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PAUL HACKMAN

## "I Am a Double Agent": Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* and the Persistence of Print in the Age of Hypertext

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**I**n the early 1990s a number of academics began to note the potentially drastic changes new media might have on the place of print literature in college classrooms and society at large. Richard A. Lanham began his 1993 look at the future of literature, *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*, by wondering, "Perhaps the real question for literary study now is not whether our students will be reading Great Traditional Books or Relevant Modern ones in the future, but whether they will be reading books at all" (3). George P. Landow's important 1992 analysis of the exciting synergy between new media and poststructural theory predicted that print probably will continue into the next century but warned that it "*should* feel threatened by hypertext. . . . Descendants, after all, offer continuity with the past but only at the cost of replacing it" (183). As both of these quotations suggest, something new was emerging at the end of the century besides a concern about high culture or the value of literary studies. The material form of the book itself was what seemed to be under attack. Where television or film just threatened to steal away audiences from the novel, hypertext and electronic books seemed capable of making the print form obsolete. For both Lanham and Landow, such a future, one where print is replaced by computer screens, was not only possible but preferable, as the next logical step in the evolution of Western arts and theory.

Before the World Wide Web and the use of computers to combine text, graphics, and sound, the central feature of new media

threatening the preeminence of print was the hypertext link. The hypertext novel emerged at this moment as a promising embodiment of the literary future. No longer constrained by paper, literature could finally fulfill the postmodern vision of plurality and democracy in the classroom (Lanham) or break down the troublesome divide between writer and reader (Landow). Even print novelist Robert Coover agreed that the emergence of hypertext meant “the end of books,” as his frequently cited 1992 *New York Times Book Review* article was titled. Of these first-generation hypertext novels, one of the most widely acclaimed has been Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl; or, a Modern Monster* (1995), with Coover in 2000 naming it “the true paradigmatic work of the era” because it makes construction of the text through hyperlinks a central thematic concern (“Literary Hypertext”).<sup>1</sup> Criticism of Jackson’s novel almost unanimously agrees that the most notable feature of the text is the correspondence between the medium and the message. Many critics read *Patchwork Girl* as a meditation on the fragmented nature of human subjectivity, particularly female subjectivity, a meditation enhanced by the multiple reading paths characteristic of hypertext. The overly enthusiastic proclamations of the early and mid nineties about the future of hypertext literature contribute to this standard reading of *Patchwork Girl*, tying the importance of Jackson’s work to the revolutionary nature of hypertext novels for literary studies in general. However, fifteen years after the first generation of hypertext novels emerged, hypertext literature remains on the fringe of literary studies. The relationship between print and digital media has indeed grown more complicated, as people do more and more reading on their computer screens, but many of the ballyhooed features of early hypertext novels remain restricted to experimental works. In this essay, I will argue for reading Jackson’s novel as an increasingly relevant meditation on the relationship between print and digital media, rather than as a paradigmatic

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1. “First-generation” hypertext novels are largely characterized by their creation before the popularization of browsers for the World Wide Web. These novels exist on CD-ROMs or floppy disks that are sold much like a book would be. Coover describes these initial attempts at creating “a new literary art form” as “the Golden Age” of literary hypertext (“Literary Hypertext”).

work of a literary movement that has yet to catch hold. I will argue that Jackson's text combines print and hypertext in order to posit a more complicated relationship between the two media—a relationship that leads to a more complex vision of female subjectivity than one attached to hypertext alone.

In 1996, Barbara Page wrote about several female authors who utilized hypertext—or used print in a way that was “hypertextual in principle” (1)—in order to resist patriarchal forms of narrative. She concluded, “hypertext should prove to be a fruitful site for innovative writing by women” (par. 26). *Patchwork Girl* is referenced only at the end of her article. N. Katherine Hayles shared Page's conclusion in what is probably the definitive early article on the novel. Hayles argues that early copyright law privileged a version of the male author by ignoring the material conditions of the text in favor of the transcendent style of the genius creator. For Hayles, Jackson's hypertext novel offers a new version of subjectivity, one that is embodied in the fragmented and multiple nature of hypertext. “The feminine associations with sewing serve to mark this as a female—and feminist—production,” Hayles writes after pointing out Jackson's use of sewing in the text as a metaphor for the patching together that characterizes hypertext (“Flickering Connectivities” par. 34). Hayles then provides a sophisticated close reading of several key lexias in *Patchwork Girl*, suggesting that the text cannot be understood without careful consideration of its material existence as a hypertext, rather than print, novel.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Hayles's claim “electronic hypertexts initiate and demand cyborg reading practices” (13) suggests that for her, too, hypertext was the future of literature.<sup>3</sup>

In these early reactions to hypertexts written by women, the excitement about the revolutionary potential of hypertext to change how we read is connected to feminist projects that critique male-dominated versions of subjectivity supposedly privi-

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2. “Lexia” is the term commonly used when discussing hypertext fiction to describe a discrete block of text. In *Patchwork Girl*, each lexia fills the screen, like a page, and is replaced by a new lexia when the reader clicks on certain words or images.

