structure or restored to a certain meaning, but language is a play of signifiers: "There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language. The advent of writing is the advent of that play" (Of Grammatology 7). According to Derrida, signifiers\_ or words\_ always refer to other signifiers and never to a signified, and meaning is constantly deferred. He calls this process *différance*, a combination of the French word for 'difference' (*différence*) and the verb denoting 'defer or postpone' (*différant*). Words differ from each other in meaning and at the same time, words refer to other words which are not present, thus meaning is constantly deferred. Words always carry traces of other words which are absent, according to Derrida, this process is the underlying element in all language. By *différance*, Derrida shows that a sign does not have a full presence, because part of it is always "not there" ( Of Grammatology 62). Thus, the structure of a sign according to Derrida is conditioned by differing and deferring, not by the signifier and signified .

Despite the complexity of Derrida's notions, yet perhaps no other philosopher has had such an influence on writing as he did. Derrida's critique of literature is related to his rejection of the Western episteme, which perceived of 'being as presence'. In "Structure, Sign



and Play in the discourse of the Human Sciences", he writes that "The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, .... is the determination of being as presence in all the senses of this word" (Writing and Difference 360). This 'metaphysics of presence' \_as Derrida calls it\_ perceives of writing as a representation of speech, while it favored speech over writing because in speech, both the speaker and the hearer are simultaneously present while in writing this presence is not found (Dissemination viii). This is why the metaphysics connects the presence of meaning to speech or the voice, thus Derrida writes that: "... the formal essence of the signified is presence, and the privilege of its proximity to the logos as phone is the privilege of presence." ( Of Grammatology 18). Spivak thus importantly notes that Derrida: "relates phonocentrism to logocentrism (Of Grammatology, int.: xviii). Derrida perceives that such assumptions are unjust to writing: "... this 'self-proclaimed language' or speech protects itself through "expelling the other ... throwing it outside and below, under the name of writing" (Derrida 39). Thus, in his writings, he tried to break down this idea and showing that writing is not inferior to speech, or a translation of a fixed meaning, but in fact writing is a broad and rich science that envelopes all language rather than being subordinated to it, he called his new science of writing: 'of Grammatology '.

Decentralization is actually a keyword in both the writings of the poststructuralists as well as the postmodernists. Both theories reject such generalizations and objectiveness such as a unified text in favor of plurality and multiplicity. The poststructuralists "stressed the importance of differences over unities and identities while championing the dissemination of meaning in opposition to its closure in totalizing, centered theories and systems" (Best and Kellner 22-23), while the postmodernists rejected all traditional cultural hierarchies or 'metanarratives' such as an author, technique or rule. Lyotard was perhaps the most evident in his rejection of those metanarrative, Best and Kellner write that: "Lyotard has emerged as the champion of difference and plurality in all theoretical realms and discourses, while energetically attacking totalizing and universalizing theories and



methods" (146). Hyperdrama forms a rich ground for decentralization , where the drama is dispersed into several branches with no order or structure and readers have freedom to form their own meanings according to the paths they choose. The employment of hypertext technology breaks down the concept of a unitary dramatic text, Landow writes that: "Hypertext fragments, disperses,or atomizes text in two related ways. First, by removing the linearity of print, it frees the individual; passages from one ordering principle\_ sequence\_ and threatens to transform the text into chaos. second, hypertext destroys the notion of a fixed unitary text" (99). Thus, he maintains that in hypertexts "we must abandon the notion of a unitary text and replace it with conceptions of a dispersed text" (101).

Hypertext technology introduces another rather peculiar aspect to dramatic texts. As mentioned above, hypertexts are by definition blocks of texts connected by hyperlinks. Those links are computer links which are usually used in most forms of digital writing, their function is to connect the different digital texts together and also to connect them to the Internet web in which they are situated. This linking element is the most distinguishing feature of hypertexts, as in this type of texts, a text becomes a network of texts.

As a digital drama produced on a computer, hyperdrama consists of sets of texts linked by computer hyperlinks, these texts form a web of simultaneous actions occurring simultaneously within the same drama. In this context, the hierarchy of an exposition, rising action, and dénouement is replaced by a network of scenes that branches in different areas, Deemer explains that: "In hyperdrama, the traditional linear narrative line explodes into branches, multiplying the action on a "stage" into simultaneous scenes occurring throughout a performance space" ("The New Hyperdrama"). This 'explosion' of the narrative line is due to the simultaneous structure of hypertexts; instead of a single text with a certain hierarchy, the dramatic text spreads into a network of texts that branch everywhere. The last song of Violetta Parra is the story of the murder of the death of Violetta Del Carmen Parra Sandoval (4 October 1917 – 5 February 1967), the Chilean songwriter, composer, and visual artist who was murdered.



Throughout the work, the scenes branch into different other scenes and readers must choose which scene to follow. In one of the scenes, a dialogue occurs between Eduardo, an artist, and each of Carmen and Ana, a rich art collector and her daughter. Throughout the conversation, hyperlinks are presented for the reader in the form of underlined notes to which they must respond:

EDUARDO: I will show him, not tell him, what I think!  
(He turns to Ana) Don't go away - we have more to talk about . .  
(He hurries out).  
CARMEN: Eduardo! That's not what I meant . . . Come on, dear  
(Carmen quickly follows Eduardo).  
(Ana moves to the master bedroom.) (Deemer 1996)

As readers follow different characters everywhere, the hierarchy of the linear play is replaced by a network of branching scenes, readers in this case move randomly within this network by clicking of different hyperlinks .

