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**A Scrutinization of an Interactive Poem Faith in the Light of
Lyotard's *the Postmodern Condition and Issues of Legitimation***



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Abstract

This article generates an argument on how digital text challenges the concept of metanarratives and deviates from the norms of legitimized knowledge. By keeping this in mind, the current research will scrutinize an interactive poem *Faith* composed by Robert Kendall which challenges the traditional style of writing poetry. As the paper deals with interactive fiction using both textual and visual methods the poem is explored under the light of Lyotard's theory of End of Metanarratives which he introduced in his most influential work *The Postmodern Condition*. Postmodernism is defined as the "incredulity towards metanarratives". The findings show that digital literature is postmodern literature because like postmodernism, it challenges traditional writing style and considers non-linear plot as more valid in the postmodern world in contrast to chronological structure. Thus, to be concluded, the immense use of postmodern hallmarks in digital literature reflects delegitimation of knowledge.

Keywords: Legitimation, Delegitimation, Hypertext, Kinetic Poetry, Metanarratives, Postmodernity.

1. Introduction

The extensive usage of technology in current times forces the authors to search for innovative and technologically ingrained advanced means of communication. Regarding this, electronic text is intended to be produced, disseminated, and consumed by digital technology. Hence, e-lit, interactive fiction, techno-poetry, and many other genres are produced exclusively for digital platforms. Digital literature blurs the stout belief of linear, bounded, and fixed text. With a shift towards Postmodernism, it has been exposed that extension to the printed literature is possible through digitized texts where the text is available on a single click that connects other texts through hyperlinks. Therefore, Digital literature is born in the digital world, and this digitalization dives the readers into the era of hypertext, interactive fiction and electronic literature and blurs the boundaries between fact and the fiction, author and reader, as in digital texts the authoritative role of the author diminishes, it's upon the reader how they interpret the text and contribute to actively meaning making.

With the emergence of technology, electronic literature has become an important

discourse. It is not like Pulp fiction, but it is presented as an obstacle between digital and printed literature. Rettberg in *Electronic Literature* defines electronic literature as, “new forms and genres of writing that explore the specific capabilities of the computer and network- literature that would not be possible without the contemporary digital context” (Rettberg 8). He further delineates several forms of e-lit such as hypertext fiction, kinetic poetry, interactive fiction, chatterbots, computer generated stories, and poems created. In reference to this, *Disappearing Rain* is the best illustration of what is considered as hypertext fiction, where the reader is experiencing the shift in the center, for instance, like linear story plots in *Disappearing Rain* there is no protagonist but the characters are just chatterbots who are narrating their own stories by themselves.

Hypertext is one of the main trademarks of digital literature because without it the goal of digital text is unfinished. Hypertext poetry is one of the subcategories of digital texts, and it uses the components of hyperlinks which are embedded throughout the poem. Each hyperlink opens a new door for the reader to enter into the text, in order to understand the idea represented in the text. In relation to this, Rettberg quoted Funkhouser’s idea of Digital Poetry in *Electronic Literature* who elucidate digital poetry as “not a single form but rather a conglomeration of forms. He further asserts that a poem is a digital poem if computer programming or processes (software, etc.) are distinctively used in the composition, generation or presentation of the text” (Rettberg 102). Thus, this software generated poetry that incorporates hypermedia elements is known as kinetic poetry.

The multimodal capacities of a contemporary computer are explored through kinetic poetry, also known as interactive poetry. Digital text transforms the text into a moving visual in space and time, in contrast to printed text. According to Rettberg, “Words and letters are not only carriers of meaning but material objects that themselves have variable properties. Movement in digital poetry functions as a metaphorical figure with as much semantic intent and affect as the words” (Rettberg 102). Kinetic poetry works with time-based poetics; it is distinguished by the way that texts change through animation and the way that the movement conveys meaning. As a result, it would be difficult to create kinetic typography effects in parts because there