3. Hayles has argued for the importance of understanding ourselves as cyborgs in constant interaction with computer technology in *How We Became Posthuman*, among other works.

leged by the traditions of the print novel. Consequently, the failure of hypertext novels in general, or *Patchwork Girl* in particular, to gain a significant readership or drastically alter the connection of literature to print would seem to have undercut the genre's potential for liberating female subjects. Subsequent readings of *Patchwork Girl* have addressed this problem in one of two ways. A number of articles simply ignore the brief lifespan of first-generation hypertext novels and continue to build on the foundation laid by Page and Hayles, locating radical feminist potential in the fragmentation and multiplicity of the hyperlink. Most explicit in this regard might be Astrid Ensslin's reading of *Patchwork Girl* as an example of cyberfeminism wherein "the concept of the female is no longer pre-defined in corporeal, biological terms but produced by female imagination itself" (212), because the body of the creature exists only in the reader's mind. It is unclear how, exactly, the body produced by the female imagination as it traverses the links of *Patchwork Girl* is radically different from the body produced by the female imagination as it reads *Frankenstein* in print.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Ensslin insists that "virtual space is, according to Jackson, to be seen as women writers' ideal breeding ground" (214).<sup>5</sup>

4. Ensslin does not directly contrast hypertext to print, but her article is structured around a comparison of *Patchwork Girl* to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. She argues that Eliot's use of the desert parallels a decaying nature and a decaying femininity still defined by patriarchal notions, whereas Jackson's text posits a more positive interpretation of the desert as a new frontier for progressive cyberfeminism. Although she does not analyze the material nature of print in her analysis of Eliot's poem (in fact, she argues that the two texts share a nonlinear intertextuality), Ensslin's focus on the importance of technology in creating the new cyborg woman who escapes the corporeal limits she associates with ecofeminism and Eliot's poem suggests a contrast between print and hypertext in which hypertext can express female subjectivity in ways that print cannot.

5. Other articles that connect hypertext to feminist projects include Christopher Keep's argument that the otherness of the medium of hypertext breaks down the mind/body divide in a way similar to gothic texts that contemporary critics feared would overwhelm female readers. Carolina Sánchez-Palencia Carazo and Manuel Almagro Jiménez assert that the fragmentary nature of hypertext allows *Patchwork Girl* to "be contrasted with classic (and masculine?) forms of composition" (127). Teresa Dobson and Rebecca Luce-Kapler propose that *Patchwork Girl* be taught alongside Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* because the digital medium of *Patchwork Girl* focuses more prominently on questions about gender than its print forerunner. Laura Shackelford cites the influence of Hayles on her own reading of *Patchwork Girl* as "the resistance of a dynamic, multiple category of the feminine" (94).

The second path is that taken by Hayles herself, namely to bracket *Patchwork Girl* as a particularly impressive example of a once-exciting technological moment now surpassed. Two years after arguing for the essential role of the hypertext medium in understanding the text's critique of subjectivity, Hayles "realized that these first-generation works were more like books than they were like second-generation electronic literature, because they operated by replacing one screen of text with another, much as a book goes from one page to another" (*Writing Machines* 37).<sup>6</sup> Though Hayles insists that first-generation texts remain important, she argues that technological limitations and a book culture built on print models kept these early attempts from breaking truly new ground. Ironically, those recent readings that seem direct descendants of Hayles's initial article value the text's rejection of print in favor of the multilayered subjectivity embodied by hypertext, while Hayles now contends that the text has diminished in relevance precisely because it borrows too much from the print tradition. One group argues that the age of the hypertext novel is yet to come; the other sees it as already passed, as authors produce more mature literary experiments in digital media. Both agree that any connection to print in *Patchwork Girl* only damages its literary value and feminist potential.

A lexia within the "broken accents" section of *Patchwork Girl* rejects the exclusive focus on hypertext: "I am not the agent of absolute multiplicity any more than I am some redoubtable whole. I am a double agent, messing up both territories" ("double agent").<sup>7</sup> The novel is an agent of hypertext but also of print,

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6. This portrayal of *Patchwork Girl* as adulterated by the traditions of print is repeated in Hayles's more recent *Electronic Literature*. There Hayles describes *Patchwork Girl* as "an appropriate culminating work for the classical period" (7) but worries that "early claims for electronic hypertext's novelty seem not only inflated but misguided, for the features that then seemed so new and different—primarily the hyperlink and 'interactivity'—existed in a context in which functionality, navigation, and design were still largely determined by print models" (60).

7. Each lexia in *Patchwork Girl* has a title that appears in a field at the top of the window or within any of the maps one can use to navigate through the text. The titles are frequently central terms discussed within the lexia but at other times are more abstract or thematic. In this way, Jackson both replicates the print tradition of page numbering and defamiliarizes it by making the "page numbers" part of the text.

a double agent working for two sides at once and “messaging up both.” My analysis builds on Hayles’s insight that *Patchwork Girl* clings to the traditions of print even as it extols many of the qualities of hypertext, but I read Jackson’s patchwork of media as the text’s central argument, not its shortcoming. Hypertext allows Jackson to critique claims of wholeness and stability, but the tradition of print remains necessary to make sense of the hypertext as anything but a series of fragments, making the interaction between the two media more important than celebrating one at the expense of the other.

