

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Telling Tales: Hypertext Writing Part 2

COMP3220 Web Infrastructure

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Hypertext Fiction

Academic study concentrates on literary hypertext (c.f. literary fiction)

- Typified by non-linear narratives, rather than non-linear stories

What about the hypertext equivalent of genre or popular fiction?

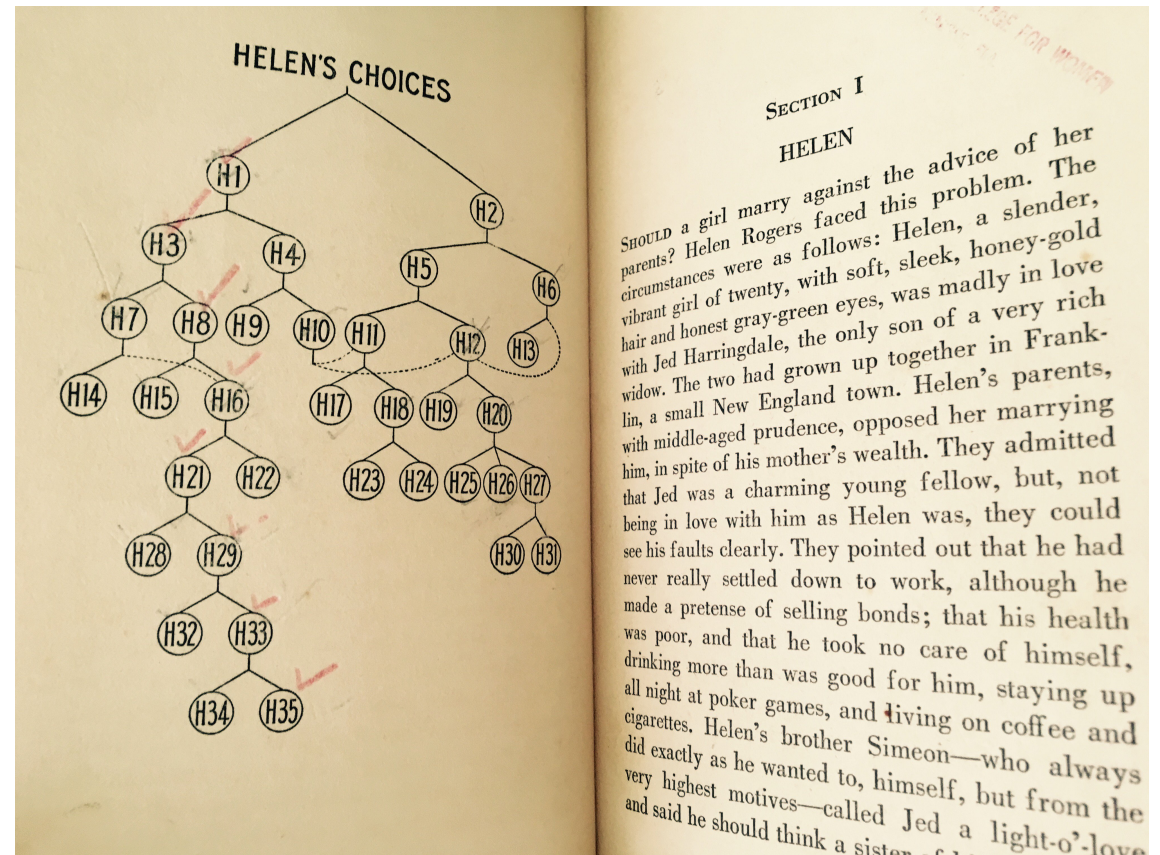
Consider the Consequences (1930)

Earliest known example of a branching novel!

Third person narrative

Relatively fine-grained, non-linear story

- Multi-paragraph lexias
- Three intertwined stories within the book (a woman and her two suitors)
- Introductory text suggests that the "game" may be played by a group