is no accepted language to express the precise movements of words or characters on a screen. Even if one made the effort to identify and map every conceivable movement of letters, it is unclear how these motions relate to certain poetic results. This novelty of the text identifies it as a work of Avant-grade literature, in which movements like Surrealism and Dadaism served as the ultimate justification for rejecting conventional poetic forms which were promoted by Romantic poets. The idea that poetry should be simple and portray the rustic life experience has faded away in e-lit. In digital poetry, as Rettberg elucidates; “Letters falling, fading, twisting, turning, layering, or overlapping on the screen can have many different meanings” (Rettberg 236). This hypermedia representation of e-text is evident in Reiner Strasser’s *in the white darkness*; the author has used various hypermedia elements which the reader can access on clicking pulsing dots. As the poem represents the theme of fragile memory, through clicking dots sometimes the reader encounters the pictures with some background sounds and sometimes by clicking dots text appears on screen.

1.1 Research Objective

1. To scrutinize that interactive poem *Faith* challenges the concept of grand-narratives and deviates from the norms of legitimized knowledge.

1.2 Research Question

1. How does the interactive poem *Faith* challenge the concept of grand narratives and deviates from the norms of legitimized knowledge?

1.3 Significance

The goal of the research is to bring about change and to edify society with new knowledge and ways of thinking. Similar to this, the goal of the current study is to inform students of literature that with the rise of postmodernism, the Classical and Raphaelite movements have been transformed into new forms of communication and the knowledge that was once considered as a grand narrative is not valid today. This change in knowledge after modernity familiarizes us with a new field of study known as digital literature. In contrast to conventional printed literature, digital literature provides new methods for reading and writing traditional texts. With digital text, readers have the chance to assume a leading role in the narrative.

1.4 Delimitations

The present study is limited to the boundaries of electronic literature. The researchers have selected an interactive poem, *Faith* composed by Robert Kendall, to highlight the newness in the knowledge that digital literature provides us. The poem is analyzed under the glance of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, which is a full debate on the end of the theory of legitimation of meta-narratives.

1.5 Literature Review

Postmodernism is a phenomenon driven by the media; it is a maverick approach to discern the world. Postmodernism carries vagueness with itself, like we have multiple ways to write this one word for instance, Postmodernism, Postmodernism, Postmodern and Pomo. Since the shift in the style gives it a different meaning which delineates that the absoluteness of the meaning is lost. Postmodernism is not simply propped up by aesthetics isms or Avant garde movements like conceptualism and minimalism. It has its own way to see the world as a whole. Postmodern quality can be seen in Carl Andres's work piles of bricks Equivalent VIII (1966) which disturbs a lot of people when shown in Tate Library, London in 1976. Hence, postmodernism theory contains multiple variations that create complications. Though, Modernism is also illusive nevertheless allusivity multiplies in Postmodernism.

Postmodernism erases the boundaries and pretty similar to it, Digital Text blurs the boundaries between author and reader. In other words, the role of the author is diminishing in digital texts, and it's upon the reader how he interprets the text and can add more into it. In many digital shows like *Disappearing Rain*, *ECLiPSE*, *Text Rain* the readers can see the shift from traditional narrative to a multi narrative digital plot which are established by the use of various hypermedia elements. Moreover, as Lyotard asserts that postmodern condition does not allow totalizing knowledge or theories. Similarly, Digital texts defy the idea of Metanarratives and consider mini narratives as a focal point. *ECLiPSE* is based on many different plots which delineates a rejection to a single idea and emphasizes multiple narratives within a single story. Henceforth, this fragmentation in the story challenges the idea of a linear structure or a single coherent narrative. A similar idea is also replicated in *Disappearing Rain* where we encountered four different stories with no plot and conclusion to it.

