Hypertext: Theory into Practice The Operating Mechanisms of Hypertextuality in *Foe, Poor Things* and *Pale Fire*

Norbert Gyuris

There can be no user of the worldwide computer network who is not familiar with the mechanisms and the operation of that special text-system which is built up from the most various data placed on the millions of servers or hosts that function as a domain to form a retrieval system. The data programmed to be available for the most remote users by a mere click on a link or image, most frequently appears on the screen of the visitors of the Net as a particular type of text, widely known as the hypertext. While computer-literate people or the readers of the Internet are aware of the qualities and the characteristics of the operation of the hypertext, scholars working in the field of literary theory and interpretation—since they are practicing readers of the older, more conventional linear, printed text that mainly takes the form of the book—do not or cannot take the new text organization, the hypertext, into consideration. However, computer text theories find their way into printed literature, and this study will show how certain books and their printed characters—not made up from pixels but ink—conform to the hypertext or show the peculiarities of a printed hypertext. In addition, two of the analyzed texts—the prize-winning *Pale Fire* and *Foe*, by Vladimir Nabokov and J. M. Coetzee respectively—were written when only the theoretical foundation of the earlier, not so sophisticated ancestor of the worldwide web, the gopher, which started out as a smaller information system between a couple of American universities, was set up. The third text to be examined is the Booker Prize-winner *Poor Things* by Alasdair Gray, the distinguished Scottish writer. The reading of his book will also show that the appearance of hypertextuality is not only restricted to computer-generated texts, but that its conceptual traces may be found in printed literature as well. The aim of this study is not to give an overall and intensive analysis of the works instead, it concentrates on the structural analysis of the hypertextual system that produces the fabric of the texts.

Hypertext: Theoretical Background

George P. Landow's *Hypertext* reveals how the concept of hypertextuality, which has become well-known in the computer world, is applicable to the interpretation of literary works.

> [Hypertext is] an ideal textuality that precisely matches that which has come to be called computer hypertext—text composed of blocks of

words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality.... "In this ideal text," says Barthes, "the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest... we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one..." (3)

Hypertext is built from lexias, decentralized parts of text which are on the same hierarchical level. The term lexia was coined by Roland Barthes, who uses it to distinguish the parts of a text similar to the build-up of the series of the orchestral scores in a classical musical piece (58). Such a coordination is the consequence of the special characteristics of the texts constructing the hypertext. Each block of text is meaningful as a separate unit, but does not carry individually the complex messages and meanings of the entire text. Each part of the text enlarges the meaning of the text-network and gives new aspects to it. The coordinated blocks of the text build up a *network* and if a block of text is taken or cut from the others, the meaning of this particular block of text is lost, although the network still remains a meaningful system. The blocks of text are connected by *links*, similarly to the operation of an interactive, computer generated picture each text can be reached from anywhere, and even if several of them are arranged on one screen, they can be examined and observed at the same time. From the practical aspect the links are connecting points between the texts, with their help several texts are connected to a number of the blocks, similar to the nervous system, where each neuron can be attached to several others by nerve fibers. The special feature of these electronic texts is that their system is a complex, open and never complete network, which may always be extended by new points of connection (Barthes 3-15). This is the reason why a hypertext is beyond the limits of the printed text, a book. While a traditional book cannot be extended after it has been printed, bound and published, the hypertext may obtain new blocks of text and new layers of meaning can be carried by the new blocks. Although a printed book sets physical boundaries to the number of the blocks of text, new readings and further investigations of the connections between the blocks of text may increase the number of its links. With the help of computers practically any literary work may be compiled into a hypertext by building the network of criticisms, interpretations, biographical data or later rewritings of the original text. (For instance, let us imagine *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* compiled into a computer generated network with all the possible links to data on the readings of the novels and events from Brontë's life etc.)

