Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Jennifer Shaffer April 6, 2017

The Effects of Digital Technology: Remix, Collaboration, and Authorship in Contemporary Writing

by

Jennifer Shaffer

Heather Julien
Adviser

Institute of the Liberal Arts

Heather Julien

Adviser

Peter Wakefield

Committee Member

Daniel LaChance

Committee Member

2017

The Effects of Digital Technology: Remix, Collaboration, and Authorship in Contemporary Writing

By

Jennifer Shaffer

Heather Julien

Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Institute of the Liberal Arts

2017

Abstract

The Effects of Digital Technology: Remix, Collaboration, and Authorship in Contemporary Writing

By Jennifer Shaffer

The goal of this thesis is to examine how digital technologies, specifically the use of the Internet as well as word processors, have affected contemporary and post-modern literature. Drawing upon secondary sources as well as interviews with Emory University students and professors, it aims to determine how forms of literature have expanded and converged, and whether or not the creative process behind the production of literature has shifted as a consequence of digital technologies. The thesis concludes that digitalization has maximized the process of manipulation, circulation, and collaboration within literature, thus contributing to the increase in experimental writing and reading techniques. Additionally, it argues that digital technology has diminished the significance and the responsibilities of the author, and reestablished the relationship between reader, writer, and text by emphasizing the medium rather than the final content itself. Finally, this thesis questions the importance of authenticity in contemporary literature, and suggests that as authorship is becoming less relevant, authenticity in writing is simultaneously becoming less defined.

The Effects of Digital Technology: Remix, Collaboration, and Authorship in Contemporary Writing

By

Jennifer Shaffer

Heather Julien

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Institute of the Liberal Arts

2017

Table of Contents

I. Introduction.

As a humanities student, there has been an emphasis on writing throughout my education. The combination of this necessity to write in school with a passion for creative writing as a hobby, has forced me to question the relationship I have with my writing, and more specifically, with my writing tools. As a high school student, I used pencil and paper. I liked my unique handwriting; I archaically thought that writing would benefit me more than typing; and I felt as though I had a more intimate connection with my written words- I felt as though the process was somehow more genuine than clicking out keys on a machine. However, as time has passed and computers have become ubiquitous in virtually every setting, it now seems almost impossible to not use the digital technology available to me, and resorting to pen and paper seems merely obsolete and arduous.

Using our computers as a writing tool, where we not only utilize word processors to transcribe our thoughts, but also use the internet as a source of inspiration and extended intelligence, has become second nature to us, and consequently is rarely questioned or reflected upon. But we, as writers and readers, must recognize that without our writing tools we would not have written word, and thus the means by which our written word is produced inherently must play a significant role in the creative process as well as in the final product.

This thesis argues that we, as writers, have developed a dependency on our digital technology to the point where it acts as an extension of our minds throughout the writing process, as well as shifts what types of writing writers are actually engaging in. This dependency on and fixation with technology has enabled us to manipulate our work, as well as previous written work, on a maximized and perpetual level, resulting in a

continuous set of remixes of pre-existing writings and mediums, many of which are considered experimental modes of literature. Not only has digital technology affected the writer and aspects of the writing process, but it has also altered the relationship between author and reader, and redefined the acts of writing and reading to facilitate a much more collaborative approach. Based on an analysis of multiple secondary sources that focus on the transition of writing tools in the postmodern era, as well as an ethnography consisting of interviews with various writers, I argue that our reliance on digital technology has initiated a process of remix and collaboration, and has ultimately initiated the diminishing importance of authorship in contemporary literature.

Contemporary Dependence on Digital Technology

The relationship between the author and his or her writing tools is ceaselessly evolving as technology progresses. Beginning with laborious scribing until the invention of the printing press in the 1440's, and then shifting to the typewriter in 1868 and currently- although perhaps not finally- the computer in the 1960's, the author has gone through a series of transitions in which it has become progressively easier to write. In the most recent development from typewriter (and pen and paper) to computer, many authors felt hesitant about abandoning their more manual writing processes, feeling as though the new advancements in technology created "associations with mechanization, automation, and repetition" rather than emphasizing the intimate human experience of writing.[1] Indeed, many writers were simply unable to adapt to the aesthetic of a computer; the way the keys felt, the sound they made, the way the words looked on the screen as opposed to

[1] Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, Page 16

on paper. Furthermore, many writers began questioning whether this new technology caused them to think differently, whether it "[affected] the nature and forms of [their] ideas".[2]

Despite the uncertainty of whether computers affected the writer's mind and the physical aesthetic of writing, the transition into the computer age was moderated further as the new technology was only available to a narrow portion of writers who were able to afford it. Thus, its integration into postmodern society was gradual and unintimidating. Once word-processors and the World Wide Web became integrated through mass production and cheaper costs, however, they simultaneously became ubiquitous and absolutely essential to writers and non-writers alike.

Today, computers, word-processors, and the internet are almost synonymous with writing; one does not contemplate beginning his or her work without somewhere through the process (if not throughout its entirety) utilizing their digital technology. The reasoning behind this dependency is simple: writing with the computer has become equated with speed and efficiency as well as with correctness and ostensible perfection. We get our thoughts down faster, allowing us to write more; all of our spelling and grammar errors are instantly corrected by the machine (although, as I will discuss, often not to our benefit); all of the proof of our editing - such as rearranging, crossing out, replacing words, etc. – is eliminated, making our editing process virtually nonexistent and leaving the final product outwardly flawless.

Thus, the concept that "thinking…is coming to be identified with speed, accuracy, and limitless calculation", reveals the possibility that the way we think has adapted to the

[2] Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, Page 16

way we write.[3] Indeed, the concerns that several writers expressed in the early days of computers have become irrelevant to the immense usage of digital technology, but are still being voiced by many as our usage and dependency has maximized tremendously. How has our writing – and the very ways we think about literature- changed because of this sustained reliance on digital technology? Do speed and accuracy ultimately mean better writing? Or is our technology merely allowing us to "[crank] out fast-food prose, generating millions of copies of contentless words"?[4] The idea that our technology is a "product which comes to dominate and control acts of creation" is a complex answer to these questions; it assumes that our writing, supposedly, as many writers suggest, the essence and culmination of our individuality, is no longer merely a product of who we are, but has become a product of how we interact with our digital technologies.

It is necessary to recognize that language and writing are perceived differently throughout different disciplines. While psychologists and sociologists might view writing as a social or historical construction, I understand writing through evidence primarily rooted in English and creative writing scholars, who view writing as an expression of one's person; an act "that expresses individual ideas and thoughts."[5] Moreover, as I will discuss, the majority of the scholars used as evidence for this thesis point to the negative or precarious consequences of the relationship between writing and digital technology. However, situating these scholars in the larger theoretical discussion of digitalization and literature, it is evident that there are also scholars and theorists who would disagree, optimistically suggesting that digital technology promotes better thinking, reading, and

---

[3] Heim, Michael. *Electric Language: a Philosophical Study of Word Processing*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987. Page 87
[4] IBID, Page 4
[5] Thompson, Jake. "Interview with Jake Thompson." Jennifer Shaffer, February, 2017

writing skills.[6] Despite these varying opinions, it is clear that digital technology is changing the way scholars think about writing and literature. In addition, I want to emphasize that my goal is neither to delegitimize nor promote digital technology as a writing tool, but to highlight the degree to which digitalization and writing, reading, and authorship are interconnected and impacting various processes and roles within literature.

It is essential to first define how our technology, exactly, is being used. The computer as a writing tool consists of two main components: the utilization of its word processors, in which we can type into writing applications quickly and efficiently and make use of dozens of editing and manipulation tools; and the internet, which allows us to search anything we could possibly imagine, and thus aids us not only in our writing process but also feeds us inspiration when we have yet to begin or continue our writing process. While this instantaneous and limitless inspiration may seem like a goldmine for writers, author Joe Dunthorne encapsulates the juxtapositional effects that the large amount of internet-help can have on us: "In seconds, I can find every simile I have ever written about an onion or every description of a particular character asleep. I'm able to pull together resources in a much more fluid way. I can't quite decide whether this has made me a lazier writer or a freer writer."[7]

It seems as though the colossal amount of information available to us, as well as the editing tools that enable us to make mistakes without needing to correct them ourselves, has taken some of the burden off of the writer and shifted it onto the machine. The final product, therefore, is an ostensibly immaculate piece of writing resulting from the combined forces of writer and computer, which reinforces the inextricable post-

[6] MacArthur, Charles A., Steve Graham, and Jill Fitzgerald. *Handbook of Writing Research*. New York ; London: Guilford, 2016. Print.
[7] McMullan, Thomas. "How Technology Rewrites Literature " *The Guardian*, 23 June 2014.

modern relationship between author and digital technology. Our computer as a writing tool is no longer merely an instrument of transcription, but also helps us with idea formation and the very process of writing. It supplies us with inspiration when we are stumped, thus influencing our ideas and acting as what digital artist and theorist Mark Amerika deems "artificial intelligence"; it makes editing easy and even, to some, enjoyable; and finally, it deletes the messiness of our creative processes, the "physical signs…of occasional blunders and delays."[8] In addition, digital technology has altered the demographics of who is actually reading and writing, and how often they are doing so.

Our dependence on our digital technology has ultimately resulted in a shift in contemporary literature, sometimes conspicuous in its form and sometimes hidden underneath the surface of the digital format. This shift in writing can be termed "remix"; the frequent manipulations of authorship as collaboration is becoming more prevalent; of past work found through the Web; of our own work through editing; and of multiple different mediums that are combined and modified in order to create something new. These experimental forms of writing often quite explicitly represent digitalization. For example, subgenres have been dedicated to text and twitter poetry, and literature has been combined with animation to function on an exclusively on-screen platform.

To a certain extent, we have always been remixing our writings. Our ideas change, they are influenced by and combined with other ideas, and they adapt in order to be improved. However, as the digital age has progressed, publishing methods have expanded to appeal to online readers, and internet users have increased (with 84% of American adults using the internet as of 2015), past work has also become increasingly

[8] Heim, Michael. *Electric Language: a Philosophical Study of Word Processing*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987. Page132

available, and accessing writing has become infinitely easier.[9] Compounding this relatively new easy-access to past writing with the editing tools word processors supply, one can assume that the process of remix (manipulating others' as well as one's own work) has also become easier, and thus arguably more frequent.