This theory of the relationship between media as a dynamic patchwork of characteristics rather than a progressive pattern of innovation and obsolescence is at the heart of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s concept of “remediation.” In their 1999 book of that name, the authors argue that new media always define themselves in relation to older media. The forms that these references to older media take can range from borrowing techniques and content, to emphasizing differences, to claiming superiority in terms of transparency and authenticity. Bolter and Grusin focus primarily on the relation of digital media to older visual media such as film, television, and photography, but they include enough references to books, newspapers, and magazines to suggest that their claim that digital media “function in a constant dialectic with earlier media” (50) applies equally well to the relationship between computers and books. Most relevant to my discussion of the persistence of print in Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* is the authors’ explanation that “the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium” and that new media “emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts” (19). As the earlier quotation from *Patchwork Girl* suggests, Jackson’s hypertext novel is a double agent, working to alter both print and new media. The need for hypertext to define itself against print draws attention to the mediations of the computer but also reconfigures our understanding of the materiality and social role of print. The similarities of hypertext lexias to print pages are less an interim stage in the development of a new medium than an act of remediation

necessary to further our understanding of hypertext and to bring print into the twenty-first century.

*Patchwork Girl; or, A Modern Monster* is a stand-alone hypertext novel published on a CD-ROM. The title page offers the reader a choice of five major starting points:

PATCHWORK GIRL;  
OR,  
A MODERN MONSTER  
BY MARY/SHELLEY, & HERSELF  
a graveyard,  
a journal,  
a quilt,  
a story,  
& broken accents

The inclusion of Mary, Shelley, and the patchwork girl as co-authors brings multiplicity and female identity to the forefront from the beginning of the text. Whatever starting point the reader chooses, she is bound to find further connections between female bodies and hypertext. The link labeled “a graveyard” leads to the statement, “I am buried here. You can resurrect me, but only piecemeal. If you want to see the whole, you will have to sew me together yourself.” From there, the reader is led to an apparent epitaph for the patchwork girl (although the “story” section of the novel suggests that she is still alive) that reads, “Here Lies a Head, Trunk, Arms (Right and Left), and Legs (Right and Left) as well as divers Organs appropriately Disposed. May they Rest in Piece” (“headstone”). Here the reader finds a list of several different parts of the patchwork girl’s body, each one linked to a brief description of the part’s previous owner: the left hand belonged to Dominique the pickpocket, her lungs to Thomasina the mountain-girl, and her liver to Roderick, the apparently homosexual importer of fine fabrics. The reader may choose whatever order she wishes to reconstruct the body, stitching the parts together differently with each reading. Even as the body is made whole again by the reader, however, the very act of linking reminds one that each body part remains distinct in its history.



The link labeled “a journal” opens a series of lexias that reproduce Mary Shelley’s journal as Shelley tells of meeting in the flesh the female monster that she had conceived in her mind. Creator and creation develop an intimate friendship that ends with Mary slicing a small piece of skin from her inner thigh and attaching it to the creature’s body. Through this gesture, the writer becomes a literal piece of the text she has created. The “journal” section connects directly to the opening of the “story” section, a section that rarely mentions Mary Shelley, making the reader’s choice of whether or not to read “a journal” first a significant contributor to how she understands the patchwork girl’s subsequent trip from Europe to America.

The section of the novel labeled “a quilt” consists of a series of short paragraphs, each composed of interwoven scraps of text taken from diverse sources, in particular L. Frank Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* and Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Jackson also includes feminist and poststructuralist theory and the instructions for using Storyspace software. The texts that Jackson breaks apart and merges together connect feminist concerns about the construction of female bodies to the act of creating a hypertext. The reader can choose to view the paragraphs as uniform pieces of writing or as a patchwork of different fonts and styles with citations designating the original sources. Though “a quilt” seems to be the one section that is separate from the patchwork girl’s story, the patchwork girl often refers to herself as the chain of hypertext links that each reader creates, so this patchwork of secondary sources becomes a graphical representation of her stitched-together body.

The “story” section is the narrative of the patchwork girl’s life after leaving Mary Shelley. The story splits at one point into two different paths, though they soon come together, with only a few opportunities to leap from “a story” to one of the other sections by clicking linked words. The patchwork girl’s monstrous, stitched-together body, unsurprisingly, makes simple travel an ordeal, and at various moments in her tale, appendages fall off or threaten to float away in the bath, reminding the reader that her body is not whole.

Finally, the link labeled “broken accents” first opens a picture titled “phrenology,” a drawing of a human head in profile, the scalp partitioned into sections, each of which contains a word, most of them linking to a number of lexias gathered under the subheading “body of text” that discuss the multiplicity of the human body and the multiplicity of hypertext. It is not always clear in “broken accents” whether one is reading Shelley Jackson’s commentary on creating hypertext fiction or the patchwork girl’s feelings on being pieced together by hyperlinks, but it is hard to miss the connection between female bodies and multiplicity in a lexia such as “mosaic girls”:

Inside each cell of a human girl’s body one of the two chromosomal X’s curls up on one side of the nucleus and sleeps. It’s called the Barr body, a little snarl of DNA, a microscopic badge of femininity. Each cell decides independently which X will sleep. Not all choose the same one. This gives girls a genetic flexibility boys don’t have.

The female body, in particular, is noted here for the biological benefits of its genetic multiplicity, though the complexity of DNA does not preclude structure and predictability.