Links as Connecting Points Between the Dissimilarity of Lexias*foe*

The first book to be investigated is J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, since among the three books this study examines *Foe* as the most inelaborate from the point of view of hypertextuality. The reading concentrates on the fourth part of *Foe*, which shows precisely how the lexias can contain more or less the same elements while focusing on an identical topic, and the examined fourth chapter also reveals how new meaning is attached to the blocks of text, thus creating a system that still remains meaningful if one lexia is lost. (It has to be added here that the South-African J. M. Coetzee is not only the renowned author of such masterpieces as *In the Heart of the Country* and *The Life and Times of Michael K.*, but he is a computer scientist and a

linguist, too, and thus it is understandable that either deliberately or by chance his works bear traces of hypertextual characteristics.)

Even the title of the book refers to the main theme and suggests that *Foe* is the rewriting of Daniel Defoe's famous novel, *Robinson Crusoe*. Therefore *Foe* becomes a lexia, which can be viewed by a click on its title, and forms one block of text in a greater hypothetical hypertext system which contains the various rewritings of the Crusoe-myth: poems like Derek Walcott's *Crusoe's Journal*, A. D. Hope's *Man Friday*, Adrian Mitchell's *The Castaways or Vote for Caliban*, and novels like Jane Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter* or J. M. Wyss' *The Swiss Family Robinson*. Naturally, depending on the size of the hypertext system and the number of links, the Crusoe-discourse could be extended to the motif of the lonely hero(es) on a remote and desolate island and thus the number of blocks could reach an extremely high number. One could include links pointing to texts or lexias like William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, R. M. Ballantyne's *Coral Island*, R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, or crossing the genre-boundaries, one may switch to the filmic text, Adrien Mitchell's movie, *Man Friday*, based on the novel by Michael Tournier. In addition, the hypothetical hypertext page set up above could be extended by other links to interpretations of these works or could contain links leading to Coetzee's homepage, data on the author's oeuvre and the authors of criticism dealing with the Crusoe-discourse. Thus a megasystem unfolds in which even the slightest marks of the Crusoe-discourse would comply with the hypertext system of the myth and appropriate and minute linking would lead the reader of such a text to the most remote areas of literature. It can also be assumed that literature as such could be regarded as a huge hypertext-system, in which links could build up such paths which lead to the most various fields of the entire network.

As was mentioned above, *Foe* is a rewriting of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, or as Angela Carter put it, it is "putting new wine in old bottles" (131). The Coetzee version can be examined from a multitude of points of viewfeminism, postcolonialism, postmodernism etc.—as the narrator is mostly Susan Barton, a female castaway who lives for some time on Cruso's island. Moreover, Friday's tongue is cut out and he is therefore silent—or a silenced subaltern. The book is structured into four parts; the first chapter is about Susan's life on the island, where Cruso is vainly building terraces for agricultural purposes—he has no seed to sow—and tries to make ends meet. There are several differences between Cruso's island and that of Robinson Crusoe, but this study is not going to deal with these dissimilarities in depth, as the scope of the paper is to center on the differences of the blocks of text. Cruso dies on the ship that finally rescues him, Susan, and Friday from the island. As Friday is mute, no one can tell what the truth behind Cruso's story is and Susan wants to give an account of Cruso's life. Since she is incapable of putting down the story, she hires the author, Foe, to write the story, but he wants to change the main concept and would give the following title to the story: "The Female Castaway. Being a True Account of A Year Spent on a Desert Island. With Many Strange Circumstances Never Hitherto Related" (67). Instead of investigating the truth his goal is to publish a marketable book, and so the first draft is quickly filled with fictitious events to make the book more adventurous. In the meantime, Friday cannot be taught to speak, and Susan's repeated efforts to get the underlying truth out of him by drawings also fail. Friday's speechlessness is the key to Susan's plan, according to which she wants to reach down to the truth in the depth of Cruso's and

Friday's secret and myth. The only place where Friday tells his story is the fourth part.