While it is difficult to determine exactly if and how manipulation has been maximized with the advent of digital technology (no statistical analyses into this specific question have been conducted), it is important to consider that our ideas and inspirations are constantly reformulating based on what we read as well as what is circulated online. As author Michael Mack suggests, "[Literature]…challenges the way we think about ourselves [and] our society."[10] Thus, with the extensive amount of writing and reading that occurs online - the "information overload" that is "instantly available" – it is essential to question whether this writing is subconsciously or intentionally reworked and incorporated into our own writing.[11]

Writers' relationship with the internet, as I will discuss, has become especially precarious and complex as content can now consist of anything written by anyone. To make matters more problematic, this (often dubious) content has the potential to be circulated by mass audiences and likely influence future readers and writers. Indeed, "in an age when [writers] gravitate to online sources…and when tremendous amounts of both refutable and questionable information are available online-many have come to regard the internet itself as a culprit in [writers'] plagiarism."[12] This exploration is not confined

---

[9] Perrin, Andrew, and Maeve Duggan. "Americans' Internet Access: 2000-2015." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*. N.p., 26 June 2015. Web. 20 Jan. 2017.
[10] Mack, Michael. *How Literature Changes the Way We Think*. New York: Continuum, 2011. Print.
[11] Brockman, John. "2010: *How is the Internet Changing the Way You Think? Edge.org.* The Edge, 2010. Web. 20 Jan. 2017.
[12] Moore Howard, Rebecca, and Laura J. Davies. "Plagiarism in the Internet Age." *Educational Leadership* 6th ser. 66 (2009): 64-67. Web.

to plagiarism by any means, but does however question several writing techniques that precipitate similar concerns, such as authorship, authenticity, idea formulation, and responsibilities of and relationships between writers and readers.

The collaboration and manipulation that the internet facilitates, as well as the many experimental forms of writing that I will discuss, also force us to reconsider how we conceive of authorship. Many of the scholarly sources in this thesis define authorship as contingent upon authenticity, where an authentic representation of identity is a measure of the author. However, this particular discussion of the importance of the author is not a new one, and while a multitude of theorists and philosophers have pondered the significance of authorship, Roland Barthes is a particularly relevant addition to this thesis.

The literary critic and essayist criticized our necessity of an identifiable author, and suggested that writing is entirely independent of its creator. He rightly recognized our "prestige of the individual…of the human person…[and] the greatest importance [of] the author's person."[13] Indeed, the countless biographies and analyses dedicated to authors of famous works reveal that "the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it"[14] However, Barthes argues that to "give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing", and that literature should be "the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes."[15] While Barthes was certainly not foreseeing the advent of digital literature, and would most likely not even categorize many of these subgenres

[13] Barthes, Roland, and Stephen Heath. *Image, Music, Text*, "The Death of the Author", New York: Noonday, 1988. Print.
[14] IBID
[15] IBID

as literature, his hopes that we, as readers and writers, stop fixating on the identity of the author have begun to materialize. As we will see in many of the avant-garde forms of literature, especially those that utilize the screen as their solitary platform, digital and contemporary writers are beginning to experiment with the multiplicity and anonymity of authorship.

Finally, this exploration is a significant response to how digital technologies and writers have begun to operate as a joint system. Rather than dissolving the boundaries between digitalization and manual work, writers, readers, and technology are cooperating as a dual nexus to produce and consume literature, and this is a system worthy of investigation. Moreover, while several of the questions put forward yield limited conclusive answers, it is important, nonetheless, to synthesize the vast majority of information that scholars have discussed in regards to digital technology and writing.

II. Methodology

There are numerous scholars that study how digital technology has affected writing, production, and reading of literature. However, a vast minority of these scholars has studied what these effects mean for *contemporary* writers and readers; they focused, rather, on the substantial impacts that word processors and the internet had when they were initially introduced around 40-50 years ago. Thus, my secondary research was limited to digital and media studies scholars; primarily Mark Amerika, a digital and media theorist; and Matthew Kirschenbaum, a writer dedicated to new media and the digital humanities. Analyses of their work lead me to draw conclusions, as well as ask necessary questions, about how contemporary writing is produced and received by authors and readers alike. Additionally, there are various literary scholars and critics who

were consulted in order to gain a more concrete understanding of theoretical views of literature, readership, and authorship. Moreover, there is a multitude of statistical reports and newspaper articles that chronicle the usage of technology, as well as the demographics and percentages of those reading and writing. While this quantitative data is by no means a product of digital technology exclusively, a substantial amount of evidence indicates that digital technology usage is directly correlated to how often people are writing as well as what they are writing about.

Another crucial component of my methodology were interviews carried out after the majority of my secondary-source research had been completed, thus allowing me to gain insight into how contemporary writers are responding to many of the issues detailed in the literature. The primary goal of these interviews was to ascertain whether or not writers' opinions were consistent with or in opposition to various deductions made by scholars. Moreover, the participants also served as contemporary respondents, as opposed to the participants of the interviews conducted in the scholars' research. I interviewed four teachers, three of whom worked in the English Department at Emory University, and one of who has conducted research on contentious writing techniques in the Emory University Institute of the Liberal Arts. Furthermore, I interviewed two students from the Emory University English major in order to determine how opinions on these issues might differ between age groups. Indeed, the student interviewees at 21 years old have spent the majority of their lives utilizing digital technologies (computers, the internet, word processors, etc.), whereas the older professors tended to have adapted later to these electronic writing and reading tools, as they did not grow up using them.

The interviews took place over several weeks, and were primarily conducted in person, while a couple were conducted over email. The same 10-15 questions were posed to all participants, with emphasis given to certain questions depending on the participant's experiences and interests. Several quotes were also collected from peers in the context of casual conversation, and have been added to reinforce many of the interviewee's opinions and processes. I have created pseudonyms for several of the interviewees who wished to remain anonymous in order to protect their identities.

It is important to consider that while those interviewed and used as scholarly sources constitute the basis of my evidence, they only represent one part of the conversation, and do not definitively answer the broad question of how digital technology has affected literature.

III: Pre-Existing Writing and Manipulation

The concept of remix or manipulation is crucial to this investigation, and is best explained by media theorist Mark Amerika. Amerika views remix as contextually defined by the usage of the internet, when "text…that [is] available to us…[is] digitally-manipulated so that [it] becomes 'original' constructions."[16] Furthermore, the remix is a unique product of writing that results from the "collaborative acts of creative mindshare"; in other words, a remix occurs when the writer (the producer) "samples data and then changes or manipulates that data to meet the specific needs of the narrative."[17]

As this manipulation is seen in several emerging subgenres of sorts, Amerika emphasizes the idea that some level of remix occurs in all contemporary writing - either

[16] Amerika, Mark. "Writing Cyberspace: Notes on Nomadic Narrative, Net Art and Life Style Practice " *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, vol. 10, no. 7, 2002.
[17] IBID

explicitly or otherwise - because of the limitless and instantaneous access to content that digital technology (specifically the internet and online writing platforms) renders possible. It is essential to first examine how writers understand and evaluate their access to and reliance on the internet, in order to determine how their usage facilitates remix. As one Emory University undergraduate student, Jake Thompson, stated; "I think that my inspiration often comes from stories, people, photos, etc.…obviously the internet has allowed me a much larger catalogue of these things than what I would encounter without it." Moreover, he admits that "for creative pieces, [he] will look for inspiration on the internet," indicating that the omnipresence of online information informs his writing. English Professor Joseph Skibell of Emory University, who has written several novels, states in concurrence:

> I check things on the internet all the time…it's hard to write a novel, but I also recognize that any distraction can be problematic, so you look something up and then you're gone forever, you're back into the most shallow reaches of your mind, which is not where you write fiction from, so you have to be careful…it's much harder to (use the internet) when you're trying to write a narrative that's supposed to really last.

Therefore, allowing the internet to act as a source of reference or inspiration is a slippery and complex engagement, but one that all writers employ nonetheless. This content found on the internet not only serves as influence and inspiration for our writing when we are stumped, but can also appear verbatim within new forms, as is the case in patchwriting. Amerika asserts that when we "see something [we] like…many times [we] can just download the entire document and manipulate it to [our] own needs", revealing that

accessibility often acts as a stepping stone for remix.[18] However, Professor Skibell's acknowledgement of the harmfulness of such an accessible and limitless tool shows that literary writers are using the internet with caution, and trying to avoid the manipulation and shallowness that patchwriting emanates from.

Professor Skibell also takes note of a concept central to literary writers, and one that the internet can potentially interfere with: profound thinking must occur in concentrated and deep areas of the author's mind. English Professor of Emory University Professor Mark Bauerlein, agrees that the internet has the capacity to interfere with depth; "[writers] are online all the time…maybe it makes them bright, clever, and quick, but not at all deep." As we will see, various examples of writing techniques that utilize the internet- including patchwriting- contrast with Professor Skibell's assertion of necessary inwardness and depth.

1. Patchwriting

A form of writing that has always been a technique of contention, but has recently served as an experimental mode of writing– patchwriting - is a fitting example of what Amerika describes as remix: "the writer is rearranging phrases…but is relying heavily on the vocabulary and syntax of the source material."[19] The fact that patchwriting is discussed in published work and is viewed by certain scholars as a "gesture of reverence", suggests that this type of writing is becoming a particularly debated topic rather than declining in usage, especially amongst student writers.[20] Furthermore,

[18] Amerika, Mark. "Writing Cyberspace: Notes on Nomadic Narrative, Net Art and Life Style Practice " *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, vol. 10, no. 7, 2002.
[19] McBridge, Kelly. "'Patchwriting' Is More Common Than Plagiarism, Just as Dishonest." *Poynter*, 8 Sept. 2012.
[20] Blum, Susan Debra. *My Word!: Plagiarism and College Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009. Print.

supporters view patchwriting as emblematic of the collaborative engagement that writing with digital technology has facilitated.[21] Indeed, "because text can be easily appropriated through cutting and pasting", the internet serves as a catalyst for patchwriting, and indicates a link between digital access and utilization of this questionable approach to writing.[22]

While patchwriting can perhaps occur just as frequently without digital technology, the fact that the discussion surrounding this controversial method has expanded to classrooms, experimentations, and debates, highlights the degree to which our current writing process-as well as how we think about writing-is evolving. The discussion around patchwriting is decidedly associated to the superfluity and availability of information available to us; as undergraduate Emory student Michelle Wilde suggests, "I- and I know others too- definitely look things (descriptions, ideas, things like that) up more with the internet; information is just more accessible… I think implementing that information is easier and more valuable now too, and certainly harder to avoid."