The notion of a network thus destroys the order of a beginning, middle, and end, and disperses the text. Bolter explains that: "By offering multiplicity in place of a single order of paragraphs and pages, an index transforms a book from a tree into a network.... Instead of strict subordination, we have paths that weave their way through a textual space" (37). Unlike footnotes in printed texts, the underlined links in a digital text weaves together different texts, making them branch in a dispersed manner rather than a linear one. The form is closer to a network than that of a linear order and sophisticates notions of structure and form to a great extent. In the example above, readers of the drama find themselves inside a network of texts which disperses everywhere without hierarchy or order. Instead, they move in a random manner within the drama, later on, we shall see how this element leads to disorientation and reader's empowerment.

The concept of text as network is also found in the writings of the poststructuralists, Landow points to the fact that: "Discussions and designs of hypertext share with contemporary critical theory an



emphasis on the model or paradigm of the network" (62). Landow maintains that among the shared notions between critical theory and hypertext is the notion of a text as a network. Barthes for example perceives of what he calls an 'ideal text' in which "the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest" (S/Z 5). These networks which Barthes refers to are networks of meanings which interact together in a text, forming what he calls the 'plural' text. Barthes rejects the concept that any text is merely an assemblage of familiar signifiers that the reader passively deciphers. Instead, he sees the text as consisting of multiple codes which form a network of different meanings opened for the reader to interpret. Barthes's idea is evident in hypertexts, where the employment of digital technology turns the linear text into a network of interconnected scenes which branch everywhere. In the previous example, each underlined link is a pathway to a new scene with a different meaning, those meanings interact together forming a plural dramatic text .

Barthes perceives of a text as composed of five different codes which the reader of a text deciphers, without going into the details of each code, what Barthes shows is that these five codes function as a "weaving of voices," as Barthes puts it (S/Z 20). The codes point to the "multivalence of the text" and to "its partial reversibility" (Barthes 20), allowing a reader to see a work not just as a single narrative line but as a braiding of different meanings: "The grouping of codes, as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (text, fabric, braid: the same thing); each thread, each code, is a voice; these braided—or braiding—voices form the writing" (Barthes 160). The notion of text as a braiding or weaving is evident in hyperdrama, where the unified text is transformed into a web of simultaneous interconnected texts woven together, forming a network. This form enables the narrative to be multiplied into different narratives braided together, forming a weaving of different voices within the dramatic text. In this context, readers immerse in a disorganized reading method, where they randomly move within this web of texts without having a particular narrative path to follow. Ermarth significantly notices that the concept of language as a



network produces the: "effect of validating nonhierarchical organization. A network differs from a structure because it is headless and footless; it has no "heart" or "center," no "origin" or "end"" (58 ).

In the example given from The Last Song Of Violetta Parra, if a reader chooses the last link\_ “(Ana moves to the master bedroom.)” \_ the link opens a new text, or a lexia, inside it is a new scene with other links:

Ana: (She shrugs and continues around corner  
(to other area of livingroom  
A few lines later, other links are offered for the reader, leading to  
:new areas inside the drama  
.JUAN: I'd better tend to business. If you'll excuse me  
(He moves to other area of livingroom.) (Deemer 1996).

The different links turns the text into a network of intricate texts woven together instead of linearly arranged, readers in this case are easily lost, because the text is dispersed everywhere. The network form \_one might add\_ offers a sort of an exploration trip, where every scene is a new part of the web or the riddle which readers must unravel. Indeed, one recalls Derrida's words: "The dissimulation of the woven texture can in any case take centuries to undo its web: a web that envelopes a web, undoing a web for centuries; ... the decision of each reading" (Dissemination 63). Each reading in hyperdrama is a new movement inside a web of interconnected texts and an anticipation of what the scene might contain.

The concept of a text as a network used in hyperdrama might be regarded as a translation of the practices of contemporary culture. Fredric Jameson, one of the most influential critics of postmodern culture, claims that we are living in a society of 'late capitalism', or a society informed by capitalist ideology. One of the symptoms of this age is the spread of communication networks which connect different people around the globe easily through the Internet web (The Cultures of Globalization, 56-57). As a part of this culture, works of hypertext might represent a crystallization of this linking spirit, where a text is dispersed into a network of connected texts. Located within the Internet medium, hyperdrama is a digital drama which consumes the



nature of the Internet, in which a dramatic text is transformed into an electronic drama perceived in terms of network, combining all scenes and characters in a kind of plurality. Landow explains that linking : "involves the essence of hypertext technology" (359), thus hypertexts are not only informed by digital culture, they are an essential part of this culture, being digital by nature, they correspond to the practices of this culture .

No doubt that the concept of hyperdrama represents an innovative and contemporary shift in literary perceptions, as well as a translation of a digitalized culture. Yet, the concept of a 'digital' drama consisting of blocks of texts connected by computer links might still seem a radical departure from the rules of writing drama. The notions of form, structure and narrative are all shaked down to a considerable extent by the new modifications which hypertext technology introduces to a text. On the other hand, however, one finds that hyperdrama might stand as an example of the natural development of the concept of theater in the digital age, where culture moved to a 'digital' culture that is informed by computers and other digital devices which dominate society.

One recalls Ermarth's insightful phrase: "It appears that representational language is not something based upon a certain given order of things but that, on the contrary, a certain order of things is based on representational linguistic usages and is changed when that language changes" (150). By employing digital technology to modify the basic elements of writing drama, hyperdrama presents a rather unique and innovative kind of dramatic texts that are different to a great extent from the concept of drama as we know. Hypertext is a new digital language that transforms the concept of drama, moving it from a linear dramatic script to a chaotic drama in which readers are able to choose their paths throughout. By this, the work alters the rules of representation that was taken for granted for a long time, as well as literary perceptions regarding reading and writing.