The fourth chapter starts with the very same sentence that launched the third part: "The staircase was dark and mean" (153). In this chapter the narrator is not Susan any longer, but a still unknown self that was not present in the book until this point. The final part of *Foe* can be divided into two structural units. The second unit repeats the first one, but this repetition is not performed word by word, so it is neither complete nor exact. The second unit differs from the first one in the presentation of the same motif, for example in the first unit the moon shines in through the window, while in the second part the time of narration is pinned down as a sunny autumn day. Nevertheless, in both units the narrator has to light a candle, in the first case it has to be done because of the nighttime shade, in the second part because "light does not penetrate these walls" (155). In both cases the woman and the man are lying in the bed, but their position is dissimilar: the first time it is "side to side," while the second time it is "face to face" (153, 155). Furthermore, the similarity between the deep structures of the two lexias can be propped up by the motif of the body lying on the stairs. When the narrator enters the house, the following picture is seen: "The staircase is dark and mean. On the landing I stumble over a body" (153). The second unit is similar: "I enter... On the landing I stumble over the body, light as straw, of a woman or a girl" (155). In both cases the narrator steps in the room, this movement from the outside to the inside is expressed by the description of the staircase in the first version, and it is functionally identical with the verb "enter" in the second unit. In both instances the narrator stumbles into a body, here even the very words correspond. The only difference can be distinguished in the usage of the definite and indefinite articles, but this division is a seeming one in fact both blocks of text speak about an unidentified figure. In the first version it is put the following way: "By the light of a match I make out a woman or a girl.... She weighs no more than a sack of straw" (155), while in the other block it is also unidentifiable whether the figure in the landing is a woman's or a girl's. The two lexias are identical only in one aspect: in both cases the age of the woman-figure is uncertain, so indefiniteness proves to be the link between the blocks. In the same way the body of the woman-girl proves to be weightless, as both versions compare the weight of the body to straw and thus characterize the figure as a light-weight person.

Such parts can also be found in the units when a particular element is present in the first unit and it is missing from the second one and vice versa. In the first version a rat runs through the room—in the second one the narrator does not mention this fact. The second unit, as it is considerably longer than the first one, contains several elements and episodes that are missing from the first version: the house, which the narrator enters, is Daniel Defoe's abode, a necklace-like scar can be seen on Friday's neck, etc. Since both of the versions center around the same theme—the narrator enters the house, where a couple is sleeping, Friday is lying in the alcove and the girl on the stairs—it can be assumed that the parts are in a certain relation to each other and that they are variations on the same theme. Other interpreters drew a similar conclusion: "Then there comes a break in the text and Part IV begins again" (Marshall 51). The text seems to start again, but it is not exactly a restart as the texts are not the same but variations of one theme. The two blocks of text can be easily mistaken for one unit that starts again, still the differences between the lexias

show that the fourth chapter consists of two almost identical versions, and these variations are not exactly the same. "In hypertext systems, links within and without a text—intratextual and intertextual connections between points of text (including images)—become equivalent, thus bringing texts closer together and blurring the boundaries between them" (Landow 61). The division of the two units is obscure, the lexias seem to blend into each other, but they are not identical and, therefore, they behave similarly to the blocks of text in a hypertext system, where one lexia supplements other blocks or texts, still if one lexia is omitted from the system, the whole remains a meaningful network, only the extra meanings and the actions of the given block being lost. In the fourth part of *Foe* the second unit contains Friday's underwater speech, and in the small bilateral hypertext system of this chapter this loss is a considerable one, as at least half of this hypertext system is lost if the second unit is not taken into account. It is a surplus attribute of the text that Friday does not reveal his story in syllables, which would give a solution to Susan's quest for truth. "His mouth opens. From inside comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me [the narrator] it passes through the cabin, through the wreck washing the cliffs and the shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth" (156). Friday's medium is water, his world can be found under the water. From his mouth ideas and thoughts flow, they describe Cruso's island, tell his own and Cruso's story, create the essence of the world found under water and the textual surface of the hypertext. His thoughts are ebbing freely as waves and draw the attention not on the meaning of the given lexia but on the intertextual links or connections between the parts, or the blocks of text of *Foe*.

The hypertextual structure of the fourth part of *Foe* is constructed by two units and the analysis of these blocks of text has revealed how two lexias can form a relationship which is characteristic of hypertextual linking. Naturally, blocks of text may be present in a hypertextual network in a practically unlimited number. The interpretation of *Poor Things* casts light on a trilateral hypertextual relationship.