Professors have even begun to explore patchwriting in a more positive light by emphasizing the utility, rather than the dangers, of this technique. Associate Computer Science Professor of Emory University, James Lu, is conducting a project dedicated to patchwriting, which he views as "a useful technique for writing, especially for writers unfamiliar with the language or the topic that they are writing about." His project, a software tool called the Corpus-Assisted Predictive Editor, ultimately aims to "facilitate systematic approaches to writing through assemblage of existing text…[which] may

[21] Blum, Susan Debra. *My Word!: Plagiarism and College Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009. Print.
[22] Moore Howard, Rebecca and Laura J. Davies. "Plagiarism in the Internet Age." *Educational Leadership* 6th ser. 66 (2009): 64-67. Web.

affect composition practices, influence writing pedagogy, and it may even change the way we think about text ownership."

The concept of text ownership is central to this investigation. As patchwriting allows for the appropriation of pre-existing phrases and ideas, we are forced to reevaluate the importance we have placed on who "owns", creates, and embodies text. Indeed, the possible effects on text ownership that Lu mentions urge us to question and acknowledge the identity and rights of the original author.

Professor Reed, an English Professor at Emory University, further highlighted the issue of text ownership, which encompasses issues of identity, authenticity, and authorship:

> It [patchwriting] gets to the idea of authenticity and the difference between consulting, paraphrasing, and plagiarizing…a lot of the printing press books were called centos; collections of other people's thoughts and wisdom of the ages- an encyclopedia of learning, and that was a perfectly acceptable type of genre. There wasn't the same attitude towards ownership back then.

This historical context is necessary in tracking the progression of how we produce and perceive literature and "text ownership", as patchwriting- and, essentially, the internet itself- serve as contemporary forms of centos. Whereas literature created after the decline of the printing press, according to Professor Reed, has always stressed the importance of text ownership (this is also evident in the severe copyright laws introduced in the 1970s), patchwriting and various other digital formats demonstrate a shifting view. This view, which ultimately creates ambiguity "between consulting, paraphrasing, and plagiarizing", parallels the view held in the age of the printing press, where centos were common and

accepted forms of literature. The post-modern tendency towards the irrelevancy of ownership, or, more concretely, authorship and thus identity and authenticity within literature, is implicit in patchwriting, where authors converge and overlap.

Moreover, Professor Lu's technological tool "[enables] students to compare and choose rhetorical moves based on pre-assembled text, rather than overloading students' cognition with the details of language construction." Here, it is necessary to revert back to Professor Skibell's discussion of deep mindfulness whilst writing, which he believes results in a more thoughtful and enduring work. It is evident that there is a contrast between how Professor Lu and Professor Skibell view the writing process, as Professor Lu, by glossing over the details of language construction, essentially adheres to what Professor Skibell deems the shallow areas of the author's mind. Of course, the types of writing these two professors engage in vary; Professor Skibell writes literary fiction while Professor Lu mostly writes mathematical research papers and what he calls "drudgery" work, such as letters of recommendation. I do not wish to assert that patchwriting and Professor Lu's methods are lesser or detrimental to writing, but to highlight that there are clearly discrepancies over the losses and gains of systematic, technological patchwriting amongst different disciplines and different levels of writing.

Clearly, patchwriting is best understood when viewed in an educational and developmental context. While this thesis is not directed towards how digital technology affects student writers specifically, it is significant to note that many professors and employers suggest that students' writing skills are declining, arguably due to their fixation with the internet and other technological gadgets.[23] As Professor Lu attempts to

[23] Strain-Moritz, Tessa E., "Perceptions of Technology Use and Its Effects on Student Writing" *Culminating Projects in Teach Development, Paper 8, 2016*

improve student writing and to eliminate the burdens that come with writing through, ironically, technological software, he raises important questions about digital tools' potential to transform how we write, how we think about writing, and how we develop as writers. Whether or not we agree with the implementation of systematized patchwriting to improve writing, the possibility of solving a problem catalyzed by technology- with technology- is a significant reflection of our current interdependence. My goal is not to unconditionally accept the idea that digital technology is ruinous by delegitimizing it. Rather, I aim to stress the intertwinement of technology and this specific writing process, and to acknowledge that technology is viewed as both a setback and a resolution to certain writing challenges.

As our access to past work has become effortless and the integration of past ideas has become more difficult to avoid, we are forced to redefine our understanding of the author, as well as what we deem original or authentic- or what Professor Lu labels as text ownership. Student Jake Thompson further complicates the disagreement around patchwriting, stating, "Often people have no other choice than to rely on existing thinking and research" which accentuates the possibility that the increase in accessibility and circulation of work has potentially made us more reliant. It seems as if writers and professors have merely accepted the fact that the internet provides us with so much information, that the "collaborative work zone" in which writers take part maintains authenticity, when necessary questions about authorship and identity must be asked.[24]

[24] Amerika, Mark. "Writing Cyberspace: Notes on Nomadic Narrative, Net Art and Life Style Practice " *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, vol. 10, no. 7, 2002.

2. Parodies

The issue of how digital technology has affected authenticity and authorship in writing is further addressed by writer Matthew Kirschenbaum, who identifies intentional "literary remixes", such as Seth Grahame Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies.*[25] This form of remix, in which an identifiable and renowned piece of literature is manipulated in order to create a new story out of the old, has recently emerged as an independent subgenre. Indeed, despite the fact that *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* deviates from traditional literature by possessing minimal artistic merit, it has received high praise from critical reviewers, such as *Entertainment Weekly* and *Library Journal.* Moreover, the book was on the *New York Times* and Amazon UK top seller lists, revealing the tendency of contemporary readers to purchase entertainment content, rather than literature in the traditional sense. I suggest that the success and proliferation of this type of writing legitimizes it as a subgenre, and validates the investigation into this expanding written form.

The process of producing *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* was ostensibly a very straightforward and technological process. Grahame Smith downloaded the PDF of the original *Pride and Prejudice*, he copied and pasted the text into his word processor, and he manipulated only 15% of the text, replacing Jane Austen's words with his own to fit the theme of zombie apocalypse. There are a multitude of books that use the same method of copying, pasting, and replacing that have made their way into the field of literature; *Android Karenina* by Ben H. Winters, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and the Undead* by Don Borchert, and *Robin Hood and Friar Tuck: Zombie Killers- A*

[25] Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, page 170

Canterbury Tale by Paul A. Freeman, to name a few. All of these examples exemplify the process of remix, in which the material is already available, but "molded and sculpted" rather than the author beginning the writing process with the production of entirely new content.[26]

It is evident from this subgenre, in which literary classics are transformed into parodies, that elements of our writing processes have changed as our fixation with technology grows. Whereas writing once began with a blank page and an original idea, writing today can begin with a finished – and historically celebrated – product, ready to be manipulated. Even the words that are inserted into the old writing to create the new product are arguably not the author's own. Indeed, the authors of these parodies have shifted their focus from creating a piece of writing with their own unique and cultivated voices – a detail within literature that is celebrated – to copying the voices of the original author. As Grahame Smith says: "I needed things to seem authentic so I could to the best of my ability mimic the voice of one of the most gifted writers of her time," showing that authenticity in this type of writing has strayed from presenting the author's own voice and own ideas, to achieving the believability that the original author is still in fact writing.[27]

The creative process for these parody writers, therefore, is not about developing one's own thoughts and presenting them in an original and individual way, but researching and reading the works of the author whom they wish to simulate in order to convey authenticity and fluidity within their remixed writing. Once they have achieved

---

[26]Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, page 205

[27] Lammers, Tim. "Interview: Seth Grahame-Smith Talks 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies'." *Direct Conversation*, 5 Feb. 2016.

the reproducibility of the original author's voice, the writing process consists of editing on word processors, thus leaving the physical manipulation of the text the easiest part of the whole process. This zombie parody subgenre is a compelling example of circulation, manipulation, and collaboration that skews or fails to present distinctive voices of authors and ultimately reflects changing understandings of authorship. The process of creating these stories is not necessarily easier or less valuable, but is merely different, and accentuates alternative aspects of writing such as conjoining, simulating, and reshaping. It is important to examine these works as they force us to question whether or not literary representations of digital technology are maintaining authenticity and authorship, or how they are changing how we perceive these elements within a text.

It is essential to define authenticity in literature in order to determine whether the aforementioned texts- products of digital technology- relay authenticity and authorship. I argue that authenticity consists of genuine, true, or original products or displays of identity (in thinking, style, beliefs, etc.), whereas something that is fake, stolen, unoriginal, or deceptive would be considered inauthentic. Professor Bauerlein reinforces these criteria by adding that authenticity can be achieved when one "[works] hard to expel the lexicon of mass culture…to keep the voice of the scribbling mob out of your own prose." This attestation emphasizes the importance of a unique voice, one that is natural and independent of how the masses perceive and contribute to work. Additionally, Professor Reed defines authenticity as "a concept and ideal behavior or practice that was pretty much invented in the romantic era. It's the true interiority of self; people write out of their heart." Undergraduate Jake Thompson suggests that authenticity "has to do with whether or not I created something that captures what I was feeling or aiming for, and

whether or not I created something that is creative- as in, did I innovate? – And original." Finally, Professor Skibell considers authenticity as a more complex standard of writing:

> If you think about language as a tool, we're all using the same tool, we're all using the same grammar, we're all more or less using the same vocabulary and syntax…sometimes I think that I don't believe in a fixed self, but I can look at stuff from 40 years ago and it's the same writing…. Style is the man, so to speak. The more subtle your control of language becomes, the more language teaches you how to think and see, and so part of authenticity is being able to say what you want to say…you can only do so much with language, and you try to express yourself as much as you can through it. But it forms what you think and feel and express as well.

Professor Skibell takes note of a very important element of writing: the discourse of language as a common tool and as power for creative expression. The ability to have control of words and styles used throughout personal development is the very foundation of authenticity, and using that control to identify and convey thoughts and emotions reinforces the fixed nature of individuality. Referring back to the discussion on patchwriting, the creative power of language-something that is wholly individual and cultivated-contrasts Professor Lu's systematic tool used to avoid the "details of language construction" thus bringing into focus the differing definitions and expectations of authenticity in writing. As Professor Skibell contemplates his past written work, he acknowledges that writing tracks growth, as well as defines the writer. All of these definitions solidify the fundamental quality of individuality and genuineness essential to authentic content and authorship.