The Postmodern Condition (La Condition Postmoderne) by Jean Francois Lyotard,

which was published in 1979, established postmodern as a new lexicon. By looking into language use, he discovered a postmodern experimental language game that combines science and technology. In his book *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard first articulated his groundbreaking theory of postmodernism. It is a knowledge report. He specifically identified the postmodern as skepticism of metanarratives. These metanarratives, which ground and justify knowledge and cultural practices, are stories about history and the aspirations of the human race, whether they are explicitly stated or not. These metanarratives were crucial to the course of history because they were employed for enlightenment. The difference between modernity and postmodernity is that the former is the era of metanarrative legitimation, while the latter is the era of metanarrative bankruptcy. According to Lyotard, the postmodern condition does not permit totalizing knowledge, so the focus of epistemology has been shifted to ontology. Thus, Lyotard has created his theory of the end of metanarratives by developing his own interpretation of what tends to be agreed upon by postmodernist theorists that postmodernity is an era of fragmentation and pluralism (Chalise 1).

The Postmodern Condition makes an analysis of the status of knowledge and explores the radical effect that occurred due to certain technological advancements that have taken place since the Second World War. According to Lyotard, computerization is seen as a problem to legitimate knowledge because in the digital world, only digital contents are acceptable, delineating that digitalization is one of the most important key traits of postmodernism and thus digital literature is marked as postmodern literature where we find the computerized literary texts and explore the scope of such hypertexts in the 21st century. Digital literature is a form of literature born in the digital world and this type of literature is not meant to be printed because it contains hypermedia elements and the incorporation of these elements, digital texts challenge the notions of traditional texts by effacing the notion of traditional legitimate knowledge. Hypertexts, Interactive Fiction, non-linear plots, hyperfiction, postmodern modification, and paradigm shift are considered as hallmarks of digital literature. Digitalization of literary text is preceded by the theory of Digital Humanities. It is an emerging method to use technological information as a tool of research in the field of traditional humanities. Hence, it promotes and upbrings our

knowledge of culture through digital culture which is based on hyperfiction. With regards to this, the current research will scrutinize Kendall's *Faith* by using the lens of Lyotard's end of metanarratives.

An instance of a postmodern digital poem that questions conventional ideas of poetry and communication is Robert Kendall's composition of *Faith*. Being a digital poem, it combines text, sound, and visuals to produce an immersive, multi-layered experience that engages the reader or viewer on various levels. The poem incorporates postmodern themes like fragmentation, multimodality, interactivity, and non-linearity, which are important aspects of postmodernism. The poem's disjointed structure reflects postmodernism's emphasis on the disintegration of conventional narratives and the rejection of meaning that cannot be changed. According to Fredrich Jameson, the postmodern writer responds to the wealth of information available by dismantling conventional narrative structures and producing fragmented, non-linear texts. According to him, postmodern language is fragmented and lacks clarity, much like the speech of a person who has recently experienced trauma. As we can see, the poem does not follow a linear narrative or structure and is made up of a number of disjointed lines and phrases. As time goes on, random word fragments that eventually form sentences start to appear on the screen. Each of the poem's brief stanzas contains a unique idea or image. The juxtaposition of these stanzas results in an unsettling and unpredictable feeling. Thus, the whole poem from beginning to end reflects how kinetic poetry can show deviation from traditional norms by challenging the very idea of absolute knowledge which was considered metanarrative till modernism.

2. Theoretical Framework

The shift towards postmodernism changes the grand idea of knowledge as being a grand narrative of civilizing force into a commodity. Before this shift, knowledge was conceptualized as a grand narrative which was intended to improve human conditions like an enlightenment project, but this post-industrial age erased the notions of legitimation of knowledge and reduced it to a mini narrative. With this, Lyotard argues that "knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valued in new production: in both cases the goal is exchange" (Lyotard 31). By using Lyotard's idea that knowledge is no longer a grand narrative,

this paper will scrutinize Kendall's *Faith* in the light of Lyotard's idea of end of metanarratives which he introduced in his highly influential work *The Postmodern Condition*.