Each of the five major sections of the novel makes use of techniques and metaphors that can identify hypertext with multiplicity and with female subjectivity. In a 1997 lecture at MIT on the future of the book, Jackson herself proclaimed, “Hypertext is everything that for centuries has been damned by its association with the feminine” (“Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl”), a clear statement in favor of the feminist associations of hypertext, but also one that suggests problems with celebrating that connection. Jackson does not argue that hypertext represents the feminine, or that it more ably expresses or embodies female subjectivity, but only that it includes characteristics that have historically been labeled feminine. Feminist critics may make productive use of multiplicity, but this practice does not make multiplicity a *de facto* critique of patriarchy. The fragmentation that enables this multiplicity might very well work against feminist goals. Reducing women to legs, breasts, or wombs is an example of “everything that for centuries has been damned by its association with the feminine,” but not a characteristic most feminists would want to perpetuate in the age of new media. Or as Jackson col-

orfully puts it in the “double agent” lexia, “Jennifer’s leg lying next to Bronwyn’s foot. . . . can’t kick anyone’s butt.”<sup>8</sup> Multiplicity is undoubtedly a central concern in Jackson’s text, but so is the necessity of wholeness, making print as important a medium for representing female subjectivity as hypertext. In other words, the hypertext remediates print both as a medium to define itself against and as a useful and culturally significant social context for making the hypertext authoritative or meaningful.

From the title page, one can link to a fictional account of Mary Shelley’s journal, a hypertext representation of a document that originally would have been written on paper. The interaction between hypertext and paper appears early in “a journal,” as the reader must choose to follow a link titled “written” or a link titled “sewn.” In “written,” Mary Shelley remembers writing her horror story until “the tiny black letters blurred into stitches”; “sewn” is the mirror image of the act of creation, as “the tiny black stitches wavered into script.” Because stitching is connected explicitly to hypertext linking throughout the text, the reader, upon reaching this fork, chooses whether to witness print transforming into hypertext or hypertext transforming into print.<sup>9</sup> The choice makes no difference to the plot of the narrative, because the two paths immediately converge, indicating that the text’s multiplicity lies not in the act of choosing but in the act of conjoining print and hypertext.

Jackson characterizes the “story” section of *Patchwork Girl* as “deliberately, the most like a conventional novel” (“Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author”), and indeed, it reads for long stretches in a linear, page-to-page manner with little metacommentary, textual experimentation, or ontological disorientation. The opening lexia is the creature writing 175 years after leaving Mary Shelley. She describes herself, noting that “Women and men alike mistake my gender and both are drawn to me.” If the reader

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8. In a 1999 roundtable discussion two years after her remarks at MIT, Jackson “reject[ed] the idea that there’s anything biologically feminine about this mode [hypertext]” (qtd. in Ley).

9. “Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl,” the title of Jackson’s presentation at the “Transformations of the Book” conference held at MIT on October 24–25, 1997, also suggests the importance of stitches as a metaphor for hypertext.

clicks on the phrase “I am never settled,” she links to “Interrupting D,” a lexia in the “broken accents” section in which a quotation from Jacques Derrida’s *Disseminations* is interrupted by commentary that connects writing to the creation of monsters.<sup>10</sup> Should the reader click on any other word in the initial lexia, she opens up the lexia “birth.” In “birth” the creature claims to have been born many times, including both “under the needle, and under the pen,” again setting hypertext and paper side by side rather than in clear opposition. From this lexia, there are six possible paths to take. The phrase “under the needle” takes the reader to “sewn,” while “under the pen” links to “written.” The lexia also connects to a quotation from *Frankenstein*, in which the male creature asks Frankenstein for a mate, to the graveyard section of the hypertext, and, again, to “Interrupting D.”

To begin the narrative of the creature’s westward travels, one must click on the words “a good story” in the middle of the lexia titled “birth.” A lexia in the “broken accents” section makes clear that a good story is one that follows a linear path: “We live in the expectation of traditional narrative progression . . . we protest bad writing” (“lives”). The story of the creature’s travels is largely linear, though it is available in two different flavors, between which the reader can move back and forth, until finally the narrative settles into a long sequence of lexias, each with only one possible link. From “birth,” the reader has multiple options for abandoning the promised history of the patchwork girl and instead freely exploring other sections of the hypertext, though

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10. The choice of Derrida’s text is emblematic of Jackson’s strategy throughout the novel. Derrida argues against the artificial distinction between speech and writing, as well as that all writing results in a proliferation of meanings and connections. Jackson’s rejection of a simple binary between print and hypertext and her interest in multiplicity and intertextuality are obviously similar to Derrida’s arguments. At the same time, Jackson draws attention to the masculine connotations of both “logos” and “dissemination” in her first interruption: “As a living thing, logos issues from a father—I, on the other hand, have adopted a nominal mother (M/S) who is more like a midwife, and spring unparented from my own past selves—.” Jackson is making a feminist argument, but that argument does not rest simply on the dismissal of print as linear, masculine, and limited. She interrupts Derrida to provide another, feminist, point of view, but Derrida’s text and arguments about writing still make up part of the patchwork girl.

each of these options leads to further discussion of the necessity of both print and hypertext to the birth of the text. If one wants to learn the story of the patchwork girl, however, one has to choose “a good story” and commit to an almost conventional novel. The linear narrative associated with print becomes an option within the multiplicity of the text, rather than being multiplicity’s other.