It is difficult to deem these parodies inauthentic, when, essentially, inauthenticity is the author's goal. As Grahame-Smith attempts to simulate Jane Austen's voice, he fails to produce any distinct or original voice at all, and further avoids leaving any unique or identifiable trace of himself as a writer. Essentially, authenticity in this subgenre is redefined as simulation and continuity. However, the dangers of accepting this modified notion of authenticity throughout literature are multifold; the final product of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* sounding as if Jane Austen wrote it, parallels any other counterfeit product that looks, feels, and sounds just like the real product, only it's anything but. It is also difficult to deem this work entirely inauthentic when it is, in a way, original; no previous authors have specialized in romantic era apocalyptic remixes. However, the presenting of authors as indistinguishable- as well as the fact that 85% of the content remains exactly the same- fortifies the inauthenticity in the writing rather than in the idea itself.

3. Popular Audiences Outside the Literary

There is an alternative aspect of this subgenre that forces us to redefine how we perceive authorship. One of the reasons these works have become so successful is that readers are interested in both Jane Austen and zombies, and thus are attracted to a blending of the two. We must consider whether or not these books would have amassed fame if they were not based in immensely recognizable stories and authors. In this sense, authorship (Jane Austen, specifically) is still relevant, and it would be extremely difficult for readers to disregard the prominent identity of the primary contributor. While Jane Austen remains recognizable in her (very large) portion of the text, Seth Grahame Smith is the writer who produces without a distinguishable- or, as many of the interviewees

defined authenticity- authentic authorial role. In this sense, one of the authors is not definitively dead, but is reconceived and manipulated.

This commentary is not meant to condemn the parody in any way, but rather, to reveal that as this comedy-horror subgenre expands, a greater emphasis is being placed on the final product independent of its author, rather than on the unique process of writing. Identifying how this subgenre displays an altered version of authenticity is essential for examining authorship. Indeed, as we get a less unique, singular, or identifiable product, the identity of Seth Grahame Smith in relation to his work can be considered less available and important, virtually rendering him, as Barthes would have it, dead.

This subgenre arguably would never have emerged without digital technology, as the internet and the word processor are major components of this particular remixing process. The access to online material that can be downloaded and copied into a word processor, allowing the writer to easily delete words from existence and type over them with their own, is a distinctively technological approach. Furthermore, this subgenre as a product of our computers reveals that digital technology has had an impact on specific elements of the writing process, allowing authors to transition original writing into remixed writing. As a subgenre, it represents the "redefinition of writing from inscription to the abstract realm of algorithmic symbol manipulation",[28] which parallels the idea that these authors are no longer merely transcribing their thoughts, but are technologically remixing symbols embedded in the computer, and are doing so with tools the computer provides. This "symbol manipulation" is reminiscent of James Lu's software tool, which

[28] Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, page 82

also serves as a computative writing strategy. The fact that these parodies have amassed success reveals the broad acceptance of a more mechanical process of writing, one that readers don't seem to have any qualms about. The obvious gain of these stories is an experimental form of writing that has been added to contemporary literature, and the delight with which readers consume it. However, as I have tried to make clear, what is shifting is that readers don't seem to be as concerned with the author, nor with the mechanical nature of the product. This shift ultimately reveals the adaptations of readership in a digitally technological age.

Similarly to patchwriting, this explicit manipulation could also exist without digital technology; crossing out Austen's words and writing over them essentially serves the same function of parody and distortion, although the effect on readers might differ. To illustrate this difference between manual and digital manipulation, consider how readers might perceive the original text of *Pride and Prejudice* tangibly butchered by another's handwriting; the fluidity and imperceptibility of two isolated authors would diminish. On the other hand, the totality of digital manipulation conveys a more believable and immaculate product, allowing readers to engage without distraction or confusion. However, it is not the fact that this writing could exist without technology that is significant, but the fact that digital technology has recently made the process of remix so easy, that a multitude of writers have begun to engage in this subgenre and produce successful texts. In effect, the authors that engage in these experimental manipulations represent the developing post-modern notion of collaboration, and the diminution of personalization in writing.

In these avant-garde forms of literature, the distinction between the voices of past writers and of our own individual voices as contemporary writers is obscured, resulting in not only a remix of work, but also a remix of authorship. Alternatively, as is the case with remixed parodies, a new unique authorial voice is never cultivated or presented, and the original author remains the identity worth acknowledging. In addition, the fact that literature such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and patchwriting has become producible and widely accessible implies that inauthenticity- or a lack of authorship and ownership- is becoming more accepted as digital technology circulates writing at such an amplified level. Indeed, authenticity is becoming more difficult to achieve, as expectations of literature constantly evolve as a consequence of adaptions to digitalization. Does authenticity in literature – whether it comes from where the content originates or the evidence of the author's identity– necessarily mean better? Instead of viewing these changes as better or worse, I have attempted to identify what is gained and lost in reducing writing to a formulaic and collaborative process.

IV: Editing and Authorship

1. Evidence of the Author

Another type of remix that has arguably become more prevalent, more complex, and indisputably different with the usage of digital technology is editing. The editing process has always been a crucial – indeed, perhaps the most important – part of the writing process. With pen and paper and even with typewriter, the editing process is conspicuous; the physical existence of the author and the development of his/her thoughts as well as the writing tools are clear in the markups, giving the work a uniquely human quality. The word processor as an editing tool has redefined the responsibilities and the

very presence of the author, eliminating the messiness of editing by hand as well as acting as a separate source of editing itself. Indeed, the idea that word processors act as extensions of our minds is evident in our dependency on them for editing, where we expect them to fix our spelling and grammar errors instantaneously. We also rely on them for their supply of alternative words to use, translations, multiple writing styles and layouts, and dozens of options to consider when writing that are executed entirely by the computer. Ultimately, our editing process as a remix that has resulted from our digital technology has forced us to continuously revise in ways that were not possible before, and create a seemingly perfect product of writing, where the evidence of the author has been eliminated along with his or her mistakes.

Editing not only serves as affirmation of an author working behind every word, but also "[reminds] us of what could have been or might have been, remaking literature as multidimensional possibility space rather than the finality of words printed on the page."[29] In this quote, Kirschenbaum emphasizes the idea that writing must be considered in its "social and ideological context"; how it came to be and why certain words, plots, and structures were chosen over others.[30] That is to say, rather than only understanding literature as words in their final and determined state, we must also take into account the context of how they were written- and rewritten- in order to grasp their full significance. Writing with a pen and paper as well as a typewriter allows the writer – who, throughout the editing process, also becomes the reader - to actually see the changes they are making, and to see the before and the after product as two distinct pieces of work.

---

[29] Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, Page 227

[30] Porter, Jim. "Why Technology Matters to Writing: a Cyberwriter's Tale." *Computers and Composition*, vol. 20, 2002, pp. 375–394.

While this is certainly the more laborious and seemingly disorderly process, there is a greater sense of intentionality within the finished product, where the development of thought is clear and there is evident reason behind omissions and expansions. Writers can look at their improvements and consider why they made them and if they truly are better than the original, and they can always undo their edits. Indeed, editing by hand is a "laborious process [that] is part of the creative process", showing that our changes, minute as they may be, act as evidence of ceaselessly active creativity.[31] While this is true for editing on a word processor as well, it can be argued that manually making and physically seeing these changes as they evolve, displays authenticity and individuality more conspicuously. Thus, this distinction between manual and technological edits forces us to question whether physical proof of changes renders a more genuine display of authorship; does the crossing out of words, the addition of ideas in the margins, the arrows and the indentions, all emphasize the individuality and identity of the author? While they act as significant indicators for how and why the final product turned out the way it did, the question of whether the author and authenticity are found in the process rather than in the product is essential to explore.

Writing on a word processor, on the other hand, eliminates the before product as if it never existed, "[allowing] for maximum flexibility in alteration, changes, correction, [and] revision" while removing the reasoning behind these changes and seemingly containing no changes at all.[32] As author Jon McGregor notes, "writing on the screen is far more ephemeral – a sentence deleted can't be reconsidered," revealing that the fluidity

[31] Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, Page 160
[32] IBID, Page 36

that comes with onscreen editing can be deleterious to the ongoing revision process.[33] Professor Skibell comments on this quality of "ephemeralness", revealing his strategy to guarantee transparency in his revisions and enable reconsideration; "What I used to do whenever I cut anything, was I bolded it and I pasted it to the bottom of my manuscript because I didn't want to lose it." An undergraduate student at Emory reiterated the desire to retain and trace his changes, stating: "I always print out a copy, and make revisions on the physical paper so that I can always go back and see them." Evidently, there is an effort by writers to preserve, in some form, their edits, revealing that the elimination of concrete progress throughout digital editing provokes an anxiety about losing initial-and perhaps, better-work.

These anxieties also reveal that the thought process throughout editing with digital technology is shielded from the writer, and creates an appearance of perfection in composition. This perfection, compounded with the elimination of physical editing and thus the author's thought maturation, also draws parallels to questions of authenticity and authorship discussed earlier. How can writing with a word processor, which dismisses the physicality of the author and his/her alterations, represent a genuine product? If the final product is perfect but the process was not, is the writing authentic in its finished state? Or should the reader and writer be aware of the many changes made in order to produce the final piece of writing? As Kirschenbaum notes, "the ostensible perfection of the printed text becomes a stand-in for a whole set of much deeper anxieties related to authenticity in the writer's craft—originality and creativity, truth and beauty", revealing that for many

[33] Rourke, Lee. "Why Creative Writing Is Better with a Pen." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 3 Nov. 2011, www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/03/creative-writing-better-pen-longhand.

writers, the expectation of a unique and sincere piece of writing is often coupled with imperfection and transparency in order to relay true authenticity.

Indeed, the intangibility of digital writing essentially has the capacity to minimize the importance and very existence of the author; the machine is what produced the writing, and the ideas behind the writing could belong to anyone. Essentially, the relevance of the identity behind the machine diminishes as the signifiers of a distinctly human endeavor are reduced. Additionally, digital technology erodes the evidence of human communication, altering the relationship between the author and the reader to become less pertinent. Not only does editing on a word processor alter the relationship between writer and reader, it also transitions the focus on composition to the importance of delivery.[34] Thus, the writer no longer unintentionally, through errors and modifications, produces the connectivity implicit in the relationship between reader and writer, but has begun to prioritize the perceived perfection of a finished work. Undergraduate student Michelle Wilde testified to this gradual shift:

> I definitely think about the fact that anyone can just type their name and claim authorship. Typing isn't like writing, or talking…there's no distinction between typists, and now every paper is expected to be completely corrected and why shouldn't it be when we can correct it so easily? But sometimes those errors were, in some way, more original. They were the first try. Those first attempts don't matter though, because the reader only sees the finished piece, and the writer is ultimately only concerned with what people will see in the end.