The experimental method used in hyperdrama matches the concept of Postmodern theater, which is known as a theater that:



"raises theory to the rank of a playful activity" ( Pavis 69 ). Unlike modern theater, postmodern theater does not aim to represent life by following a certain set of rules and traditions, but instead, it is regarded as a revolutionary theater which displays a tendency to question traditional theatrical conventions and problematizing them (Schmidt 22 ). In her remarkable book on postmodern theater: *The Theater of Transformation, Postmodernism in American Drama* ( 2005), Kerstin Schmidt writes that postmodern drama: " takes up the postmodern penchant for the exploration of boundaries and fosters dramatic experiments on the margins of possibility" (17). Schmidt maintains that postmodern theater is an experimental theater which always finds new ways of presenting its own vision of the world. One of the common methods in this theater is the employment of technology, Schmidt maintains that: "Postmodern drama navigates the tensions inherent to postmodern anti-representationalism by using media and technology. Its purpose is the disruption and fragmentation of almost all established dramatic categories" (Schmidt 77 .(

One might use Schmidt's words as a statement about hyperdrama, where the use of digital technology challenges the rules of theatrical writing and disrupts the known dramatic traditions. As seen in the previous section, digital technology has transformed the concept of a dramatic text, providing it with new 'digital' features which is related to the new medium in which the work is produced. Instead of a linear text with some kind of order, the text is presented in the form of blocks of texts read using hyperlinks. One might note here that although several contemporary theater practitioners employ technology in their works, yet the technological element formed only a part of the work, in hyperdrama however, technology is the basis without which the drama would not be produced.

Schmidt's insightful book, in which she "investigates the forms and functions in which postmodernism has been received by contemporary American playwrights and how postmodernism has influenced and shaped dramatic writing." (Schmidt 11), regards technology as a powerful element in postmodern theater. She maintains that: " The repercussions of a thoroughly mediatized culture



on contemporary American theater are manifold and blatantly visible" (81). One senses those repercussions in hyperdrama, where technology turns the drama into a 'hyper' drama situated on a computer device. One of the strongest effects of this new position is that the dramatic text turns into a digital transforming text which moves at a reader's 'click' of a computer link. In *The Seagull Hyperdrama*, a dialogue occurs between Sorin\_the brother of the actress Irina\_, Ilya who runs Sorin's state, and Treplov, the young playwright. Deemer offers the readers choices on which character to follow in the form of underlined links to which a reader must respond:

(Ilya leaves. Treplev and Sorin follow him out of the study)  
SORIN: (confidentially to Treplev) His damn dog kept Irina awake  
.again  
[follow Ilya]  
[follow Treplev and Sorin] (Deemer 2004)

By simply clicking on one of those underlined hyperlinks, the scene attached to the link is opened immediately, following 'ILya' for example opens a new scene, while following the other characters opens another. Schmidt comments that postmodern dramatic forms are thus "essentially transformative and fluid" (57), certainly, the transforming element which hypertext provides breaks down the concept of dramatic structure and establishes the drama as fluid and flexible. Unlike printed texts which are written using a type writer, hypertexts are written using a word processor, this fact enables the text to be a transformable flexible one. Deemer explains that: "Writing hypertext is really two kinds of writing: text writing in the normal formal sense (but with a new emerging logic of narrative and drama) and computer code writing (of the most elementary kind!)" ("What is Hypertext") . Like all hypertext works, hyperdrama is written using these computer codes.

In his insightful book *Narrative* (2001), Paul Cobly states that: "Even the most 'simple' of stories is embedded in a network of relations that are sometimes astounding in their complexity" (2). Cobly's words echo as one examines the complexity of the narrative that hyperdrama introduces. The use of digital technology in writing



drama produces a rather complex dramatic narrative. As mentioned earlier, hypertexts are texts taking the form of a network, in which different scenes are connected through hyperlinks. Moreover, these scenes are displayed simultaneously within the drama, these features complicate the concept of dramatic narrative to a considerable extent.

Cobly's book, in which he investigates the development of narrative through different ages, maintains that there are several aspects to narrative than traditionally perceived. According to Cobly, the different contexts in which a narrative is situated produce new issues regarding the concept of a narrative in literature. By situating a drama in the digital context of the computer device, narrative as a plot or a sequence of events is almost lost, as hypertext technology presents a version of a dramatic narrative that is different to what is perceived in theater. The digital nature of hypertext, with its ability to take different forms complicates the narrative by fragmenting as well as dividing the story into different parts. In this context, the narrative is divided and its coherence becomes much difficult to maintain. Landow importantly explains the variety of forms in which a narrative in hypertext can take:

Hypertext narrative clearly takes a wide range of forms best understood in terms of a number of axes, including those formed by degrees or ratios of (1) reader choice, intervention, and empowerment, (2) inclusion of extralinguistic texts (images, motion, sound), (3) complexity of network structure, and (4) degrees of multiplicity and variation in literary elements, such as plot, characterization, setting and so forth. (217)

In works written in hypertext, the linear narrative is replaced by a flexible one, which depends basically on the extent of technology employed in the text. As seen in previous sections, the text takes the form of a network of different blocks or Barthian lexias connected by links. At the same time, readers are able to choose between those different links. These practices disrupt the coherence of the narrative, as the manipulation of the text breaks down the linear action line and



almost diminishes plot .