2.1 Legitimation

Postmodernism is incredulity towards metanarratives. In a context where narratives are accounts of things, metanarratives are totalizing accounts that go beyond the individual narrative and offer overarching philosophies. Just like narratives are Theological, metanarratives have a bigger aim of explaining phenomena in pretty simple terms. Enlightenment is a metanarrative which is based on many smaller narratives of logic, science and progress and has the aim to make the world believe that logic will remedy all the ills of human civilization. Lyotard asserts that in the postmodern world such metanarratives will not abide as the postmodern condition doesn't allow for totalizing knowledge because this knowledge is delegitimized in the postmodern world. "We no longer have recourse to the grand narratives; we cannot resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse" (Lyotard 87). Thus, this no longer recourse to grand narrative elucidates that we are living in the world of mini narratives and in digital literature considered these mini-narratives as stories within stories that helps us to comprehend the change a postmodern theory brings into an absolute knowledge. "But we have just seen, the little narrative [petit recit] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science" (Lyotard 87). Hence, the idea that legitimation is necessary has faded away with the transformation from modern to postmodern times.

2.2 Delegitimation

Metanarratives are no longer legitimized but are delegitimized. Lyotard argues that since the Second World War the decline towards these grand-narratives has been visible because different techniques and technological advancements have been blossoming. He mentions, "In contemporary society and culture-post-industrial society, postmodern culture- the question of legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narratives have lost their credibility regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is speculative narrative or a

narrative emancipation” (Lyotard 64). This formulation of knowledge into different terms introduces to us a new way of writing a text in contrast to traditional writing known as digital literature.

Modernity is influenced by the traditional style of writing a narrative, but postmodernity introduces a digital technique to readers to create a text known as hypertext. Hypertext is a digital term coined by Nelson in 1963, and he defines it as a non-sequential writing. Thus, by navigating a hypertext, readers can explore different stories present in one digital text. Well, many examples are penned down: Hypertexts in digital narrative are important because it helps in the functionality of the text without hypertext exploring a digital text is impossible. In Taylor’s *ECLiPSE* the reader can see how the stories are embedded within the stories through hypertext. As current research is dealing with Kendall’s *Faith*, another best illustration of interactive fiction where the reader is playing an active role as author because by clicking given hyperlinks the viewer is compiling the whole story. The reason to mention the idea of hypertext is to reflect Delegitimation of grand narratives. The narratives which were considered once as grand, can be transformed into multiple shapes through different technological techniques. Hence, we are living in the era where “New languages are added to the old ones” (Lyotard 67).

3. Method and Methodology

Respectively, this paper will scrutinize an interactive poem *Faith* composed by Kendall in the light of Lyotard’s theory of end of metanarratives. Our utmost focus for this research would be on Lyotard’s highly influential work *The Postmodern Condition* where he introduced different concepts like Legitimation and Delegitimation which help us to analyze this digital poem. The research is qualitative in its nature and in order to analyze the interactive poem, the researchers will use textual and visual analysis for the interpretation of the text. Moreover, different hallmarks of postmodernism are used to justify that the idea of grand narratives is not valid in the postmodern and digital world.

4. Analysis and Findings

Joseph Smith depicts that postmodernism is the embrace of the uncertainties of discourse. Digital literature is postmodern literature because like Postmodernism it