The Combination of Lexias: *Poor Things*

Poor Things is based on the topos of the found manuscript: it is a pseudo-Victorian story of Archibald McCandless, a "Scottish Public Health Officer" (5), who falls in love with his professor's adopted daughter. The university teacher and inventor, Godwin Baxter is involved in the study of and experiments on vivisection: not only his white and black rabbits, Flopsy and Mopsy are operated on so that their body parts are exchanged, but his "daughter" is the result of an experiment as well. He finds the pregnant Bella after she has unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide and vivisects her body. As her brain is dead, God(win) places the brain of Bella's fetus into the woman's skull. The plot follows the narratives of McCandless, Bella and Wedderburn, with whom Bella elopes before her marriage with Archibald McCandless. Even the structure of the book offers an excellent possibility of hypertextual analysis, as the vantage points differ throughout the narration, and various points of view and focalizers make up the varied network of the story, thus creating an extended network of narration. The change of focalization and the vantage points establish a fragmented and multisequential foundation to the text as *Poor Things* utilizes a wide range of narrational techniques: Bella's elopement with Wedderburn is narrated by the gradually developing mental abilities of Bella, by Wedderburn's

hysterical letters reporting the enormous sexual appetite of Bella, and by McCandless, who comments on the events reported in the letters. Not only does embedded narration draw attention to the fragmented structure of the book, but *Poor Things* also contains "A Letter to Posterity" (249-76) written by Victoria McCandless (earlier Bella Baxter) and "Notes Critical and Historical" (277-317) by an exterior author-figure of the book, Alasdair Gray, who provides the readers with mainly fictional data to prop up the credibility of the story.

The structure of *Poor Things* can be divided into four parts as regards the points of view. The authorial introduction and the critical notes provide a frame to the found manuscript, which consists of McCandless', Bella's and Wedderburn's narration. In addition, Bella also writes a letter of criticism about the falsity and the drawbacks of her late husband's, McCandless' story. These vantage points create a multilinear system, in which every vantage point offers a surplus interpretation of the events narrated from different points of view. If the hypertextual network of the book is set up, the following blocks of text can be differentiated. "Alasdair Gray's" claim to authenticity in the "Introduction" and the "Notes Critical" tries to validate the book as a true story which took place at the approach to the twentieth century. Archibald McCandless' version constitutes the second lexia, which narrates the events as seen by the doctor. The third block is Wedderburn's letter as embedded into McCandless' narration, while the fourth is itself a fragmented system which could be further split up into a smaller network: the intratextual links between Bella's and Victoria's (one and the same person's) story give an insight into the process of the girl's maturation from the point of her own child's brain, which is installed into her skull. In this fourth lexia alone at least two sub-blocks can be separated. Bella's letters reveal how the childish perspective changes from the phase of the Shakespearean way of writing to the phases of more colloquial and fluent narration. Victoria's "A Letter to Posterity" written near the end of her life reveals a sound character, a mature personality, who has her own developed thoughts, opinions and evaluations about the events that happened in her and her husband's life.

The above-mentioned four lexias are constituents of one hypertextual system, *Poor Things*. The book could be read leaving out any of the narrations, as the reading would lose only parts of the whole. Wedderburn's letters are contradicted by Bella's letters to the same extent as McCandless' narration is disputed by Victoria's point of view as elaborated on in "A Letter to Posterity." The author's verifying, authenticating intrusion into the discourse of the blocks of *Poor Things* further emphasizes the feeling of the diffracted build-up of the text and reveals that the lexias converse with each other. Each block of text has got its own vantage point and offers an answer to the questions raised by the other blocks. Through this peculiar discourse of the lexias the ultimate democracy of the hypertext can be discovered: none of the blocks are hierarchically higher than others, they do not fall into a paradigm instead, they build up a syntagmatic, metonimic relationship between the blocks of text. Whenever one lexia is read, the reader accepts the notions and opinions of the given narrator, but on reading another block a special conversation between the lexias can be experienced which results in total undefinability: the interpretations of the lexias become dependent on one another. One block of text may give an account of one event, but as soon as there is another lexia throwing a different light on the particular event, the first reading of the story is invalidated by the second one. Naturally, the reader or the interpreter may choose one distinguished

point of view and may relate all the other lexias to the chosen vantage point, but the outcome is only a false picture: in order to obtain the whole one must work through all the lexias and realize that there is no ultimate vantage point, the lexias are in mutual discourse with each other, therefore the ultimate reading or the final interpretation of the events can never be achieved.