[34] Porter, Jim. "Why Technology Matters to Writing: a Cyberwriter's Tale." *Computers and Composition*, vol. 20, 2002, pp. 375–394.

The perfect "finished piece" that the reader is exposed to is not a new concept; it has always been the goal of the author to provide a level of flawlessness to their audience. However, as this level of perfection is now seemingly easier to attain, writers are experiencing growing anxiety over how to achieve that perfection throughout a process that they engage in, as we will see, almost too frequently.

2. Editing Tools as Helping Hands

The word processor not only produces an ostensibly perfect piece of writing by eliminating the evidence of edits done by the writer, it also acts as an essential source of editing without the contribution of the writer. Indeed, equipped with a spellcheck and grammar editing tools, along with a thesaurus accessible by one click, the responsibility of correction has been shifted from the author onto the machine, which instantaneously recognizes mistakes that the writer may not. This reliance on the word processor as a source of automated correction allows the writer to focus more on their ideas rather than spelling and grammar, reinforcing the interactive process of technological writing.

However, while these editing tools reap obvious benefits for the writer, we must recognize what is lost as we rely on our word processors for correction. Are they always making the corrections that we want them to make, or providing us with the words that we truly want to use? Indeed, while handwriting allows you to intentionally choose where a word should be placed, or whether or not it is capitalized or spelled correctly, word processors remove that intentionality and ultimately can force us to correct the corrections that they make. In other words, word processors minimize the amount of time authors spend mentally and physically formulating their written work, but have the potential of consuming more time by implementing unwanted adjustments.

Undergraduate student Max Lee exemplifies the recurrence of erroneous automated correction:

> I always use the thesaurus tool on Word, and just implement the first synonym that comes up if it sounds better. But then I find that I'm always getting comments from readers or editors such as "incorrect usage of this word", and it just goes to show that these adjustments are automated, there's no actual knowledge or reasoning behind them.

Moreover, the mistakes made while writing with hand – as well as the corrections made by hand- are authentic representations of what we, as writers, know in regards to language and composition. Mistakes can often reveal what strengths and weaknesses writers have, and force them to confront their errors. Thus, while technology certainly acts as a necessary helping hand, making the editing process "immediate, enjoyable, and less constrained by materials", it is significant to note that it also may be detrimental to our spelling, vocabulary, and grammar skills. As digital technology accounts for the literary faults in writers, we as technology-users have begun to stray from the responsibility of perfecting our own skills, to letting the computer correct for us. It seems as if adapting to our own technologically advanced writing tools has favored efficiency over self-correction, giving us freedom to spend more time formulating ideas while constraining our abilities to fully understand rules of language. Therein lies the juxtapositional effect of these editing tools; while eliminating the focus on contextually irrelevant spelling and grammar issues, allowing the writing process to be "looser, freer, [and] more spontaneous", they ultimately make the writer less aware of language and

syntax, further redefining the role and responsibilities of the author.[35] Professor Skibell testifies to the connection to language that manual, rather than digital, writing promotes; "The quiet, intimate (of the page) just creates a deeper sense of a connection to language and mind."

On the other hand, word processors that correct for writers may result in a flawless piece of writing, but one that is less authentic or genuine in that the writer themself did not contribute to the entirety of the finished perfection. Professor Bauelerein reiterates this boundary between author and machine by stating:

> When you revise on paper, you see the sentence more concretely in front of you, and you have a stronger feel for language. And here's why: when you type a word, you don't make the letter, the computer makes the letter, and the difference between tapping an A or an E is minimal. When you write you make every letter and every letter is different, and you have to be conscious of the next letter…this makes you pay more attention to words, to sentences, to syntax, to grammar, in a way that the computer intervenes. *You're buffered by the keyboard.*

3. Continuous Revision

Finally, our dependence on our word processors is apparent in our desire to continuously edit and reedit, confirming that the process has become easier and allowed for seamless and fluid revision. As Matthew Kirschenbaum points out, "there's really no excuse for not writing the perfect book", revealing that our editing capabilities with technology should – and certainly have – influence how much we edit our storylines,

[35] Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, Page 38

descriptions, formatting, and the very words we choose.[36] While the editing process is very idiosyncratic and differs with every writer, a generalization can be made that multiple revisions eventually generate a more perfect product, and furthermore, that technology makes the revision process easier, faster, and continuous. Thus, we can conclude that as technology has made editing a more effortless and less daunting task, the feasibility of achieving perfection has actually become progressively realistic, prompting us to engage more in the editing process. Jake Thompson substantiates this claim by stating that he has always "[liked] to rewrite and tweak what [he] has written…but [he] thinks that word-processing enables [him] to get the best product by having the flexibility to simply delete or swap or shift, etc." Additionally, he claims:

> Because of the way I like to constantly tweak and edit, I think that not having to cross so much out and crumple up so many pieces of paper really helps me stay focused on the writing, instead of the mounting stress of using up paper and ink. I absolutely believe that technology has made my writing easier and better, precisely for the aforementioned reason: it enables me to continuously edit my work so that the only thing between me and my best writing is my personal effort, rather than that AND the additional burden of using up paper and ink.

Professor Skibell also shares the impulse to continuously revise, praising digital editing by remarking on the tediousness of manual editing; "if you made a change (manually), you had to white out everything and retype it six times." However, while he acknowledges the effortlessness of digital revision, he, unlike Jake, questions whether or not these ceaseless edits are indeed producing better writing:

---

[36] Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, Page 50

> From the time I've been writing fiction, I've always had a computer, so I think it makes rewriting much more convenient, but there's also less at stake. So maybe it promotes more rewriting, but maybe also endless fiddling that doesn't really help, so it's just a double-edged sword…Endlessly I revise…for me it's really ridiculous, I think maybe the first way I wrote it was better…but it's as though there's some sort of mathematical formula in getting the words exactly right.

Professor Reed- who made, what he deems, a late adjustment to digital technology- also confirms this tendency to revise, saying, "I found they (word processors) led me to make endless revisions of the electronic text, even with e-mails. I save these things, and build on them, and revise them. I'm never going to have a final version because there are always changes… it gives you a sense of an ongoing manuscript." He also states that he's "one of the few people that copy edits [his] emails", suggesting that endless editing can occur in all genres of writing. His seemingly reluctant admittance that this compulsivity to revise has emerged in his informal writing (his emails) is notable. As I will discuss in the next chapters, casual written communication- in the form of blogs, emails, social media posts, etc.- has also been impacted by digital technology, as well as made an impact on writers in general.

With our newfound ability to continuously edit our work and the ease with which we do so, our works are arguably comprised of new and deeper levels of construction than would have been possible without technology as an editing tool. As author Ann Rice states: "once you really get used to a computer…you change as a writer…what it does is it forces you to come up to it…it says, I can do anything you want now, so think, what do

you want me to do?"[37] This concept of being able to achieve new feats within our writing with the help of technology is evident throughout the editing process. Indeed, the faster and easier editing becomes, the more we can indulge in new possibilities. Professor Reed confirms this by saying he "[found] it had the effect of making [him] more wordy…the ease of transcription creates a different sort of genre; you start out with a short story and end up with a novel." Professor Reed also praises word processors as "particularly good for…second and third thoughts", attesting to the elaboration of work that otherwise perhaps would not have transpired.

The process for how we achieve the final product has changed considerably, with our first drafts evolving into second and third drafts and finally resulting in the finished piece, all of which are condensed into one fluid work. This investigation is not to say that editing longhand is superior to digital editing; as discussed, there are positives and negatives to both methods. Indeed, while editing digitally is undoubtedly the easier method, prompting many writers to write and edit more, Professor Bauerlein suggests "that doesn't mean that it's making it [writing] better." He believes, rather, that "when you write on a keyboard, you speed up too much, and when you write by hand it slows you down." He suggests that this increase in speed is ultimately harmful to our writing despite the simultaneous increase in editing that other participants discussed; "the acceleration of writing isn't going to be corrected by editing it a lot more." In contrast to this claim that the acceleration of writing and editing- made possible through digitalization- is not making us better writers, Professor Skibell responds:

[37]Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016, Page 50

> I think that (acceleration in writing) has as much to do with the technology as the fact that time has changed. Maybe time has changed because of technology…the fallacy in (this) thinking, is that, once upon a time, everybody had typewriters, and everybody had pens and notepads and not everybody did deep thinking.

Moreover, he jokes; "it's progressively getting worse and worse, because they would've been thinking once upon a time, I can't believe they're using paper instead of animal hide!" Here, Professor Skibell is providing an explanation for the incongruity in writers' opinions on digital editing: while there are those who take advantage of the new abilities digitalization allows, there will always be opposition in response to technological progress. While it is impossible to determine whether or not digital editing has made writing better or fundamentally different, deciphering the differences between and the effects of these two distinct editing processes sheds light on how writers are thinking about composition, as well as production and audience perception.

4. Informality of Platforms

Similarly to many of the conclusions deduced in this exploration, there is no available quantitative or statistical data that solidifies the correlation between digital technology and increased editing. Indeed, an increased level of editing could be a consequence of numerous factors, such as higher expectations for authors, for example. However, the writers interviewed consistently agreed that perpetual correction and adaptation was a significant consequence of writing on a word processor. Another commonality between the participants was the propensity to develop and perfect writing on a platform considered less fixed or pressured than word processing software.

A senior undergraduate student reiterated this tendency to create and revise in the context of informality, suggesting that the expected perfection of digital writing can ultimately appear a more pressured or anchored environment. According to Julia Mathers, she uses "Stickies", a digital notepad provided as an application to all Apple users, which serves as a more casual platform for writing. Her idiosyncratic process involves transcribing her initial ideas on Stickies, and continuously revising her writing until she deems it ready for her word processor- the more professional or daunting platform. This compulsive revision- especially one that takes place in a more casual and unintimidating application- can be explained by the impulses and anxieties towards perfection that were emphasized in Kirshenbaum's exploration. Indeed, Julia claims that Stickies "feels much more informal than Microsoft Word", revealing that for her, the writing and the editing process occur more fluidly within a comfortable and familiar format. The Sticky, in this case, acts as the preliminary blank pages where first drafts are produced, and the initial ideas are secured between the regularly discarded Stickies and the writer.

Several other interviewees revealed similar inclinations; Professor Bauerlein states: "I write by hand, and when I feel like sentences are fully there, or a paragraph, I'll put it on the screen. But I don't write anything serious, first, with the keyboard." Likewise, Professor Reed claimed that he "[thinks] it through in [his] mind before [he] puts it down on the screen, because if it's on the screen, it's fixed and [he] might feel like [he] doesn't want to pursue it." Professor Skibell also expressed a similar initial process:

> (At first), I work longhand, in a notepad, and then I type everything into the computer…I do feel there is a deeper level of immersion in what you're doing that comes through the quiet of the page, and the actual physical act of spilling ink across a page.