The first three lexias within “a good story” tell of the creature’s parting from Mary, focusing on a scene in which Mary sews a piece of her own skin onto the creature, and the creature sews one of her scars onto Mary’s leg. This act of sewing that joins two female bodies continues the metaphorical references to hypertext. Halfway through the narrative, the creature longs to hear from Mary again and stabs a quill pen into her creator’s patch of skin, drawing blood to use as ink: the creature uses an implement of pen-and-paper writing in order to “activate” a skin graft that resembles a hyperlink. Long dead by this point, Mary does not write back, and the creature begins to fall apart, literally, without an author to make her whole. Body parts fall off and stitches burst open, until a friend, Elsie, squeezes the floating parts together in a bathtub and the creature “began to invent something new: a way to hang together without pretending I was whole” (“I made myself over”). Complete fragmentation renders the creature helpless, but she realizes that she can no longer rely on Mary to make her whole through writing.

The creature ends her story alone in Death Valley, where she sits either writing on paper or typing on a laptop computer. She worries: “Sometimes it bothers me to put my words on paper. Set in ranks, they argue I possess a ‘life’” (“a life”). She feels a need to write down her history but worries about the illusion of wholeness it creates. At this point, after a long sequence of linear links, the reader is offered a choice. One link leaps to a lexia titled “this writing,” which begins by reminding the reader that she is looking not at print but at a computer screen: “Assembling these patched words in an electronic space, I feel half-blind, as if the entire text is within reach, but . . . I can see only that part most immediately before me.” This lexia juxtaposes concerns about the wholeness of print with concerns about the lack of any shape

or history in a hypertext. The other link from “a life” ends the “story” section of the novel with the creature admitting that although she can never be perfectly whole, she keeps an image of wholeness as “something to fondle in my pocket while I work” (“beauty”). A perfect wholeness is an illusion necessary to keep in mind, lest one be left “half-blind” and “without story” (“this writing”).

A reading of print and hypertext as oppositional and exclusionary sets up a binary that the text rejects time and time again. Within the “story” section, this same critique is applied to a binary rendering of gender. After leaving Shelley, the creature takes a boat to America. She disguises herself during the trip as well as she can but only stimulates endless guesses about her true identity:

Among the ladies aboard the general belief seemed to be that I was a man, in lady's garb. Some believed me to be a homosexual, seeking a more tolerant climate; others did not doubt I was a mysterious, no doubt extremely handsome and rich, brigand fleeing capture . . . Some held I was a woman, but eccentric; I was a woman, suffering a disfiguring disease; I was a half-man, half-woman, who had lived my life as a man, and who now sought peace as a woman . . . I was a woman who had lived my life as a man . . . As for Chancy [the ship's cabin boy], others supposed him my confidant, but in fact he was merely deeper initiated into doubt. Consequently, his attraction to me was complex, but nonetheless unwavering. I know now that he held simultaneously the belief that I could not possibly be a woman (was therefore a man), and the conviction that I could not possibly be a man (and therefore had to be a woman). He had no great urge to solve the mystery, since he liked me either way: as a man I was more interesting for my feminine guise, as a woman more interesting for what seemed to me my failures: my awkwardness, and my uncanny strength.

(“guises”)

I quote this scene at length to demonstrate that multiplicity is not associated with just one gender but, rather, with the seemingly endless combinations of gender that people on the boat imagine upon encountering the patchwork girl. The debate is not whether she is a man or a woman but whether she is a woman borrowing the conventions of a man or a man trying on the con-

ventions of a woman. Even Chancy, who believes that if one is not a woman, one must be a man, has “no great urge to solve the mystery” and, in fact, enjoys the company of the creature precisely because she thwarts any label. A feminist reading of *Patchwork Girl* should require that the same understanding of multiplicity be applied to the relationship between print and hypertext. Like masculinity and femininity, print and hypertext are distinct categories, with some characteristics determined by historical conventions rather than essential differences. A productive multiplicity arises not from embracing those aspects of hypertext that have been “damned by [their] association with the feminine” but from combining those aspects with print in ways that unsettle both categories.<sup>11</sup> Hypertext remediates print but in doing so allows print to remediate hypertext. Both media end up altered by the intermingling.

The “graveyard” section, often cited as evidence of the attraction of hypertext to feminism, given the numerous female histories and body parts sewn together, includes the story of Charlotte, who writes letters to her dead children using her breast milk as ink, and Livia, whose calloused hands wrote the books of her academic husband. Each of these images links the female body to paper rather than to hypertext. Charlotte relies on the material qualities of paper to remind her of the children she has lost. Pen filled with breast milk, she writes invisible-ink letters to the dead: “Then she held a match under the page and watched her words come back” (“left breast”). It is not clear whether Livia’s husband passed her thoughts off as his own or