Similar to the computer hypertext of the World Wide Web, where constitutional and ethical questions arise regarding the democracy of the submitted material, one single lexia cannot be given full credit before all the others are investigated. This proposes the question of epistemological constraints both in the case of printed hypertext systems (books) and their computer hypertext counterparts. In both cases the reading or the evaluation of the text is due to a democratic standpoint. In computer hypertext only those sites are removed by force from the Net which dangerously affect personal or unalienable rights and the same can be experienced in the publishing of certain printed texts, for example *Mein Kampf*, which is prohibited in certain countries (Germany, Hungary). In *Poor Things* none of the blocks could be prohibited, as the fiction supplies its fictional space with no democratic or ethical issues that could be compared to the same questions in present-day cultural discourse. This means that the interpretation of a printed hypertext remains open to the most democratic ways of evaluation or analysis. Therefore, interpretation and thinking about the book is always an open, never complete, multi-linked system, and as such becomes similar to the printed, decentralized hypertext it tries to interpret.

The conversation among or the discourse of the lexias in *Poor Things* can be traced back throughout the entire text, but one example will reveal how this characteristic of hypertext works in practice. The motif under examination is the moment when General Blessington shoots his earlier wife, Bella, in the toe. Three versions of this accident are given in the book, one by McCandless, a second one by Victoria (Bella) McCandless and a third one by the editor of the text, Alasdair Gray. Archibald McCandless comments on the events as follows: "The bullet had luckily gone clean into the carpet, puncturing the integument between the ulna and radius of the second and third metacarpals without even chipping a bone" (237). The second version is considerably different from the doctor's account, as Bella blames McCandless for incompetence and negligence of treating the truth properly. In Victoria's words, which can be found in "A Letter to Posterity" the event is the following:

> Why did he not make it more convincing? In the twenty second chapter, describing how my first husband shot me through the foot, he says "The bullet had luckily gone clean into the carpet, PUNCTURING THE INTEGUMENT BETWEEN THE ULNA AND RADIUS OF THE SECOND AND THIRD METACARPALS without even chipping a bone." The capitalized words might just convince someone who knows nothing of anatomy but they are blethers, havers, claptrap, gibberish, gobbledygook, and since Archie cannot have forgotten his medical training to that extent he must have known it. He could easily have said "puncturing the tendon of the oblique head of adductor hallucis between the great and index proximal phalanges without chipping a bone," because that was what happened. (274)

Victoria sticks to the truth and she only contradicts her husband to give an example in order to show that McCandless' book is "a cunning lie" (274). Therefore there is a more or less significant difference between the two versions, the two lexias, which are McCandless' book and Victoria's letter. While both of them narrate the same event, their vantage points and their narrator's interests differ, and so they come to dissimilar conclusions, in this case medical. In this way a disseminated picture is created in front of the reader's or the interpreter's eyes. The facts and the core of the events remain untouched by any of the versions (Blessington has shot Bella through the toe) nevertheless the account the lexias give slightly differ. The blocks of text supplement each other none of them can be taken to be the most truthful one, as Bella also misquotes the passage from McCandless' book. Victoria refers to the twenty-second chapter, in which the shooting is described while the scene is reported in the twenty-third chapter of McCandless' story. Therefore Bella's account loses its credibility at least to the same extent as McCandless' version may be interrogated by Bella's professional comment. In addition a third opinion is also represented by the pseudo-editor, the fictional author-figure, who makes the following remark in the "Notes Critical and Historical":

> If Dr. Victoria had loved her husband more she would easily have seen why he wrote this claptrap. Archibald McCandless obviously wanted her to edit his book for publication. This, the only part of it which she had the experience and medical training to correct, was his way of asking for her collaboration. But she could not see it. (302)

Thus a third opinion is heard about the events, and the question of truth remains open. The editor-author did not recognize the mistake Bella made when referring to the number of the chapter, thus his account and remark lack as much credibility if viewed from McCandless' block of text as from Bella's. At the same instance the fictitious editor also questions Victoria's competence to see the motives behind such a minor event in the book, and so he corrects Victoria's reading of McCandless' story. What emerges here is practically a discourse of interpretations, which never ends until all the relevant viewpoints are examined. In *Poor Things* there are only three different vantage points in the toe-accident, but further perspectives of the event would not elucidate the obscure events surrounding the toe-shooting.