Finally, Jake Thompson agrees,

> I try to give myself time away from the computer to let the ideas roll around in my head…I prefer pen and paper (for brainstorming and informal jotting down), because using the computer means creating a document, saving that document in a specific place, etc., and I don't feel that everything needs that level of longevity.

The impressions of longevity, fixedness, and formality that these participants expressed of the word processor- especially on the more official writing applications- seem contradictory to the idea that digitalized editing allows for a more fluid and continuous process. However, rather than viewing these assertions as antithetical, we must consider them as testimonies to evolving and adapting views on evolving and adapting writing tools. Moreover, we can deduce that while the interviewed writers heavily rely on their word processors for editing, they are all in various ways holding on to older and simpler methods embedded in the computer-less world.

Why the influences that digital editing have on literature matter- indeed if they matter at all- is up for debate. I argue that the quantity and quality of what we are writing matters now more than ever, as digital technology promulgates our writing and alters the ways in which we communicate. Moreover, the multiplicity of writing platforms- "informal", such as Stickies or notepads, and more official, such as word processors for the purpose of creating a viewed or published work- cultivates processes of writing that are significantly diversified and distinctive. Additionally, it is significant to understand

how editing on a digital format reinforces the idea that writers are engaging more in intentional manipulation of their work. This manipulation occurs not only as a consequence of the proficiency of digital editing tools, but also as a consequence of a growing authorial anxiety about perfection and adaptation. Finally, the characteristic of digitalization throughout the editing process conceals the evidence of the writer, and raises questions of authenticity and authorship central to this thesis.

V: Avant-Garde Literature and the Importance of the Reader

1. Multimedia Literature

Remix in contemporary writing as a result of technology has not only changed how authors write, but what types of writing they produce. New avant-garde forms of writing, similar to patchwriting and the emerging remix subgenres, have developed within literature as writers attempt to uncover new ways to keep writing post-modern and interactive. Indeed, authors now have the opportunity to incorporate not only text, but also visual and auditory components into their writing, expanding the definition of literature and creating new mediums of thought and communication. These contemporary forms of writing have made use of digital technology to produce an amalgam of "text, images, music, and graphics", shifting the medium of written word into "a multimedia network publishing platform."[38] While these new and multifarious mediums would not have been possible without the technological advancements that writing tools have allowed us, they emphasize the importance of the act of production. Furthermore, these digital literature technologies have not only redefined the role of the author and the act of

[38] Amerika, Mark. "Writing Cyberspace: Notes on Nomadic Narrative, Net Art and Life Style Practice " *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, vol. 10, No. 7, 2002.

writing itself, but have now reestablished the importance of the reader and the publishing platform as well.

New avant-garde mediums of literature are characteristically all-inclusive and wide-ranging, combining virtually every medium of art. Moreover, electronic literature is defined as "works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer."[39] William Poundstone, a contemporary digital writer, and his work *Project for the Tachistoscope [Bottomless Pit],* is exemplary of the post-modern process of writing, producing, and eventually experiencing literature. It includes the necessary text, and uses visual and auditory components through the internet and flash animation in order to completely change the function of the author, the text, and the reader themselves. It is important to note that this specific project, as is the case with the majority of post-modern and contemporary forms of writing explored in this thesis, cannot be read or consumed without the use of the computer. Just as it would have been impossible for Poundstone to create the project without the computer, it functions solely as an extension of digital technology and therefore cannot be translated from the web.

Writers who engage in the production of multimedia literature, such as William Poundstone, have surpassed the title of writer by centralizing production forms; the importance of the text has been shifted to emphasize the importance of the medium. This shift in focus inherently changes the creative process as well as the writing process. Indeed, an author producing remixes of multiple mediums can still develop a story with a particular message, but the creativity lies in how that message is produced. In Marshall McLuhan's "The Medium Is the Message", he emphasized this modified version of the

[39] "What Is E-Lit?" *Electronic Literature Organization*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2017.

creative process: "the increasing awareness of the action of media, quite independently of their content" is evident in the avant-garde remix, where the intentionality of the author is more apparent in the medium than in the text.[40] Similarly to how Mark Amerika views the inextricable usage of the internet for the contemporary writer, authors who combine multiple media forms are working in a "collaborative work zone" and a unique "exhibition space", continuously diversifying the creative formats for writers.[41]

2. The Responsibility of the Reader

Just as the writer and his/her creative process has been affected by digital technology, the reader has also been affected by the remixes that technology has helped produce. As readers who experience multimedia literature, we inherently become witness to more than just text, and thus the ability and process of understanding and appreciating that form of literature has changed. Indeed, "the foundational layers upon which we as readers have built our methodologies for accessing and interpreting texts are in a state of seismic shift due to digital technologies."[42] In effect, we no longer engage solely in close reading and analytical practice, as digital literature that incorporates multiple art forms demands much more from the reader. For example, William Poundstone's *Project,* with flashing words, sounds, and images, forces the reader to redefine the action of reading as they must focus on the entirety of the media format rather than the words themselves. As the work aims to elicit a response from the reader primarily based on the advanced and somewhat chaotic nature of the medium rather than through the actual text,

[40] McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium Is the Message." *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge: MIT, 1994. N. pag. Print.
[41] Amerika, Mark. "Writing Cyberspace: Notes on Nomadic Narrative, Net Art and Life Style Practice " *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, vol. 10, no. 7, 2002.
[42] Pressman,Jessica. *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014.Page 65

it begs the question: what do our post-modern and contemporary genres of writing "tell us about what we take to be quintessential modern qualities of reading? In other words, how and why do [contemporary mediums of writing] shape its reader?"[43]

In fact, as the reader grapples with the intentionality behind the combination of specific visual, textual and auditory messages, it is clear that a significant amount of the message can be found in what isn't written or textually visible, forcing us to engage in a more complex version of interpretation and analysis. Oftentimes the words that aren't written, or the way that the written words interact with the other elements of communication, are the messages themselves that the reader receives. As literature has become more technologically advanced - to the point where solitary text has become less consequential to digital forms of writing – the role of the reader has evolved just as much as the role of the author. Additionally, it is clear that the process of reading and understanding literature has also changed dramatically, forcing us to take into account all elements of creation and production. As author Jessica Pressman indicates, "Poundstone's *Project* promotes recognition that literature, and our means of reading it, is dependent upon reading machines."[44] The next chapter will discuss more concretely how the role of the reader has developed as a consequence of evolving reading machines.

Another compelling example of multimedia electronic literature can be found in the work of online art group Young-Hae Change Heavy Industries, whose piece "Dakota", is "based on a close reading of Ezra Pound's Cantos I and first part of II."[45] The flash animated text (in this case, the mobile text appears, transfigures, and disappears

[43]Pressman,Jessica. *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014.Page 65
[44]IBID, Page 67
[45]Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries,"Dakota". *I Love E-Poetry*. N.p., 21 Sept. 2015. Web. 05 Feb. 2017.

before the reader's eyes) is literally catapulted onto the screen in different sizes, fonts, and areas, flashing aggressively depending on the importance of the word or phrase. The text is also accompanied by fitting chaotic and primal music, and it is almost impossible to get through the entire experience (for it is a combination of reading, watching, and listening). Other Young-Hae Change Heavy Industries multi-media literature includes automated, robotic voices reading the text along with the viewer, and oscillating colors and backgrounds on the screen. Unlike reading a hardcopy book, the reader cannot pause or step away from the piece without having to restart the entire process, further attesting to the changing role of the reader. Many of the pieces pose questions and observations about the World Wide Web itself, and humorously criticize it's own robotic and computerized existence.

3. Internet-suffused Writing

While digital literature such as *Project for Tachistoscope* and "Dakota" is emblematic of the utilization and remix of multiple mediums of art and communication, other types of remix that emphasize the importance of the internet have also emerged. For example, "flarf" writing is a contemporary poetry subgenre that relies on the internet to essentially produce the content – but not the structure - of the written piece. By typing a word or a phrase into Google, the individual words within the search results serve as catalysts for creative composition.

An example of flarf, written by Drew Gardner and titled "As Dolphins Languor", was created based on the Google results for "awww", "yeah", and "God." It reads as follows:

"awe yea I open a photo album I found under my bed

uhhuh, The dusty, leather cover decaying and smelling of

the years

awe yea baby Regrets mingling with my tears

as I methodically turn the pages, you see

I like to dress up in REALLY tight underwater pumpkin

beavers...

and I take a deep, painful breath

Because staring back at me from the tattered origami

licenses

oh baby yea Are black and white visions of faraway hearts

uh huh"[46]

This example of flarf clearly challenges the traditional formulation of poetry in its awkwardness, its quality of un-political correctness, and the fact that it is only semi-coherent by "taking unexpected turns."[47] These qualities of flarf are important to consider as they represent the foundation of experimental and contemporary forms of writing. They are challenging established writing processes and explicitly incorporating a contemporary writing tool- the internet. Indeed, flarf poetry came out of an inclination to try new techniques and take advantage of our modern technology, and is illustrative of the potential works that the internet helps to construct. Additionally, flarf is exemplary of the assortment and collaboration of various distinctive writers and works.

The fundamental similarity between flarf and other forms of literature stimulated by the internet, such as patchwriting – using past work to provide content and inspiration

[46] Sullivan, Gary. "A Brief Guide to Flarf Poetry." *Poets.org*. Academy of American Poets, 14 Feb. 2011. Web. 21 Jan. 2017.
[47] IBID

– is evident. However, unlike patchwriting where whole phrases of previous text are incorporated and paraphrased, flarf writing allows the author to create an entirely new subject independent of the original, allowing every writer to produce an individual configuration of words while drawing upon various authors and pieces.

Many writers who critique as well as take part in flarf writing emphasize the unique unconventionality of depending on the internet for the production of literature. Technologies such as Google allow writers to stray from the established norm of how and what to write, rendering flarf not only avant-garde in its production, but also avant-garde in its content. As author and poet Drew Gardner says, "What we were really doing was throwing out rules that were constraining and ridiculous and weren't fitting anymore. Once we did that, we could do whatever we wanted."[48] Indeed, as technologies, ideas, forms of art, and the very basis of culture constantly evolves, many writers have transitioned from romantic writing to post-modern writing, experimenting with the infinite possibilities that digital technology provides.