One of the signs of this narrative transformation is the multiple beginnings which are offered for the reader of hyperdrama to choose from. Perhaps The Bride of Edgefield forms a radical example of this concept, where Deemer offers a variety of different links leading to different places within the text:

Here is a flow chart of the action in Part 1, the first twenty minutes of  
the play

. You may also begin your reading with a certain character

Begin at a space. There is a map of the area in the introduction.

Begin at B

Begin at F

Begin at D

Begin at E

Or begin the play with a character below. (See pathways of the Characters(

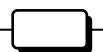
Jack

Trudy

Justin (etc) (Deemer 1994)

By offering multiple beginnings to the drama, the concept of narrative as having a beginning, middle, and end is disrupted. Readers can begin the narrative at any point they like. The capability of computer technology to launch multiple tasks at once enables the drama to spread into simultaneous parts, or scenes, thus breaking down the concept of a sequential order. Brenda Laurel notices that: "The notion of beginning, middle, and end presents an interesting riddle when using a computer with a multitasking operating system...I may have several "activities going on at once, leaping from one to another in midstream... where is the whole?" (Laurel 70).

In his S/Z, Barthes speaks of a text which "has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declares to be the main one" (5). Barthes speaks of a text with multiple entrances, similar to that of hyperdrama. Instead of seeing a text as conforming to a plot triangle of an opening exposition followed by rising action, a conflict leading to a climax, then falling action leading to a



resolution, Barthes understands narrative as a "nebulae' of signifieds" (Barthes 8). According to Barthes, the text has multiple entrances and exits, the notion is clearly exemplified in hyperdrama, where the work offers multiple beginnings or what Barthes calls "entrances" to the text. This multiplicity shakes down the order of the dramatic narrative, by permitting readers to enter the text at any point.

Like Barthes, Derrida rejects the concept of a fixed beginning to a text. According to him, prefaces, forwards, and introductions are centers imposed by the Western tradition. He writes that: "If the forward is indispensable, it is because the prevailing culture still imposes both formalism and empiricism" (Dissemination 11\_12). According to Derrida: "The preface is a necessary gesture of homage and parricide, for the book makes a claim of authority or origin which is both true and false " (Spivak, Of Grammatology, int.: xi ). Derrida rejects those claims of authority such as a center or a beginning to the text, he writes that: "From the point of view of the fore-word, which recreates an intention – to –say after the fact, the text exists as something written \_ a past\_ which, under the false appearance of a presence, a hidden omnipotent author.. is presenting to the reader as his future" (Dissemination 7).

Derrida regarded the concept of a preface as an anticipation of the body of the book, a notion which he rejects. Instead, he maintains that the text must not be introduce or anticipated by such prefaces or forwards: "the text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end. Each act of reading the "text" is a preface to the next" (Dissemination, int.: xii). One of the distinguishing characteristics of hypertexts is that the author cannot necessarily dictate a past, present or future for the reader. Because the text is written in the form of a network, a reader is able to create his own past, present and future, thus each new act of reading becomes a preface, because there is no definite beginning to the text .

Hyperdrama represents a disruption of the notion of a dramatic plot, which for long years has been one of the pivotal elements in theater. Landow states that: "Hypertext, which challenges narrative and all literary form based on linearity, calls into question ideas of plot and story current since Aristotle." (218). Landow maintains that hypertext challenges the concept of the Aristotelean plot as a "whole which has beginning, middle and end" (Aristotle qtd in Landow, 218). Not only does hyperdrama offer many beginnings to a narrative, but the narrative is also dispersed into different parts spread within the dramatic text, in this context, the plot as a sequence is



replaced by a rather chaotic one. For example, in The Bride of Edgefield, the story of the wedding of Trudy and Richard is dispersed into smaller narratives spread within different blocks of texts. The story branches into other stories, such as the murder of Trudy's father, drug dealing, family problems, gun fighting...etc. In one of the scenes, one of the characters in the play\_ Wolf \_holds a gun, threatening the wedding party guests, after being exposed to them as a drug dealer. A gun fight occurs between Wolf and another Italian drug dealer, Angelo Dimarco, and Dimarco runs after shooting the host of the evening by mistake Deemer offers readers choices whether to follow the guests who run in horror from the shots, or choose a character to stay with :

**THE GUNFIGHT BEGINS:**

people duck and hide as best they can.  
Follow the flight from E area  
"Stay with Wolf"  
Stay with Wolf  
"Stay with Matre'd"  
Stay with Matre'd  
" Stay at B"  
Stay in B area (Deemer 1994)

As the story branches into different stories, the unity of plot is broken down.

It is widely maintained that works written in hypertext have usually no specific ending. This is generally the case, yet, one must note here that hyperdrama has an end, yet it is rather incomprehensible for the reader, because the gradual sequential order of events is disrupted and replaced by a dispersed text. The end becomes an 'accidental' one, if one might call it, rather than a logical gradual one or a dramatic resolution. Barthes also rejects the concept of a resolution, regarding it as a 'crises' in Western thinking, he writes that: "Writing "the end "thus posits everything that has been written as having been a tension which "naturally" requires resolution, a consequence, an end, i.e., something like a crises. The crises is a cultural model: the same model that has marked Western thinking about the organic, the poetic, and the logical" (S/Z 52 .(