None of the three lexias are distinguished as the authoritative version, they are on the same hierarchical level and thus they establish a syntagmatic structure based on a combinational scheme instead of a paradigmatic one. The word "toe" becomes the link (b, b', b'' Figure 1) which connects the three blocks of text and by clicking on this link all the three narratives appear on the theoretical "relevant pages found" screen showing the results of the search for the shooting in *Poor Things*. All the three lexias can be viewed as a combination of events, which finally constitute the three stories, and in this combination the toe link is just a particular one. Each of the versions narrates or comments on the same story, still they differ from each other. The given parts or building blocks of each story are practically the same, but they are arranged in a different manner and order or they are different as regards the extent of elaboration.

McCandless $a + b + c + d \ldots$

Victoria $a' + b' + c' + d' \ldots$

Editor $a'' + b'' + c'' + d''$.

     $b, b', b'' = \text{toe}$

Figure 1: The syntagmatic structure as combination in the lexias.

Figure 1 shows how the toe-related blocks of *Poor Things* are structured. For the sake of simplicity only three lexias are considered, here that of McCandless, Victoria and the editor. The structure of the blocks is similar: a, b, c, d... refer to the episodes, which all the three narrators explain. Naturally, it is both theoretically and practically possible to imagine and find episodes in any of the lexias which cannot be traced back in all of the three blocks. Therefore the hypertext has the opportunity to include certain episodes into the blocks of text which may not be found in all of the lexias. Although not indicated in Figure 1, it would be possible to mark them by letters x, y, etc. Thus x, since it cannot be found in any of the three lexias, may not stand as a link connecting the blocks, and it will be a special characteristic of the given lexia, in which x is present. Therefore the blocks of text become well-distinguished constituents of the system of the hypertext, and the lexias may gain their unique qualities and add surplus information to the total of the hypertext. Consequently, in the simplified pattern of Figure 1 a, b, c etc. stand for those events and episodes which are narrated in all the three texts. These episodes are metonimically arranged, their structure is combinational, so a, b, c, etc. are put parallelly, side by side in all of the three lexias. Still, any of the episodes represented by letters (a) are dissimilar to the nod-letters (a') and are also slightly different from the two-nod-letters (a''). While their core topic and focus are the same and the lexias present the events of these episodes in a different manner, it can also be observed that the outcome of the narrated events or the consequence they draw from the episode differs. This is why a democracy and dissemination of opinions or readings of the same incident are achieved and the diverse readings therefore establish one of the main qualities of hypertext: namely, that all the blocks beat around the same bush adding surplus information to the already existing ones. The opinions and vantage points expressed by the blocks of text may be dissimilar, and while the topic remains identical the lexias contribute to a deeper—or, in certain cases, more obscure—understanding of the main line of signification in the hypertext system.

    The structure of the lexias in the hypertext system is based on combination, but the frequent and manifold linking between the blocks creates a possibility which is of utmost importance. This potentiality proves to be supplied by selection, explained by Roman Jakobson in the following way: "The selection is produced on the base of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonimity, while the combination, the build up of the sequence, is based on contiguity. *The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*" (359). During the selection between the different versions of the blocks of text, the reader is in the position of deciding which version is