Furthermore, many opinions on flarf parallel Mark Amerika's theory on web based writing, stressing that a distinct combination of previously existing writing creates a separate and legitimate piece of writing. As author Sharon Mesmer states: "when we do these crazy things with Google, a lot of times we're putting something beautiful together with something ugly, and it makes this third thing that is completely delightful and unexpected."[49] Indeed, as Google provides an outlandish and often bizarre landscape for the production of literature, it fosters the merging of different search results- written by numerous unrelated writers- that can go in any and every direction.

---

[48] Fischer, Shell. "Can Flarf Ever Be Taken Seriously? " *Poets &Amp; Writers*, 1 July 2009.
[49]IBID

While the final product may not be considered traditionally beautiful and the meaning may not be entirely obvious - similarly to William Poundstone's *Project* that was deemed chaotic and unmanageable, or Grahame Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* that many literary critics found unreadable – flarf writing pushes established boundaries and reformulates how we compose and perceive literature. Moreover, both the reader and the writer are forced to create and experience new standards of communication and understanding as these new models of creative output are experimented with and integrated as legitimate forms of literature.

This unique process of production of flarf parallels other forms of digital literature in that it cannot exist without technology; it is a subgenre that has emerged as a direct product of the author's interaction with the internet and the computer. These forms of digital writing have been validated by appearing as published works (flarf founder Gary Sullivan won a contest on poetry.com and thus attracted fellow unconventional writers and poets); being taught in classes (I encountered these contemporary forms as a junior in college); and merely amassing attention from the literary world. Indeed, the Electronic Literature Organization, founding in 1999, developed out of the realization that there was a "promise that electronic media offered for literature but [a] lack of a supporting infrastructure," and now is sponsored by numerous Universities and writers, such as UCLA, Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities, and MIT.[50]

Other examples of electronic literature that I have not yet addressed include hypertext fiction, in which links to text are provided to the reader in a non-linear way, allowing the reader to maneuver through the story at his/her will; kinetic poetry, which relies on the movement of words through an animated platform; and collaborative writing

[50] "History." *Electronic Literature Organization*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2017.

projects, which enable the reader to insert their own text into the written document. As suggested in previous chapters, these avant-garde forms of writing are exemplary of the shift towards the diminution of one unique and identifiable author. Hypertext fiction and the capability that readers have to choose their own storyline, permits them just as much- if not more- control as the author, and thus essentially obscures the boundaries between writer and reader. Kinetic poetry- as its sole platform is, primarily, Flash animation- fails to even recognize an author, unless the author's identity and title of the poem are not so subtly part of the poem itself. There is, of course, the possibility that whoever circulated the kinetic poem online is the author, but whether or not the poem is merely being shared by another, or originated with the sharer, is ambiguous. Lastly, and perhaps most exemplary, is the collaborative writing project, which allows, as it suggests, collective participation in the writing of a story on a digitalized platform. The most notable product of this collaboration is *The Legacy of Totalitarianism in a Tundra,* a book created online with participants from over 71 countries. Various websites dedicated to this collaboration have also emerged, such as Folding Story, Storymash, and Novlet. The encouragement of collaboration promoted by digitalization renders the author unidentifiable, and ultimately anonymous.

Another significant subgenre that incorporates and parallels digital technology is the hard-copy novel that has been published in the form of emails or text messages- a post-modern rendition of the epistolary novel. Author Lauren Myracle, in particular, amassed fame due to her series of instant message books; ttyl, ttfn, and l8r, g8r, all written entirely as if the reader has gained access to a private instant message discussion, highlighting the interweaving of digital technology and writing. Professor Skibell,

although he by no means considers these works to come from "deep thought", comes to the defense of these authors:

> You know that people are used to reading twitter, so you can't write a novel without that knowledge…a novel has to be kind of sprightly, you can't use syntax that's going to be slow and quiet (in this rapid society), and so it's hard. It's hard to walk the line.

Just as the previous chapters discussed what is inherently different about types of writing that have emerged from digital technology, flarf and digitalized literature, too, are legitimized forms of writing that have, in their integration, changed, eliminated, and expanded certain responsibilities of the author and reader. Essentially, these online platforms have redetermined if and how authors are made visible within their work. Whether or not we think that these experimental forms are valuable or reputable representations of developing literary practices, their very existence reveals that there are indeed writers who are attempting to cultivate a proper place for digitalization and writing to converge.

VI: Manipulation of the Reader and the Platform

As I have discussed in previous chapters, the responsibilities of the reader have also developed in order to adjust to the dynamic field of contemporary literature. It would be insufficient not to recognize the changing role of production and readership, and how they too, have the opportunity to remix, manipulate, circulate, and collaborate. Indeed, in order to fully grasp how digital technology has changed literature, we must comprehend how the public- the readers and future writers- are perceiving and adapting to these changes.

The reader of post-modern literature has not only had to adapt to the culmination of mediums as we saw in the previous chapter, but has also evolved to play an equally important and collaborative role, especially when taking into consideration the new methods of production and consumption, such as E-books, Kindles and PDF. The reader has not *replaced* the importance of medium, text, or author, but rather, has been given substantial control over the text, both mentally and physically. For example, the Kindle- an electronic device that consists of multiple forms of digital media, predominantly electronic books- allows the reader to physically maneuver through chapters, pages, and portions of text through a simple click, permitting the reader considerable mobility not possible with the hard-copy book. In addition, the kindle allows readers to highlight passages or sentences, and create annotations that can be viewed and responded to publicly. Writer Steven Johnson explicates the significance of this newfound engagement in annotation by stating:

> Think of it as a permanent, global book club. As you read, you will know that at any given moment, a conversation is available about the paragraph or even sentence you are reading. Nobody will read alone anymore. Reading books will go from being a fundamentally private activity -- a direct exchange between author and reader -- to a community event, with every isolated paragraph the launching pad for a conversation with strangers around the world.[51]

This "community event" of electronic reading- or perhaps a more appropriate term is the globalization of the digital reader- emphasizes the connectivity that digital technology has enabled, but also indicates that the writer and reader overlap. Indeed, now the reader

[51] Johnson, Steven. "How the E-Book Will Change the Way We Read and Write." *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, 20 Apr. 2009. Web. 21 Jan. 2017.

has the ability to clarify passages, reiterate certain implications or interpretations, and answer questions that other readers have posed, all through digital writing.

The platform of digitalization itself has also yielded a community of sorts, with millions of books stored electronically, ceaselessly converging and promoting further reading. Words within individual books are annotated, cross-linked, connected to other sources, etc., resulting "in the new world of books, [where] every bit informs another; every page reads all the other pages."[52] The impacts that digital writing have had on reading and, ultimately, on the circulation of writing, are consistent with how digital technology has affected communication and the spread of information more generally; anything online can be re-shared, linked, categorized, etc.; constantly associated and constantly moveable. As Johnson rightly affirmed, writing in today's technological age incorporates much more than the personalized relationship between writer and reader.

Interestingly enough, a survey conducted in 2015 on the percentage of American adults who had read a book in the previous 12 months yielded unexpected results. The amount of people who had read a book in any format (print, E-book, computer, etc.) had decreased by 6% in the course of 3 years, indicating that despite the augmented level of accessibility to literature, less people are reading. Moreover, the amount of people who had read a print book decreased by 6%. Significantly, however, out of the 73% of adults who had read a book in the past 12 months, 89% of them were reading print books, revealing that this method of reading is far from disappearing altogether. Indeed, while those who read E-books increased 11%, they still accounted for a minority of readers.[53]

---

[52] Gennaro, Ivo De. *Value: Sources and Readings on a Key Concept of the Globalized World*. Leiden: Brill, 2012. Print, Page 433

[53] Perrin, Andrew. "Book Reading 2016." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*. N.p., 01 Sept. 2016. Web. 25 Jan. 2017.

One can speculate that this aversion to reading on electronic devices is due to the aesthetic differences, or perhaps because electronic devices are expensive, or even possibly because older generations are hesitant about using digital technology. As Professor Skibell points out, "I find it very hard to read a novel on a screen…. studies say deeper reading has been killed by the screen, and my personal experience is that it's true." Walter Reed agrees, stating,

> I think everybody [reads] differently when reading off a computer as opposed to reading from a hard copy. A number of studies show that eye movements are different…you can also read fairly quickly, so there's a temptation to speed through it, but you end up with less retention.

Regardless of the reasoning behind these statistics, they indicate that readers find something valuable in hard copy books. The persistence of readers to dedicate themselves to a physical edition is objectively neither good nor bad, but reveals a common habit or preference. As Professor Skibell noted earlier on, deep writing comes out of deep thinking away from the distractions of the computer; perhaps this standard can be applied to deep reading as well.

However, it is generally agreed upon that the amount of people writing has increased as a result of widespread utilization of digital technology. There are not any statistical analyses of this increase, as virtually everyone is required to write something- an email, a text, a report- everyday. But writers and researchers predominantly agree that "young people today write far more than any generation before them."[54] While the

[54] Force, Thessaly La. "A New Literacy?" *The New Yorker*. The New Yorker, 16 July 2014. Web. 25 Jan. 2017.

majority of this writing occurs in the context of informal communication, such as blog posts or twitter, Stanford Professor Andrew Lunsford asserts that the amplification of writing- despite the social contexts or platforms- improve and facilitate more writing.[55] Professor Bauerlein, on the other hand, challenges this view:

> The more young people do their writing in the youth culture world [i.e. informal, online writing], the harder it is for them to shift their writing skills over…writing skills are not transferrable, so if you get really good at writing text messages, that doesn't mean you're good at writing a college paper…if you get adept at blog writing, that doesn't mean you're going to be good at fiction writing.

While this thesis does not examine how informal writing for the purpose of communication lends itself to more formal, creative, or professional writing, it is clear that digital technology has influenced how much and what people are writing more generally. Moreover, the reader has also adapted to play an equally authoritative and manipulative role, often collaborating or overlapping with the author as well as other readers. Finally, it is clear that the technological reading format has certainly induced negative or indifferent responses despite the mobility it allows its readers. We must keep the reader and the publishing format in mind, as they too have been drastically impacted by digitalization.

Conclusion

While dependence on and interconnectivity between digital technology and writing is certainly more indisputable in electronic literature, such as flarf or flash

[55] Force, Thessaly La. "A New Literacy?" *The New Yorker*. The New Yorker, 16 July 2014. Web. 25 Jan. 2017.

animated texts (as opposed to various experimental forms, which I have attempted to prove are strongly correlated with digital technology), we must also consider that writers have always been experimenting with new forms of writing, as well as incorporating multiple mediums into their written work. As Professor Reed noted, "even with print…there's a long tradition of not reducing everything to the same font or style." This multiplicity of styles within a story is evident in books such as *Ulysses,* by James Joyce, or works by Ezra Pound, which were initially controversial due to their unconventionality.