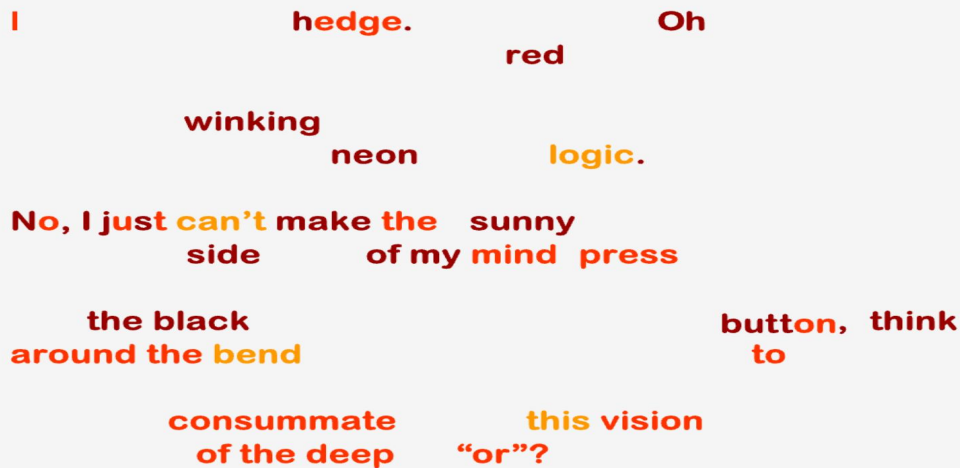
rejects the traditional forms of writing, this shift in writing style constitutes a powerful cause of paranoia of the age. In printed works, the idea of authority is only associated with the authors only, but in electronic literature the authority is shifted towards the readers. This modification in authority delineates the loss of absoluteness of meaning. This loss of absoluteness takes us to the rejection of legitimization of knowledge. Postmodernism in its simplifying terms is incredulity towards Metanarratives. As Lyotard asserts that postmodern condition does not allow totalizing knowledge or theories. In *The Postmodern Condition* he argues that “Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorised in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange” (Lyotard 31). Similarly, Digital texts defy the idea of Metanarratives and consider mini-narratives as a focal point.

By keeping this in mind, this paper shows how Robert Kendall's poem *Faith* is an illustration of kinetic poetry that questions conventional ideas about poetry and communication and delegitimize them. Being an Interactive poem, it combines text, sound, and visuals to produce an immersive, multi-layered experience that engages the reader or viewer on various levels. The poem's disjointed organization reflects postmodern emphasis on the disintegration of conventional narratives and rejection of fixed meaning. In this paper, we will proceed our discussion by elucidating some of the some of the postmodernist traits which are incorporated in digital literature, and we will highlight how these postmodern trademarks connect Kendal interactive poetry *Faith* with the idea of Delegation.

One of the crucial traits of postmodernism is its nonlinear plot which delineates how postmodern texts frequently question conventional linear narrative structures. As mentioned earlier, digital literature is postmodern literature hence digital text uses various aspects for instance; fragmented timelines, multimodality and multiple themes in a single narrative to create a sense of disorientation and uncertainty rather than telling a story in chronological order. Kendal's *Faith* is a representation of a non-chronological order where letters and words are flying, spinning, appearing, and fading. The word “logic” in the poem appears three times then vanishes abruptly without any alert. Similarly, the poem begins with a single

word and by clicking again and again the reader is compiling the whole poem. In contrast, if we look at the structure of a traditional poem, where the theme is fixed, the structure is linear, and the reader is unable to play any active role while reading the text. Henceforth, this shift from traditional to digital firstly changes the idea of linear plotting of text which ultimately resists that knowledge is legitimized. According to Lyotard, "In contemporary society and culture-post-industrial society, postmodern culture- the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (Lyotard 64). Thus, Kendall's *Faith* is not initially composed; instead, the reader is there who is composing it by clicking certain hyperlinks present there reflecting the loss of credibility and end of conventional narrative structures which poetry and many other genres follow.

Another trademark of kinetic poetry is multimodality. It is also called a postmodern pastiche where the elements of hypermedia such as images, sounds, videos, and hyperlinks are embedded together. This multimodality notion allows the reader to move into the virtual world, and they consider the virtual world as the real world delineates simulacrum. Strasser's *in the white darkness* where the author has used various hypermedia elements which the reader can access on clicking pulsing dots. As the poem represents the theme of fragile memory, through clicking dots sometimes the reader encounters the pictures with some background sounds and sometimes by clicking dots text appears on screen. Similarly, in *Faith* Kendall has used multiple hypermedia elements, like sounds when words are spinning, and vanishing. Each word appears with different sounds, zooming in and out on some words in order to put emphasis like the word "leap" is zoomed out to the extent that it is blurring the whole poem, different colours were used by the author to reflect different multiple meanings. Some letters are inverted; some words are tilted and embedded in different colours. In the end, the whole poem is falling down reflecting disorientation.