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11. Laura Shackelford also reads this scene as a critique of gender binaries, arguing that the creature’s monstrosity “is a product of binary sex and gender, which produce the masculine and the feminine, the male and female, and their respective (hetero)sexual orientations as mutually exclusive oppositions, forcing subjects to disavow the discrepancies that make such distinctions far from absolute” (86). She then connects this critique to the relationship between print and hypertext: “[J]uxtaposed to print narrative in several important respects, digital hypertext, in *Patchwork Girl*’s tactical reading, operationalizes combinatory principles that diverge from a heterosexist logic of conjoinder” (93). Shackelford uses the critique of binary sex to describe a new binary opposition between print and hypertext. Print is the medium of heterosexist and masculinist logic, while digital hypertext is the medium of everything multiple and, thus, feminine. The problem with this reading is that the people on the boat never insist on binary categories, and the text rejects the idea that multiplicity is the exclusive domain of hypertext.

dictated his books to her while she inscribed them, but in either case, she was able to mark her existence in the world through the permanence of paper. In whatever order one navigates through the list of body parts, one returns to the lexia “headstone,” which contains the epitaph. While a headstone is not a piece of paper, the quality of permanence associated with print by early advocates of hypertext literature is the very reason for memorializing the dead with carved headstones.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, by forcing the reader to return to “headstone” after reading about each body part, the text creates a whole body out of the disparate parts. The body exists as a whole both as the result of the reader’s mouse-clicks and as a result of the written epitaph. The headstone combines the multiplicity of hypertextual choice with the metaphor of writing fixed in a permanent material.

Although the quilt imagery throughout *Patchwork Girl* is often appropriated as support for the feminist nature of hypertext writing, the “quilt” section of the novel actually makes little use of techniques exclusive to the computer.<sup>13</sup> That which is most experimental in the “quilt” section—namely, the quotations cut and pasted together from diverse sources—does not use hyperlinks or encourage multiple readings. The artistic intent, as numerous critics have noted, seems to be closely aligned to hypertext because diverse sources are stitched together into one coherent narrative. The actual execution of the stitching, however, could be done as easily in print as on a computer screen. The dismissal of print in favor of hypertext is even more difficult to reconcile with lexias such as “write,” which reads, “‘I beat my books; I caressed them. Page after page, O beloved, licked, lacerated,’ said the Patchwork Girl,” and one of three lexias titled “beauty patches,” which informs us that “One of the first pro-

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12. Hypertext author Michael Joyce, in *Of Two Minds*, asserts several times that print stays itself while electronic text replaces itself.

13. Elisabeth Joyce argues for the importance of this section to understanding the nature of hypertext bodies: “The connection to the original source remains and influences its meaning, but the new context will change that meaning, will force the appropriated material to adapt to the new situation” (43–44). Her reading astutely connects the “quilt” section to vital themes developed throughout the text yet makes claims about the use of quotations in a hypertext novel that could as easily be made about quotations and allusions in a print novel.



posals for using computer graphics was to assemble a composite of the best features of various actresses—Garbo’s eyes, Bardot’s mouth, Welch’s breasts.” The first quotation grants the patchwork girl a very physical and intimate relationship to print, while the second demonstrates that the computer’s capacity for fragmenting bodies can be used as easily for patriarchal projects as for feminist ones.

In her original reading of *Patchwork Girl*, Hayles identified dotted lines as a central concept in the novel’s discussion of the hypertext medium. Each lexia of “a quilt” contains a dotted line beneath the text that the reader must click in order to advance to the next link. Elsewhere in the text, the dotted line is an image of joining, a scar that designates separation and linking at the same time—the epitome of hypertext. While in the rest of the text one can almost always move to the next lexia simply by clicking any word on the screen, in the “quilt” section one must click on the dotted line in order to continue. In this odd case, the dotted line forces a particular action every bit as specific and repetitive as turning a page. During her lecture at MIT, Jackson hinted at this meaning when she discussed the way reading print has become naturalized by centuries of practice: “Turning the page, for example, has become an invisible action, because it has no meaning in most texts[;] the little pause it provides is as unreflective as breathing, but if we expected something different, or sought to interpret the gap, we might find ourselves as perplexed by that miniature black-out as by any intrusive authorial device we get exercised about in experimental literature or hypertext” (“Stitch Bitch: The Patchwork Girl”). Invited to speak on the nature of hypertext novels, Jackson finds herself contemplating the untapped possibilities of print, and in her own hypertext, as Hayles points out, Jackson relies on individual pages of text that a reader connects together by a subtle movement of the hand. By forcing the reader to click on one particular spot, Jackson is both placing the technology of hypertext in the service of authorial control and reminding readers that the act of changing pages, even in print, can be a self-reflective task that involves the reader bodily in the production of meaning.

The “broken accents” section most takes advantage of hypertext linking. The starting point is the diagram labeled “phrenology,” in which each linked word leads down a different reading path. Many of the lexias accessed from this point offer three or four hot words that connect to new paths. In this section, the “I” narrating several of the lexias is difficult to identify, so the order in which the lexias are read plays a significant role in shaping the reader’s interpretation. Such open-ended structure, in which the reader’s choices play a crucial role in creating meaning, is often cited as a key feature of the hypertext novel and its radical potential, yet many readings of this section piece together the narrative voice into a singular whole. Elisabeth Joyce interprets the “I” as “Jackson’s direct address of the act of creating this hypertext” (46); Hayles interprets the section as “containing the female monster’s narration and theoretical speculations on hypertextual and human bodies” (“Flickering Connectivities” 23); Teresa Dobson and Rebecca Luce-Kapler argue that “the strand is narrated by the text itself” (270). Apparently, the order in which these readers read the various lexias must have been different enough to support the identity each ascribes to the narrative voice. Here, finally, is a true example of hypertext structure creating multiple female bodies, but the result is a fragmented subjectivity that blurs the lines among author, text, and character. The title page claims “Mary/Shelley, & Herself” as authors, suggesting that Jackson is interested in the potential of hypertext to break down once-clear distinctions, but even those critics most invested in championing the unique qualities of hypertext have found it helpful to describe the fragmented hypertext subject as one manageable whole.