Moreover, "book illustrations were very prominent, as you can see with William Blake, for example", who accompanied a vast majority of his text with illustrations, thus employing multiple mediums in his production process. It is therefore evident, that today's contemporary writers are part of a long lasting and historically rooted practice of challenging the established modes of writing, experimenting with various forms of art and communication, and adapting to the social and technological transitions. By no means was digital technology the exclusive catalyst of experimental literature, but it has certainly facilitated the development of subgenres and techniques that are drastically different from those practiced in the romantic or modern eras of literature.

The remixing of writing styles, words, mediums and writers gives us insight into how digital technology has affected the reader, the writer and their creative process, and literature itself. The means of production of writing has constantly been evolving, but only with the advent of the computer and the internet has the writer formed an inextricable dependence on their writing tool - a dependence that transcends the otherwise formulaic relationship between the writer and their instrument. Indeed, whereas

the pen and the typewriter acted as extensions of the author's fingers, merely allowing the writer to transcribe his/her thoughts, many writers, such as student Jake Thompson and Professor Bauerlein, for example, view the computer as an acting extension of their minds, providing ideas and acting as a fellow thinker and editor. The very definitions of the author and the reader, as well as of thinking in general, have been redefined to emphasize efficiency, forcing the "formulation of thought directly in the electric element" rather than in a distinctly separate and non-technological way.[56]

Despite the helpful and supplementary characteristics of digital technology, there is clearly still much debate about whether or not this is truly changing the nature of our writing. While Professor Bauerlein, amongst others, stresses that due to digital technologies, "people [don't have] basic reading and writing skills", Professor Skibell asserts:

> I don't think the computer, as opposed to the typewriter, as opposed to the quill, and before that the chisel, has changed anything…I don't think that the connection between head, heart, and hand, has really changed since Shakespeare with a quill or Hemingway with a typewriter.

Despite the differences in opinion on whether or not writing has changed, it is clear that as digital technology has affected virtually every facet of society- including all art forms- by expanding possibilities, eliminating non-effective methods, and in general making things easier and more advanced, literature too has expanded in its genres, evolved in its post-modern styles, and has become easily producible. Writers are now exploring new

[56] Heim, Michael. *Electric Language: a Philosophical Study of Word Processing*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987. Page 152

ways of communicating with their readers, different methods of developing ideas, and are accepting the collaboration of writing that the internet renders possible.

This is not to say that longhand or hard copy books are disappearing entirely, nor can I accurately predict whether digitalized writing and publication will replace older methods. But the increased experimentation with digital writing and the positive (or at least interested) response from readers suggests that we must be attentive and explore the potential of where digital technology can take us, so that we can remain in control of our writing and authorial roles. Furthermore, these questions are pertinent to examining how future generations will learn to write and what they will choose to write about. As we are at a technological turning point in the arts, authors have the potential to revolutionize literature through digital tech, and we, as readers and writers, must understand how that is affecting our creative process, our reading and writing abilities, and our appreciation of text.

The avant-garde forms of literature that have been discussed throughout this thesis demonstrate the association between digital technology and experimental literary enterprises. These experimental writing techniques- as a consequence of remix and manipulation, or as a necessary feature of online display- raise questions about authorship that I have strived to accentuate. However, there is no definitive answer, as every writer has a unique relationship with their writing tools, prompting varying responses and experiences. Many writers continue to grapple with the meaning of authorship, questioning its importance, and if indeed digital technology has begun to redefine it. Professor Skibell suggests:

> What writing was meant to do, in a sense, was supposed to allow you, the speaker, to be where you physically could not be. So either geographically, or in time. And I think part of what starts you, as a child, writing, is you want your voice to be heard. We're not really literally talking about a voice and we're not literally talking about hearing, but writing is a microphone that amplifies the voice through space and time. It's not about authorship so much as it is about the desire of the person who's writing… I've collaborated with people, it's just a different thing, it's like building a cathedral…So your energy is still going into it, your voice is still there, but the reader just doesn't care…we don't care who built Saint John the Divine...it's an egotistical thing (to want to know the author).

Professor Skibell's acknowledgement that individual voices still remain present despite collaboration, contradict the experimental modes of literature that we have seen, which collapse boundaries between various authors and readers. Moreover, if we remain with the cathedral metaphor, we must challenge whether it is indeed possible to leave badges of individuality in an endeavor consisting of so many, or what the significance and purpose of that would be.

Additionally, Professor Skibell brings up the question: why *do* we care about authors? And if collaboration shields distinct authorship, do we stop caring? Or is authorship merely more difficult to identify? He suggests that our need to know the identity of the author is an egotistical inquiry. Although he did not elaborate, we can deduce that he proposes the desire to search for the author, is in order to fill a reader's self-centered interest; perhaps we want to judge the author in a way only possible through knowledge of their identity, or perhaps we feel it will better our individual interpretations and understanding of a text. Emory student Michelle Wilde proposed, "readers like

knowing where and how the book originated; where did the author come up with it? The life of the author helps give us insight into the book itself." Remix of various texts and various writers certainly leaves the identity behind the text more ambiguous, and I would agree with Professor Skibell that this ambiguity and multiplicity of authors renders their identities less important or essential to the reader.

Moreover, Professor Skibell conveys the idea that the diminishing importance of authorship is not a recent development; nor are experimental writing forms changing writing:

> It is just a different number of people creating something like a movie; we just put a name on it. So I don't see that it's such a new thing. Or that it even changes the game. I don't think the fact that people are doing electronic writing or collaborative writing, means that writing has changed. It's still the same thing, it just operates a little different.

The differences in operation, although they may be subtle, are still fundamental for writing processes. The conflicting opinions and experiences that are evident in the interviews, where some professors think writing has not changed, and others think our digital technologies have ruined our writing skills for good, is an ongoing and developing discussion. The more analysis and debate surrounding how we are affected as readers and writers will perhaps yield more conclusive results, but they are yet to be conducted. Moreover, we will have to track how electronic writing and experimental contemporary forms are further incorporated into literature. Will traditional and romantic writers remain in the majority that question these works, or will these forms continue to diversify and proliferate, as was the case with *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*? Regardless of digital,

post-modern, and experimental writings' resilience or influence, they represent a unique and distinctly contemporary phase of writing.

VIII. Bibliography

Amerika, Mark. “Writing Cyberspace: Notes on Nomadic Narrative, Net Art and Life Style Practice ” *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, vol. 10, no. 7, 2002.

Barthes, Roland, and Stephen Heath. *Image, Music, Text*, ”The Death of the Author”, New York: Noonday, 1988. Print.

Blum, Susan Debra. *My Word!: Plagiarism and College Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009. Print.

Brockman, John. "2010: *How is the Internet Changing the Way You Think? Edge.org.* The Edge, 2010. Web. 20 Jan. 2017.

Electronic Literature Organization. “History”, N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2017.

Fischer, Shell. “Can Flarf Ever Be Taken Seriously? ” *Poets &Amp; Writers*, 1 July 2009.

Force, Thessaly La. "A New Literacy?" *The New Yorker*. The New Yorker, 16 July 2014. Web. 25 Jan. 2017.

Gennaro, Ivo De. *Value: Sources and Readings on a Key Concept of the Globalized World*. Leiden: Brill, 2012. Print, Page 433

Heim, Michael. *Electric Language: a Philosophical Study of Word Processing*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987.

Johnson, Steven. "How the E-Book Will Change the Way We Read and Write." *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, 20 Apr. 2009. Web. 21 Jan. 2017.

Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. *Track Changes: a Literary History of Word Processing*. Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016,

Lammers, Tim. “Interview: Seth Grahame-Smith Talks 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies'.” *Direct Conversation*, 5 Feb. 2016.

MacArthur, Charles A., Steve Graham, and Jill Fitzgerald. *Handbook of Writing Research*. New York ; London: Guilford, 2016. Print.

Mack, Michael. *How Literature Changes the Way We Think*. New York: Continuum, 2011. Print.

McBridge, Kelly. “'Patchwriting' Is More Common Than Plagiarism, Just as Dishonest.” *Poynter*, 8 Sept. 2012.

McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium Is the Message." *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge: MIT, 1994. N. pag. Print.

McMullan, Thomas. “How Technology Rewrites Literature ” *The Guardian*, 23 June 2014.

Moore Howard, Rebecca, and Laura J. Davies. "Plagiarism in the Internet Age." *Educational Leadership* 6th ser. 66 (2009): 64-67. Web.

Perrin, Andrew. "Book Reading 2016." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*. N.p., 01 Sept. 2016. Web. 25 Jan. 2017.

Perrin, Andrew, and Maeve Duggan. "Americans’ Internet Access: 2000-2015." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*. N.p., 26 June 2015. Web. 20 Jan. 2017.

Porter, Jim. “Why Technology Matters to Writing: a Cyberwriter's Tale.” *Computers and Composition* , vol. 20, 2002, pp. 375–394.

Pressman, Jessica. *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014.

Rourke, Lee. “Why Creative Writing Is Better with a Pen.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 3 Nov. 2011, www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/03/creative-writing-better-pen-longhand.

Strain-Moritz, Tessa E., “Perceptions of Technology Use and Its Effects on Student Writing” *Culminating Projects in Teach Development, Paper 8, 2016*

Sullivan, Gary. "A Brief Guide to Flarf Poetry." *Poets.org*. Academy of American Poets, 14 Feb. 2011. Web. 21 Jan. 2017.

Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, “Dakota”. *I Love E-Poetry*. N.p., 21 Sept. 2015. Web. 05 Feb. 2017.

Interviews

Bauerlein, Mark. “Interview with Mark Bauerlein.” Jennifer Shaffer, January 2017

Lee, Max. “Interview with Max Lee.” Jennifer Shaffer, February 2017

Lu, James. “Interview with James Lu.” Jennifer Shaffer, January 2017

Reed, Walter. “Interview with Walter Reed.” Jennifer Shaffer, January 2017

Skibell, Joseph. “Interview with Joseph Skibell.” Jennifer Shaffer, February 2017

Thompson, Jake. “Interview with Jake Thompson.” Jennifer Shaffer, February 2017

Wilde, Michelle. “Interview with Michelle Wilde.” Jennifer Shaffer, January 2017