The practice of disrupting the narrative is common in postmodern writings, which exchange depth for surface (Ermarth 163), Whitmore states that: "Postmodern theater offers simultaneous, overlapping, interwoven, disjointed, and non sequential experiences that defy a simple narrative reading" (205). Postmodern works usually use certain methods to manipulate the dramatic form, where experimentality becomes more important than meaning or content, in this context, concepts of narrative or plot are disregarded. Schmidt importantly maintains that the employment of technology in drama creates a fragmented disconnected plot formation, which: "cut the dramatic narrative into fragments and disturb any smoothly progressing story line" (The Theater of Transformation 168 ). Among the effects of this fragmentation is the "ripping apart" of the narrative and the destruction of the logical sequence of events" (Schmidt 169). Schmidt takes Megan Terry's play *Keep Tightly Closed* ( 1965) as a powerful example of how technology can fragment a text, Terry arranges the play in the form of the "so-called action-blocs that are connected not by plot or conflict development, but rather by rhythmic patterns and transformations" (Schmidt 172). Schmidt adds that in Terry's play: "The story requires associative processes and imaginative abilities on the part of the spectator that link the separate "action-blocs" and turn them into a possible, but never definitive story. In many ways, this process is an exercise of "making sense" (Schmidt 173). One can easily apply Schmidt's example of Terry's play on hyperdrama. Like Terry, Deemer forms his drama into fragments of different blocks of action which are not connected by a sequence or a gradual plot development, the story is simply arranged in blocks of horizontal text, in each block, a separate part of the narrative is displayed. In this context, readers must try to find a coherent story through connecting the different parts of the narrative.

In his Postmodern Condition, Lyotard states that: "Lamenting the "loss of meaning" in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative.." (Lyotard 26). According to Lyotard, these metanarratives or universal stories of the West have lost their validity; their totalizing attitudes cannot express the multiplicity of human experience in a postmodern age. They must



be replaced by what Lyotard calls "little narratives", in fact, he defines postmodernism as an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv), by which he meant totalizing stories about the history and goal of humankind that legitimize cultural practices and forms of knowledge. Lyotard, who analyzes how "the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (Lyotard 15), believes that cybernetics (computers, telecommunication systems and the various associated disciplines of language and information processing) have come to dominate society and economics since World War II and altered the status of knowledge profoundly. He "focuses on the technological transformation of information into the language of computers, stripping it of use-value" (Reading Simulacra 19).

Clearly, hyperdrama represents an example of the effect of cybernetic technology on the concept of the narrative; by displaying all narratives at once, concepts such as main and minor are disrupted, because, as Landow explains: "hypertext refuses to grant centrality to anything, to any lexia" (123). By displaying all scenes simultaneously, all parts of the drama are given equal importance, Deemer clarifies that:

But what does it mean to identify a "main character" if all performers are "on stage" - that is to say, active within the performance space - all the time, from the beginning of the play to the end?

What does it mean to identify a "main plot" if each character is associated with a fully developed story, and each of these stories is told in the performance space (albeit in different areas of that space) with the same attention and focus? ("What is Hyperdrama" 2004)

In The Seagull Hyperdrama , all scenes are displayed at the same time, readers choose their own scene or character:



#### **Act IV**

Where do you want to begin?

In the study (Chekhov's scene) with Masha and Medvedenko.

In the dining room (Deemer's scene) with Treplev and Polina.

At the boat house (Deemer) with Irina, Trigorin and Ilya.

In the garden (Deemer) with Sorin and Dorn.

Nina's entrance (Deemer) (Deemer 2004).

In his Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic Of Late Capitalism (1991), Fredric Jameson maintains there is a spatial tendency in postmodern societies, which he attributes to a loss of a historical sense, created by the spatial logic of simulacra. This logic, as Jameson maintains: "can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time" (18). Jameson, who describes postmodernism as a "spatialization of culture" under the effect of capitalism, sees that in postmodern societies, there is a spatial tendency rather than a temporal one, and that the reason for this is that the experience of the individual has became mainly a spatial experience. He writes that: "we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism." (Jameson 15).

Agreeing with Jameson, everywhere in contemporary capitalist societies, media representations spread everywhere: commercials, T.Vs, computers, advertisements... etc . These representations employ digital technology to reproduce images in a fragmented disconnected method, where knowledge is presented in sets of static depthless spatial images, which have no origin in reality or a depth that inform them, they are merely reproduced copies. With the extreme employment of these medias, the concept of linearity is replaced by fragmentation, and the historical sense of a linear time is lost and spatiality became the dominant concept. Hypertexts are basically



digital texts informed by these technologies, in fact, all works of electronic literature are 'digitally born' as Hayles states ("Electronic Literature, What is it?"). In this kind of literature, linearity is replaced by spatiality and fragmentation. As seen in hyperdrama, each part becomes a separate scene in time and space, inside a separate block of text. Despite the fact that scenes are connected by links, yet what appears on the computer screen is the scene as a separate entity. In the previous example, if a reader chooses the last link\_ Nina's entrance\_ a new scene would open without the rest of the scenes offered for the reader:.

"Nina enters the garden. She speaks to the audience... etc)  
(Deemer 2004)

Perhaps Jameson puts it more expressively: "What happens here is that each former fragment of a narrative, that was once incomprehensible without the narrative context as a whole, has now become capable of emitting a complete narrative message in its own right. It has become autonomous" ( The Cultural Turn 160 ).