The iconic image most associated with *Patchwork Girl* is found in the opening lexia, “her,” preceding even the title page. The black-and-white image is of a woman’s body separated into sections by dotted lines, with an additional dotted line cutting all the way across the body and background. This same image appears in altered form—the body parts cut apart and rearranged—as the opening image of four of the five major sections, making it a ready symbol for the divided and multiple body that is literally the case for the creature and figuratively a metaphor for the entire hyper-

text. The image also clearly invokes the materiality of paper: the image looks hand-drawn with pencil (Jackson recalls, "Patchwork Girl started as a drawing on a page of my notebook, a naked woman with dotted-line scars" ["Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author"]), the edges appear frayed or torn, spots of white appear against the black background as if the image has been through a photocopier or a scanner, and the dotted line that slices across the entire picture turns into a wrinkle at one edge, as if the page had been folded in half. The text later suggests just such a folding: "It is a potential line, an indication of the way out of two dimensions (fold along dotted line): In three dimensions what is separate can be brought together without ripping apart what is already joined, the two sides of a page flow moebiusly into one another" ("dotted line"). This image of the dotted line as a joining without ripping and a potential action that has not yet occurred gets cited frequently in readings of *Patchwork Girl* and associated with the hyperlink despite the more intuitive connection to real paper.<sup>14</sup> The hyperlinks in *Patchwork Girl* replace one two-dimensional window of text with another, while a book exists in three dimensions, with pages that can be folded and marked in ways that join without fragmenting. In this lexia, Jackson explicitly makes use of the materiality of paper in order to represent the value of wholeness.

If one selects "a graveyard" from the title page, one is taken to "hercut4," a rearranged version of the picture of the patchwork girl. In addition to mixing up the body parts of the patchwork girl like a puzzle, reminding the reader that only through the act of choosing links and reading will the body be put back together, one corner of the picture has been peeled away to reveal a segment of the instructions for using the software program, Storyspace, with which the text was created. In another example of explicit references to print being moved to the background in favor of the exciting potential of hypertext, Carolina

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14. Hayles interprets the same lexia, even with explicit references to "pages," as a metaphor for hypertext: "The movement out of the flat plane evokes the hypertext's stacks, which suggest through their placement a three-dimensional depth to the screen and a corresponding ability to emerge from the depths or recede into them" ("Flickering Connectivities" 26).

Sánchez-Palencia Carazo and Manuel Almagro Jiménez note that “the instructions of the software program are revealed under one torn fragment of the image, so that we get a glimpse of the different tissues of a multilayered artifact and its scaffolding, in a kind of metafictional strategy whereby the material circumstances of the process of creation are made apparent” (118). The authors use the terminology of paper (“torn”) even though the conclusion they draw is exclusively about the “material circumstances” of the hypertext. Jackson’s inclusion of the instructions for Storyspace does bring to the surface the material nature of the hypertext medium, but it is significant that she reveals the printed instructions for using Storyspace rather than, say, the binary code that the computer reads. The “page” from the Storyspace instruction manual is written in a font one might associate with Microsoft’s Notepad application, yet the edges are faded, as though the image is taken from a printed page that did not get enough ink. The few words visible in the instructions talk about “flesh[ing] out” one’s plans for the story by using links to connect “documents.” “[L]inks” brings to mind hypertext, but “documents” is one of the many examples of words associated with paper and print that have made their way into the argot of computer users through the process of remediation. Since Jackson’s planning for the novel was done on paper—“I wrote most of the text in fragments in my notebook” (“Stitch Bitch: The Hypertext Author”)—for her, fleshing out her initial plan meant transferring it from paper to computer screen. It is paper, then, that acted as the skeleton upon which the flesh of the finished hypertext version was built.

In each of these instances, print is used as a metaphor or a graphic representation. I am not arguing that *Patchwork Girl* is a multimedia work or that the medium of hypertext plays no part in how we read it. *Patchwork Girl* is a hypertext novel with no paper to touch or smell or fall apart, and its use of hypertext should be integrated into any reading of the text. Even as a hypertext work, however, the novel relies on conventions familiar from the reading of print materials, characteristics of wholeness and permanence associated with paper and print, and the materiality of paper as a metaphor for the patchworked body of

the creature. Jackson has argued, "In the early days of electronic literature, claims for its revolutionary potential were weakened by ignorance of the long tradition of multilinear, multimedia work in print" ("Written"). Jackson's career outside of *Patchwork Girl*, rarely referenced, suggests an author eager to explore and combine the old and the new. Besides three hypertext works, Jackson's oeuvre includes a print short-story collection, *The Melancholy of Anatomy* (2002), containing stories titled "Heart," "Sperm," "Hair," and "Blood," as well as a traditional print novel, *Half Life* (2006), about a future in which conjoined twins become a potent subculture. She has also worked on a project called "Skin," in which 2,096 volunteers each have one word of a story tattooed onto their bodies. The body has thus been a primary theme in Jackson's work throughout her career, a theme she has explored in both print and hypertext.