acceptable for his/her own particular point of view. Therefore a hypertext can be interpreted from various aspects and it creates a potentiality of readings. Concerning the toe-shooting incident one may decide whose opinion he or she accepts—that of Victoria, or McCandless, or that of the editor. The selection of one particular version brings forth the apparatus with which the reader receives the text, and defines the epistemological background of the interpretation. According to this a feminist reading of the accident would prefer Victoria's version, while positivist thinking would take the editor's critical notes as the most relevant part of the text. Naturally, it is of secondary importance which version is chosen as a vantage point. The text can be interpreted according to various ideologies, and this is what the theory of hypertext reinforces. The selection between the versions of the lexias becomes the foundation of the potentiality of the text paraphrase or reading are always less profound both in scope and the representation of thoughts, since one reading cannot give an overall and exhaustive analysis of the textit consistently remains merely an effort to understand the work. In the meantime the given reading utilizes the poetic function, as during the interpretation the potentiality of the syntagmatic order is projected into combination, and the links leading to various lexias are re- and reselected by the reader or the interpreter. Therefore the hypertext draws attention to the structural peculiarities of any literary text: the reading process chooses between the possible interpretation and (ab)uses the preferred one to build up its outcome, the reading. All the interpreters of literary texts are familiar with this phenomenon: the reading can never surpass the analyzed text, as it is merely a translation, a transposition into a known context, a paraphrasing of the interpreted text. According to the aforesaid, Figure 1 could be redrawn in the following way:

selection			
	McCandless	$a + b + c + d \ldots$	Block 1
	Victoria	$a' + b' + c' + d' \ldots$	Block 2
	Editor	$a'' + b'' + c'' + d''$.	Block 3
		c o m b i n a t i o n	

Figure 2: Combination and selection in the hypertext

The Network of Readings: *Pale Fire*

Pale Fire is similar to the structural build-up of *Foe* as regards the number of lexias. Nabokov's book also utilizes the possibilities of one story told from two different vantage points. "Pale Fire" is a poem in four cantos written by John Shade, an artist and university teacher in "New Wye, Appalachia, USA" (Nabokov 13). Charles Kinbote is a colleague of Shade's who moves into the house next to Shade's home, and can almost every morning "see the poet's slippered feet gently rocking" (23). Kinbote's aim is almost clearly formed in his narration: he tries to persuade Shade to incorporate episodes, events and motifs of the escape of the king, Charles II the Beloved, from the fictitious country of Zembla, "a distant northern land" (315). Contrary to Kinbote's expectations, the poem does not seem to mirror the stories of Kinbote, who also translates Shakespeare into Zemblan, a pseudo-

Russian language. After Shade's death Kinbote edits the poem and submits a Foreword, a Commentary, and an Index to the "Fair Copy" and the "Corrected Draft" of the poem by Shade (9, 14). The "Fair Copy" is the first draft of "Pale Fire" and in practice this is the "manuscript from which the present text has been faithfully printed, consists of eighty medium-sized index cards, on each of which Shade reserved the pink upper line for headings (canto number, date)" (13). Beside the widely and frequently used topos of the found manuscript and the editor, the structure of the manuscript shows that the work is itself fragmented: it resembles a hypertext system, where the blocks of text are the pages of the index cards and the links connecting them can be found in the heading of the cards.

Brian McHale sets up four hypotheses of the levels of interpretation in *Pale Fire*, according to which the text could be read and given credit. First, Kinbote may be the exiled Zemblan king himself and "Pale Fire" is the biography of Kinbote. In this case he is telling the truth. Secondly, Kinbote is really the king in exile, but he erroneously believes that Shade has incorporated his stories into the poem. The third reading would show that Kinbote is the Russian émigré, the academician Botkin, and Zembla is his invention. The fourth level would be the reading of a totally fictional ontological world, in which instance both the Shade-Pale Fire and Kinbote-Zembla couples are entirely fictional (McHale 18). McHale concludes in the following way:

> *Pale Fire*, in other words, is a text of absolute epistemological uncertainty: we know that something is happening here but we don't know what it is… Inevitably, epistemological doubt as total as this has ontological consequences as well in particular, the Kingdom of Zembla flickers in and out of existence, depending upon which hypothesis we choose… Thus we not only hesitate among hypotheses, but also between an epistemological and an ontological focus, making *Pale Fire* a text of limit-modernism, perhaps the paradigmatic limit-modernist novel. (19)