Hyperdrama might represent an example of the shift from the notion of a literary work to a text, which took place gradually with the development of literary perceptions, becoming a common feature in writings especially during the second half of the twentieth-century. With the shift to postmodern capitalist societies, and the change in cultural perceptions, traditional concepts of writing which were associated with the notion of a work seemed insufficient in translating the spirit of the age which is marked by plurality and diversity. In this age, literature witnessed a shift from being perceived as a separate entity to being an integral part of society. With the gradual development of different disciplines in society and the cultural shift they brought, a certain change has occurred in the concept of literature, related to what Dollimore calls a "dismantling of barriers" between different disciplines. (2). In this context, literature became intertwined with other disciplines, the notion was shown in the gradual movement of a literary work as a unified closed-off to that of a text

which is marked by plurality and multiplicity, translating the diversity of contemporary capitalist societies.

Jameson for instance maintains that in postmodern culture, the literary work has: "now turned out to be a text, whose reading proceeds by differentiation" (Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism 31). Jameson notes that in postmodern societies, a literary work became a collection of different varieties rather than a unified entity, it became "no longer unified or organic, but now a virtual grab bag or lumber room of disjoined subsystems and random raw materials and impulses of all kinds." (31). Postmodern literature witnessed a shift from the concept of a work\_ which was favored in modernism\_ to that of a text, which became a "postmodern category and phenomenon which has replaced the older one of a "work."

(Jameson xvii.)

Works of electronic literature are a good exemplification of this notion. These works are situated on the Internet, which is regarded as a public medium which embraces different cultures around the globe, which merge together in a plural manner. Written in hypertext and placed on the Internet, these works are informed by the plurality of this medium. As seen from the previous sections, in hyperdrama, all characters, actions, scenes are displayed together in a plural simultaneous manner. Moreover, the play contains a variety of different elements taken from several disciplines outside of the literary canon, such as media and computer games. At the introduction to The Bride of Edgefield, Deemer tells the audience: "Make your selection and let's get started!" ( Deemer 1994), resembling a kind of an adventure game rather than a dramatic beginning, where readers select a character to begin with. Deemer also places literary reviews, notes to directors, notes to audience, production notes, menus for readers to choose from..etc, all side-by-side with the drama itself.

#### Reviews of Hyperdrama

(This was assembled before BRIDE opened).

Of the play's predecessor, BATEAU DE MORT:



enough high society sin and scandal to do Sidney Sheldon...."

proud ... a play of staggering possibilities"

Bob Hicks, OREGONIAN

Begin play

Flow chart of action

Paths of each character (Deemer 1994).

Moreover, the concept of presenting menus throughout the drama for readers to choose from makes the drama closer to a game or a commodity rather than that of a dramatic work.

In her online article "Electronic literature, what is it?" (2007), Professor Katherine Hayles notes that:

Because electronic literature is normally created and performed within a context of networked and programmable media, it is also informed by the powerhouses of contemporary culture, particularly computer games, films, animations, digital arts, graphic design, and electronic visual culture. In this sense electronic literature is a "hopeful monster" (as geneticists call adaptive mutations) composed of parts taken from diverse traditions that may not always fit neatly together. ("Electronic Literature, What is it?")

Works of electronic literature, such as hyperdrama, are interdisciplinary works of literature which are informed by a variety of disciplines, most notably, computers and digitality. The concept sophisticates the definition of a drama, moving it from a unified work to a text. This collective nature of hyperdrama establishes it as a text rather than a dramatic work, as well as forms an obstacle in trying to pin down a definition for the drama. The problem actually is common in all works of hypertext fictions, which are still expanding as a new form. (Hayles, "Electronic Literature: What is it .( "?

Indeed, in his "From Work to Text", Barthes perceives that the text "poses a problem of classification", "it cannot be contained in a hierarchy, even in a simple division of genres" (Image-Music-Text 157), "the Text tries to place itself very exactly behind the limit of the doxa" (157-8) . As a plural digital text containing features from



diverse genres, hyperdrama are hard to be defined or simply labeled as a 'play', as it contains several elements taken from several disciplines which widens the capabilities of drama as well as complicates its definition. Barthes perceives that a change occurred in literary perceptions which altered the notion of a classical work, he writes that: " a certain change has taken place (or is taking place) in our conception of language and, consequently, of the literary work which owes at least its phenomenal existence to this same language" ("From Work to Text" 155 ). This change according to Barthes is associated with the development of different disciplines in society, such as "linguistics, anthropology, Marxism and psychoanalysis" (155) in which the old traditional notion of a work was replaced by that of a text: " Over against the traditional notion of the work, ... there is now the requirement of a new object, obtained by the sliding or overturning of former categories. That object is the text". (Barthes 156 ). One might regard hyperdrama as a Barthian text which embraces plurality and multiplicity.

One of the important features of the text according to Barthes is its plural nature, an element which is strongly manifested in hyperdrama. Barthes writes that unlike the work which "functions as a general sign and it is normal that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign" , The text : " practices the infinite deferment of the signified" (Barthes158). The text according to Barthes should never present a final meaning, or a final signified, instead the text is : "dilatory; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as 'the first stage of meaning', its material vestibule, but, in complete opposition to this, as its deferred action. Similarly, the infinity of the signifier refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the unnameable signified) but to that of a playing." (Barthes 158 ) As shown in hyperdrama, the plurality of the drama in which the text is dispersed everywhere makes reaching a single objective meaning difficult .