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I step to the idea edge elegantly and oh so ultimately, not just any watered-down walking out

but a fine wine of leave taking, a full-bodied forgoing-going-gone upon the logic lip.

No, I just can't make the usual sense anymore so I'll simply stride out of my mind, press my foot firmly

into the black, all-but-bottomless chasm beyond the brink, around the bend, off the rocker (yippee!), to leave behind

only this consummate poem, this visionary, incorruptible transcript of the deeper world's One True Word:

Leap

Now . . . ➤

◀ replay

just

to

sum

up:



(Faith https://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/kendall_faith/index.htm)

The poem looks like this, thus by adding hypermedia elements in the poem Kendall made this poem a postmodern work which is becoming a paranoia of the age. For Lyotard, postmodernism is characterized by the loss of belief in metanarratives, and the same is digital text. By looking at the given images, the reader can assume that *Faith* is a postmodern work that is rejecting the notion of epistemological knowledge

and bringing forth the reader to ontological knowledge where the reader by himself is playing the role of the author.

Interactivity is considered a postmodern phenomenon because it challenges the traditional notion of art as a static, one-way communication between the artist and the reader. Instead, interactivity allows for a more dynamic and participatory relationship between the artist and the reader. The poem is designed to be experienced as an interactive piece, with the reader encouraged to click on different elements to reveal hidden text or trigger sound effects. For example, in one section of the poem, the reader can click on a hyperlink given at the end of the poem to reveal hidden text which falls slowly or spinning and eventually holds its place. This interactivity allows the reader to engage with the poem in a more active and participatory way. To reiterate, this poem is considered as a rejection to legitimation of knowledge because in traditional narratives illustration of such hypermedia elements is not possible neither it allows the reader to play an author role.

Legitimation is the key in postmodernism but in metanarratives there is no legitimation. Lyotard states in *The Postmodern Condition*, “We no longer have recourse to the grand narratives- we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity” (Lyotard 87). Postmodernism defies the idea that art should be a fixed object that the viewer/reader simply receives and interprets. Instead, there is an emphasis on fluidity and multiplicity of meaning, and a recognition that different media can communicate meaning in different ways. *Faith* includes a wide range of multimedia elements, including text, logo, and sound which make it like an animation. For example, zooming out of the word “Leap” which distorts the entire poem shows the emphasis of the author on a specific word. The phrase “off the rocker (yippee!)” in the middle of a line is tilted below and appears to fall like a leaf, showing losing faith as he says in the previous “I’ll simply stride out of my mind”. The visual effect of tilting or falling words endorses the theme of losing faith to enhance the effect of the poem. The

Use of moving words creates a powerful emotional effect that would not be possible with text alone. In another section, there is a looping ding-ding sound effect that adds to the poem's multimodality and unconventionality. Therefore, the effect of

the poem is enhanced with the moving words, use of sounds, and use of hyperlinks which jumps the reader/viewer from one section to the other. Hence, it can be concluded that anything that is not transformed into a digital medium will not be considered “knowledge” as per Lyotard's conception of knowledge. Knowledge in the digital world is only acceptable by having postmodern traits within it. That's why Lyotard asserts that we no longer recourse to grand narratives because in postmodern condition it does allow totalizing knowledge and theories.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, just like postmodernism, digital literature defies the idea of grand narratives. By exploring *Faith*, it has been discovered that the idea of representation of knowledge as concrete, absolute is not more valid today as we can see the use of multiple hypermedia elements, hypertext which are used throughout the poem in order to produce its meaning and further the meaning or theme is not absolute but unpredictable the reader is not familiar with its next move. Thus, navigation plays an integral role in exploring digital texts while in traditional printed literature we don't have such techniques that authors can use while writing a narrative. Therefore, technological advancements are enlightening readers and writers with new ways of generating knowledge and defying the traditional ways of writing. This refusal to traditional writing style reflects that today the use of knowledge is no more than a commodity. Thus, by using Lyotard's theory it has been proved that legitimization has no relation with digital literature, but it promotes the idea of delegitimizing knowledge.

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