This criticism fails to interpret the discourse or the conversation of the four readings and employ the advantages given by hypertextual analysis. Both the epistemological and ontological concerns work as a function of hypertextual structure. Not only can the book be read as a hypertext, but the readings also show the peculiarities of a hypertextual system. Each of the four readings can be legitimate in themselves, they create the possible lexias of the hypertext system, which is constructed by all of the imaginable interpretations. Thus each reading is *one* possible lexia, which falls into the system of interpretations, and provides the potential variety of readings with one extremely important aspect of vantage point or interpretation. The reader therefore must not choose between one or two versions or hypotheses of the text to define the "epistemological and ontological focus" instead, the four interpretations together with all those interpretations, which have not been written, invented and thought about yet must be seen as the ontology of readings. Consequently, the hypertextual analysis enables the reader not to choose from the readings but to understand the analyzed work as a potentiality providing room for a multitude of interpretations. These readings *together* build up the total sphere, the entire decentralized and multilinear system of interpretations.

Elsewhere in *Postmodernist Fiction* McHale clearly observes the plurality of the parts of the text, in hypertext systems termed as lexias. The interweaving of different registers in the text of the novel produces the effect of *heteroglossia*, plurality of discourse and it is this concrete heteroglossia which serves as the vehicle for the confrontation and dialogue among world-views and ideologies in the novel, its orchestrated *polyphony* of voices (166). If Bakhtin's theory of polyphony and heteroglossia is maintained, and employed in the discourse of readings, the advantages of the hypertextual theory become clearly visible. Each reading constitutes a lexia and therefore provides the entirety of the system with a special point of view, from which the given block of textthe particular interpretationis absolutely legitimate. On the other hand this reading-lexia may differ from other lexias to a more considerable or lesser extent, therefore other, various readings can maintain their own legitimacy. The readings have a dialogue with each other and a discourse of readings is born from the dissimilarity of the interpretations. The hypertextual system of the readings supplies the always expandable area of the possible readings and thus makes all of them possible at the same time. The ontology and the epistemology of the interpreted fictional world is formed by the ontological and epistemological difference itself among the lexias.

The hypertextual reading of the system of interpretations can work in several ways. One may look up the links between the lexias of reading, and can examine what any of the readings has got to say, for instance about the question of ontological constraints in the interpretations. The hypertextual system of readings works similarly to the operation of the blocks of text in *Pale Fire*. One may read the book in a linear way, or lexia by lexia: Shade's poem first, then the comments of Kinbote and finally the index. It is also possible to read *Pale Fire* in a nonsequential way, in an alternating order: one could start with the commentary of Kinbote, if deciding to consider the academician's block as a distinguished one that provides the key to the understanding of the poem. It is also possible to start with the index, where the main characters of *Pale Fire* are listed, and, similarly to an Internet search, data in the form of episodes can be obtained by leaping from page to page. This, naturally, does not have to be performed in the increasing order of numbers.

> [Reading *Pale Fire*] even involves flipping from the main text in the front of the text to the commentary at the end, and back again. We are forced to manipulate the book as a physical object, thus never losing sight of the ontological "cut" between the projected world and the material book. This can be annoying, as any reader of books with footnotes printed at the end can attest but even annoyance can become a device of foregrounding. (McHale 192)

It is also possible to skip from reading to reading according to certain key-words, but the interpretations already available may be read in a linear order, as well. The hypertext makes it possible not to define one reading as the ultimate or final one instead, plurality in the varieties of readings is achieved: one can take the web of readings as *the* reading and therefore regard it as a process, a neverending series of the interpretational practice.

By way of conclusion, the argumentation above could analyze the operating mechanisms of the hypertextual system. Roland Barthes imagines the ideal textual-

ity as a texture that enables the reader to change his/her position from being merely a consumer or experiencer of the text to becoming the creator of the text (4). The operation of the hypertext system makes it feasible to create the scriptible or writerly text as opposed to lisible or readerly text, since the reader may recenter the hypertext by placing different lexias into central position. The focus of the reading is temporary, by promoting links leading to other lexias or variants of the text the potentiality of a different reading is established. As the center continually shifts, it is possible to reread the text from dissimilar vantage points and place marginal lexias and notions into central position. In this way a decentralized and multisequential textuality is constructed by the repeated interpretations in which the layers of meaning are multilinearly formed the parallelly accessible blocks of text build up a line of interpretation, which can be revalued from different positions over and over again.

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