:Part 4: select a character below



Angelo  
Cyndi  
Evelyn  
Jack  
Justin

(Lylla (The Bride Of Edgefield

As readers move between different paths, meaning is multiplied into a plurality of different contradicting meanings all combined together within the same drama, producing a dramatic text which is a 'galaxy of signifiers' not a "structure of signifiers" (Barthes, S/Z 5):

Each of these characters leads to a different place with a different meaning, forming a web of plural meanings dispersed everywhere in the text. This plurality of significations in Barthes's opinion is in the very nature of the text:

The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it .has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an irreducible (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. (Image-Music-Text 159)

'Dissemination' is one of Derrida's pivotal words , denoting the tendency of meaning to move out in all directions and to resist closure, a play of infinite meanings. Derrida, Like Barthes, perceives that a text is in a state of playing, of difference\_to use Derrida's word\_in which words refer to each other endlessly, and meaning is disseminated everywhere in the text, this play resists closure or unity of the text. This dissemination of meaning is brought forth by the act of différence, which is according to Derrida the structure of all language. Hyperdrama manifests this playing with meaning, and provides an example of différence. In hyperdrama, each block of text



or lexia is not only a scene with a different meaning, but each scene also evidently carries traces of other scenes to which it refers, forming what Derrida calls a "fabric of traces" (Bolter 161), in which texts refer to other texts. In each scene in the three dramas, links to other scenes are provided, readers must continually refer to other scenes by clicking those links in order to pursue the meaning of the present scene. In The Last Song of Violetta Parra, if readers choose one of characters, a new scene opens in which several different links are offered for the reader in the form of spatial metaphors asking them to follow the characters to different areas:

JUAN

.It's worth a try. I knew there was a reason I hired you

(He goes upstairs)

(.Guillermina speaks to the audience)

GUILLERMINA

He hired me because I gave him the impression that a job was  
the door to seduction. Men are so predictable.

(She returns to the other area of the livingroom.)

These underlined links alludes to other scenes in the drama, without referring to these scenes, the meaning of the present scene is missing. Thus, the present scene refers to another one in the future .

In his essay "Living on Border Lines" (1979), Derrida defines the text as " a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far" (qtd in Bolter, 162). Derrida's notion is echoed by critics of hypertexts such as Micheal Heim, who states that: "Hypertext is a dynamic referencing system in which all texts are interrelated" (Heim 4-5), as mentioned earlier, hypertexts are texts connected by links, this inter-connectivity of texts makes a text always dependable on another for meaning, carrying a trace of another text. 'Trace' is another of Derrida's terms, meaning that each sign always



contains a trace of another, because words always differ and defer from each other. As usual with Derrida, he never actually provides an ultimate or a single definition of the term. By trace, Derrida claims that words always contain traces or tracks of other words, a word always carry a trace or a meaning of another, However, this 'other' word is never present, it is in another present which is absent (Of Grammatology 47, 63). Trace is thus actually a concept that is related to différance, Spivak writes that: "For "trace" one can substitute "arche-writing ("archi-écriture" ) or "différance," or in fact quite a few other words that Derrida uses in the same way" (Of Grammatology, Int.: XV). The network structure of hypertexts creates this interrelation of meaning between signifiers, where words refer to other words, lexias refer to other lexias yet to come, in this method, the meaning of the drama is always deferred rather than present .

## **2. Hyperdrama and Intertextuality**

Perhaps it is evident by now that hyperdrama departs from the concept of a dramatic text as a closed-off field which presents a unified meaning. This fact, however, opens one of the rather noticeable aspects of hyperdrama, which is its intertextual nature. As established earlier, hypertexts are by definition a system of interconnected texts joined together by links, this linking element, which forms the "essence of hypertext" (Landow 359 ) is one of the main features which establishes hyperdrama as an intertextual work of literature .

In discussing intertextuality in relation to hypertexts, Landow says that: "Hypertext, which is a fundamentally intertextual system, has the capacity to emphasize intertextuality in a way that page-bound text in books cannot" (55). Agreeing with Landow, while several printed texts employ the method of intertextuality in writing, yet hypertext highlights intertextuality more than printed works of literature do. Hypertexts are texts connected to each other, as well as linked to other texts on the Internet. Moreover, writers of works of hypertexts usually borrow features taken from different other works,



such as styles, techniques or a transformation of an earlier work of art.

The first form of intertextuality in hyperdrama appears in the concept of the texts connected together. As explained previously, in a work written in hypertext, each lexia or block of text is connected to another text . In hyperdrama, the reader much click on the link which leads him to the other text within the drama in order to complete the story of the present scene. In The Seagull Hyperdrama, readers must choose one of the links leading to a new lexia or scene in order to complete the meaning of the present scene. For example, in the drama, Treplov fights with Nina, the woman he loves and they both leave the scene in anger, readers are offered choices whether to follow Treplov or Nina in order to see the reaction of each after the fight, and to complete the whole meaning behind the fight:

(Treplev rushes out. Nina composes herself and exits) .  
[follow Treplev]  
[followNina]  
(Deemer 2004)

Julia Kristeva is one of the eminent critics who had a deep impact on the notions of text, reading, and writing. Like Barthes, she rejected traditional ideas of a text as a closed off thing that must be restored to an author and a final meaning. She coined the term 'intertextuality' in 1966, in her *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980). Kristeva's defines intertextuality as : "the sum of knowledge that makes it possible for texts to have meaning.", she maintains that: "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva 37). According to Kristeva, each text depends upon another text for meaning, she writes that: "we think of the meaning of a text as dependent upon other texts that it absorbs and transforms" (*Desire in Language* 104). In her "Word, Dialogue and the Novel", Kristeva develops Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, praising his conception of the "literary word" as an intersection of textual surfaces" (Kristeva 36), and charts a three-dimensional textual space whose three "coordinates of dialogue" are the writing subject, the



addressee (or ideal reader), and exterior text. She describes this textual space as intersecting planes which have both a horizontal and vertical axes:

The word's status is thus defined horizontally (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus) . . . each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read . . . any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. (Kristeva 37)

Kristeva maintains that "every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it" (qtd in Culler 1981: 105), the notion is exemplified in hyperdrama, where the dramatic text is connected to other documents on the Internet. As a work of hypertext, hyperdrama is connected automatically through hyperlinks to the World Wide Web, with the other documents on the net. It is not a material closed-off physical entity standing alone as in a printed book, but the situating of the drama on the Internet medium makes the drama what Landow describes as a text placed : "... at the center of the textual universe" ( Landow120) . In The Seagull Hyperdrama, Deemer offers different links leading to other documents on the Internet outside the drama itself:

Main Menu

What is hyperdrama?