Perhaps the most vivid example of the interplay between print and hypertext is found in the several different types of maps for the reader to use to navigate through the text. The maps included with *Patchwork Girl* are both functional and aesthetic. In a text so focused on the idea of creating a whole body out of disparate parts, a map provides a visual representation of wholeness. The map I used most often in rereading the text is called "Treemap." What is impressive about "Treemap" is that it condenses the entire open-ended hypertext into one graphical representation. A reader can click on any box, each of which is titled, and instantly leap to that lexia. The map functions like a table of contents, allowing the reader to "flip" to any "page" she wishes.<sup>15</sup> Hence the map in which this complex novel is represented in two dimensions resembles print while simultaneously accentuating the freedom attributed to the reader of hypertexts. From the map, one can juxtapose any two lexias (and even open

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15. Contrast the accessibility of Jackson's maps to attempts at navigating Michael Joyce's seminal hypertext novel, *Afternoon*. Critics have pointed out that buried at the center of Joyce's text is a lexia titled "white afternoon" in which the mystery of the car accident is explicitly revealed. Many readers, however, never find "white afternoon" because it can be accessed only after completing certain paths. In this instance, the gap between author and reader is widened, with the author able to control what parts of the novel the reader can access.

several lexias in different windows and place them next to one another), but the reader also sees how fixed and structured the text actually is. The map combines characteristics associated with both print and hypertext into one visual representation—showing the permanent structure of text set down by the author and unchangeable by the reader, while also making every lexia of the text simultaneously available.<sup>16</sup> As the ambiguous narrator of “broken accents” states: “When I open a book I know where I am, which is restful. My reading is spatial and even volumetric” (“this writing”). With the aid of the maps, a reader of *Patchwork Girl* likewise knows where she is at all times, and the different levels of maps can easily make reading the hypertext “spatial and even volumetric.” In this same lexia, the narrator describes hypertext as placing “the entire text . . . within reach,” again a feature ably demonstrated by “Treemap.” The map, as a spatial object, resembles a paper-and-glue book, but as a temporal object, it offers the entire novel to the reader at once. Debates about whether the maps are essential to hypertext or remnants of our print past miss the point that they can be both simultaneously, that they represent the interplay of media that remediate one another rather than the exclusive domain of either one.<sup>17</sup>

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16. The overlap between print and hypertext in these maps is illustrated by the disagreement between Elisabeth Joyce and Hayles. Joyce argues that the unyielding structure of the mapping in *Patchwork Girl* “contrasts directly with its precursor form of the novel” (41). Hayles, on the other hand, states, “As a result of its construction as a navigable space, electronic hypertext is intrinsically more involved with issues of mapping and navigation than are most print texts” (“Flickering Connectivities” 11). Joyce sees the permanence of the maps, while Hayles sees the reader’s freedom to navigate, yet both interpret the maps as examples of one of the defining differences between old and new media. It matters less, in this case, whether one critic is right and the other wrong than that neither supposes print to play any part in understanding the maps.

17. Jay Clayton notes that at least one lexia in *Patchwork Girl*, “thanks,” is accessible only through the program’s maps; there are no direct links to the lexia from any other lexia (139). The lexia itself involves the creature thanking Mary Shelley for both creating her and loving her. While the content of the lexia does not seem directly to address issues of media, the fact that reading the entire novel is possible only by utilizing the maps lends importance to the idea that the maps are far more, for Jackson, than just a navigational tool. I would also suggest that since this lexia is clearly written in the voice of the creature, addressing Mary Shelley for penning her into existence, it lends credence to the idea that “Treemap,” with its combination of print space and hypertext time, might be the best representation of the patchwork girl’s body.

*Patchwork Girl* presents print as the remediated companion to, rather than the opponent of or a precursor to, hypertext. Hypertext clearly offers Jackson a medium and a metaphor for exploring the fragmented nature of subjectivity, a fragmentation that has long been associated with the feminine, though it is not exclusive to the female gender. This exploration of fragmentation makes sense, however, only within the context of the print tradition, as both a contrast to and a reevaluation of the association of print with qualities of permanence and wholeness. *Patchwork Girl* therefore references both print and hypertext in order to question how our world and sense of self are structured by both the illusion of wholeness and the impossibility of complete fragmentation.

Though Jackson does use the capabilities and associations of hypertext to enhance her discussion of feminist concerns, she does not suggest that the same ideas could not be expressed in print or that hypertext holds some special connection to feminism. Like the creature herself, Jackson's feminism is difficult to pin down to one particular material form. Rather than continue to bracket *Patchwork Girl* as a great work of hypertext, we should consider it as part of the continuing debates about the future of the book, the materiality of print, and the relationship between print and new media, along with the effects of these debates on the future of feminism. Rather than read *Patchwork Girl* as a paradigm of first-generation hypertexts, we can read the novel as a paradigm of the process of remediation, a process that Bolter and Grusin view as having a long history and an even longer future. Placed in this context, Jackson's novel becomes relevant to our current world, and thus its widely praised ruminations on femininity and bodies are rescued from a life on the fringes of literary study.

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