Background of the Chekhov Hyperdrama

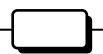
The Setting

Cast of Characters

Begin the Play

Some of these essays provides in the links do not belong to the drama, but they refer to essays on the World Wide Web to which the drama is connected .

Kristeva, who attacks the concept of the stability of meaning, established a new mode of semiotics, which she calls "semianalysis.",



in this approach, she emphasizes the idea that texts are always in a state of production, rather than being products to be quickly consumed . The text becomes what Kristeva calls :“ a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text,” in which “several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (“Word, Dialogue and the Novel” 36). The complex connection between the different texts within the drama as well as with other websites on the web makes the text apt to change . Botler for instance maintains that the electronic space makes the text "malleable in the hands of both writer and reader" (13 ).

Kristeva maintains that authors do not create their texts from their own mind, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts. The notion is evident in hyperdrama, where the text becomes subject to change by other texts. Both Kristeva and Barthes perceive of the writer of a text as the orchestrator of what Roland Barthes refers to as the 'already-written' rather than as its originator. (S/Z 21) Barthes writes that: "The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them' (Barthes 146)

Like most poststructuralists, Kristeva and Barthes rejected the concept of an author as the origin of the work, according to them, he is merely a compiler of texts. He is part of what Kristeva calls the "book's discursive universe" ( “Word, Dialogue and the Novel” 37) in which different authors and readers are situated .

Their ideas are exemplified in hyperdrama, both The Seagull Hyperdrama and The Last Song of Violetta Parra are rewritings of other stories, forming another form of intertextuality. The latter drama is rewriting of the story of the murder of Violetta Parra, while The Seagull is a re-adaptation of chekov's The Seagull. At the introduction of the drama, Deemer tells his audience:

Welcome to The Chekhov Hyperdrama, an original and expanded version of, and interpretation of, Chekhov's classic play The Seagull." The script pages that follow fall into two



categories:

my new translation from the Russian of Chekhov's play, and these sections begin with the notation [Chekhov] scenes written by myself, which comprise about three-fourths of the total script, follow the action of the characters in other parts of the larger setting after they leave, or before they enter, Chekhov's focus and stage; these are noted by [Deemer] (Deemer 2004).

Fredric Jameson signals pastiche as one of the features of postmodern literature. Pastiche as Jameson defines it is : " like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism 114). Jameson maintains that pastiche is similar to parody but without the ironic element, they both imitate a certain style but pastiche however does not contain the ironic motive of parody. The reason for this is that, as Jameson maintains, that in the postmodern era, the writer as a creative genius is ended, because there is no place for innovation any more, only the imitation of styles which have already been invented: "the writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds—they've already been invented; only a limited number of combinations are possible; the unique ones have been thought of already" (Jameson 114).

The concept according to Jameson is related to the "death of the subject" or the end of the "individual brush stroke" in postmodern writings. As Jameson puts it, the various forms of postmodernism "have, in fact, been fascinated precisely by this whole 'degraded' landscape ... of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, of advertising and motels, and other materials they no longer simply 'quote,' as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance" ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society" 3) This idea of incorporating different texts is common in postmodern writings, in which the mixing of high and low cultures is a common technique in



postmodern theater. Schmidt says that postmodern intertextuality "incorporates and quotes from a wide range of other texts" (The Theater of Transformation 36). For example, [a] "drama incorporates pop-cultural works by way of intertextuality" (Schmidt 36). As seen from the previous example, hyperdrama incorporates different elements from different disciplines within the work. Schmidt, who discusses the problem of originality in postmodern drama, maintains that :"intertextuality has come to be the backbone of postmodern drama " (55), This intertextual spirit has led to problems in originality in postmodern theater, Postmodern drama, schmidt argues : "enters into multifaceted relationship with other texts" (Schmidt 37) .

Landow states that writing about hypertext in a print medium immediately produces problems (82). One certainly agrees, to write about a moving digital text is a hard task indeed, one cannot, for instance, exemplify moving elements in the medium of a fixed static printed text. However, one ventures to take the task, and hopes to succeed in the process.

### **3. Conclusion**

Computer technology has certainly transformed several notions attached to drama, and defamiliarized our expectations as readers of dramatic texts. The use of hypertext as a language alters the experience of writing drama and adds rather unique elements that enriches the concept of a dramatic text; instead of the notion of a dramatic text as linear and sequential, hypertext and the digital capabilities of the computer have produced a digital nonlinear text situated on the Internet and read using hyperlinks, and readers can access it through their computers. Despite the fact that such new rather unfamiliar features represent a challenge to most researchers on hyperdrama, yet one finds such innovative elements rather rich and expanding to the meaning of theater.

Moreover, the modifications done to the drama by hypertext language show the extent of the effect of digital technology on theater. Deemer has indeed highlighted the richness of drama and opened new questions on how theater might benefit from digital technology in the future.



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