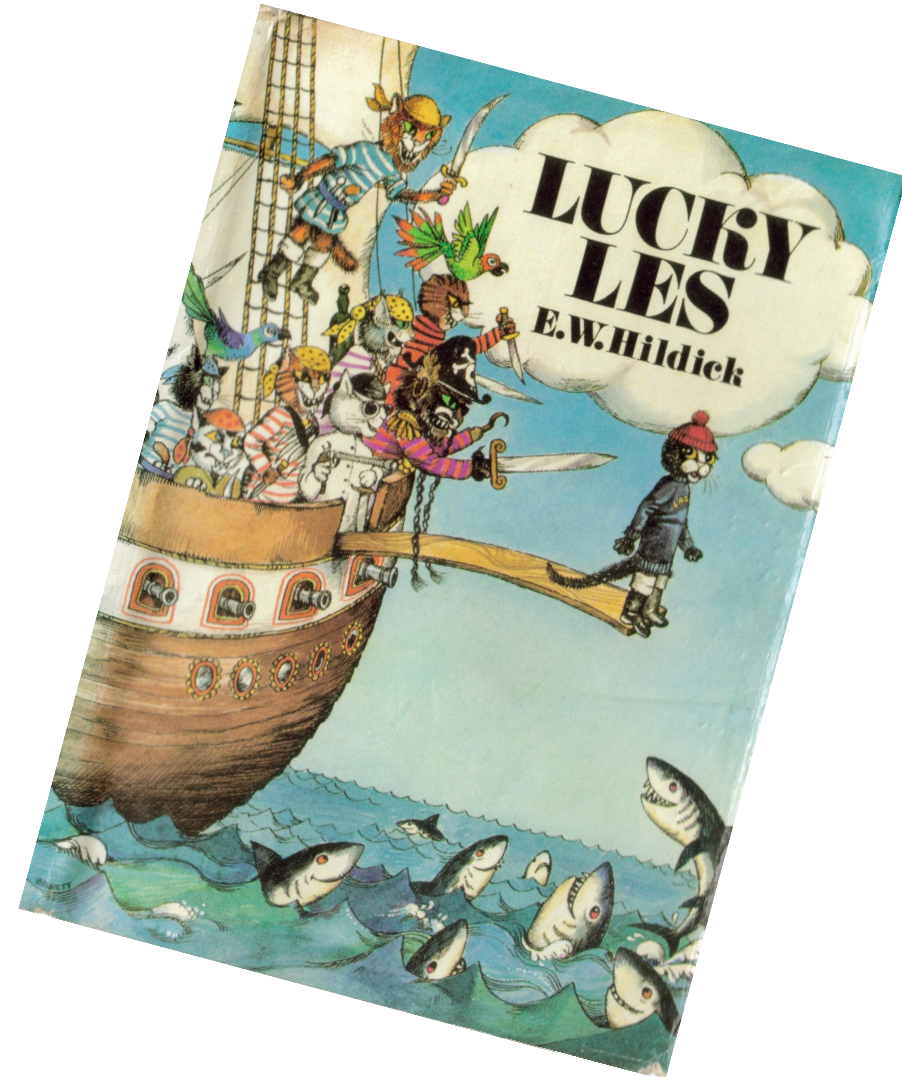


Lucky Les (1967)

Third person narrative

Coarse-grained, non-linear story

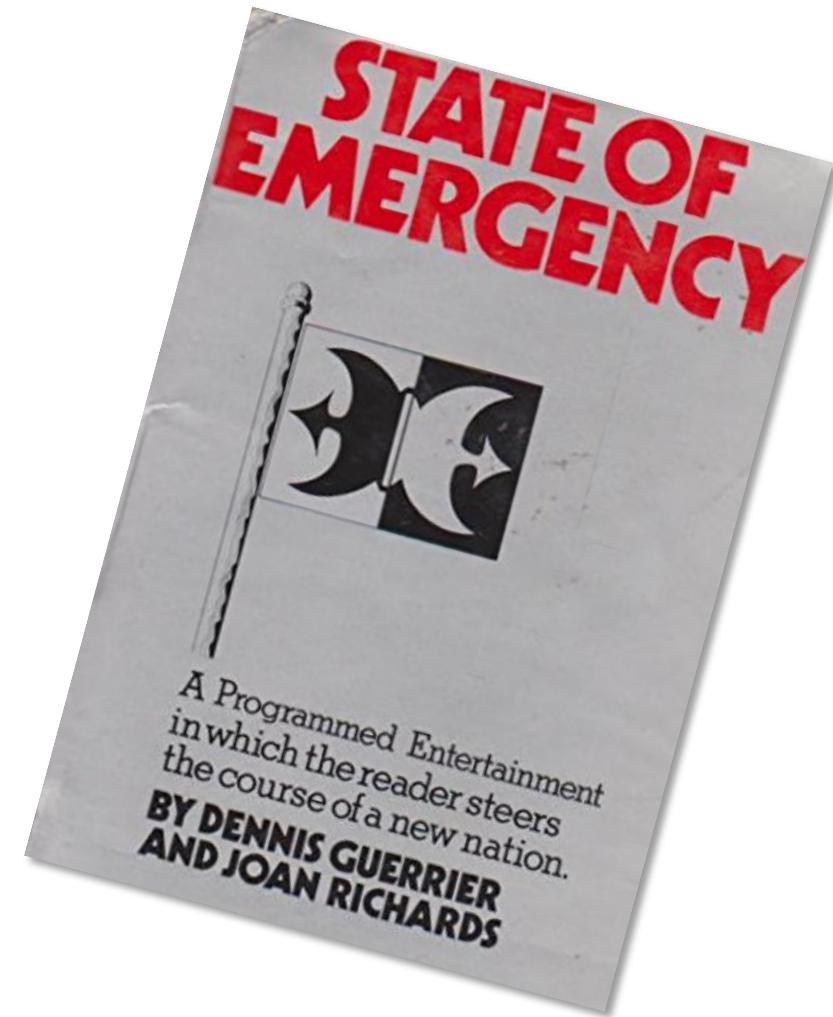
- Multi-page lexias corresponding to episodes in Les' life
- Each episode concludes with an explicit choice for the reader



State of Emergency (1969)

Crossover between hypertext fiction and programmed instruction

- Intent of book is to teach the reader about the challenges of running a newly-independent African state
- Coarse-grained (multipage) lexia
- Non-linear story



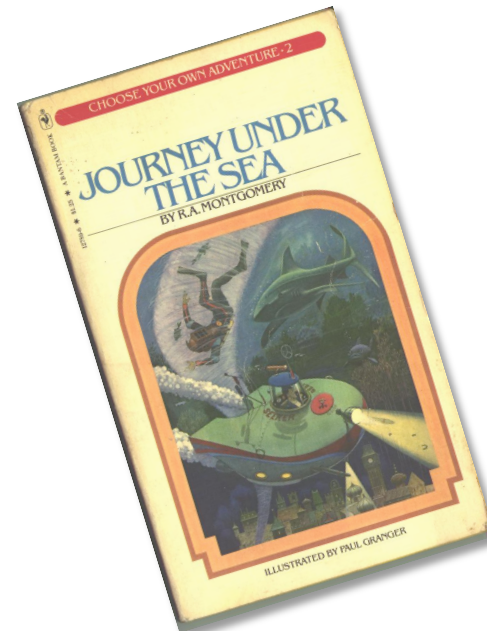
Choose Your Own Adventure (1979-)

Second person narrative

Again, non-linear story

- Single page lexias
- Numbered pages with explicit choices

See also interactive fiction
(Colossal Cave/Advent, etc)



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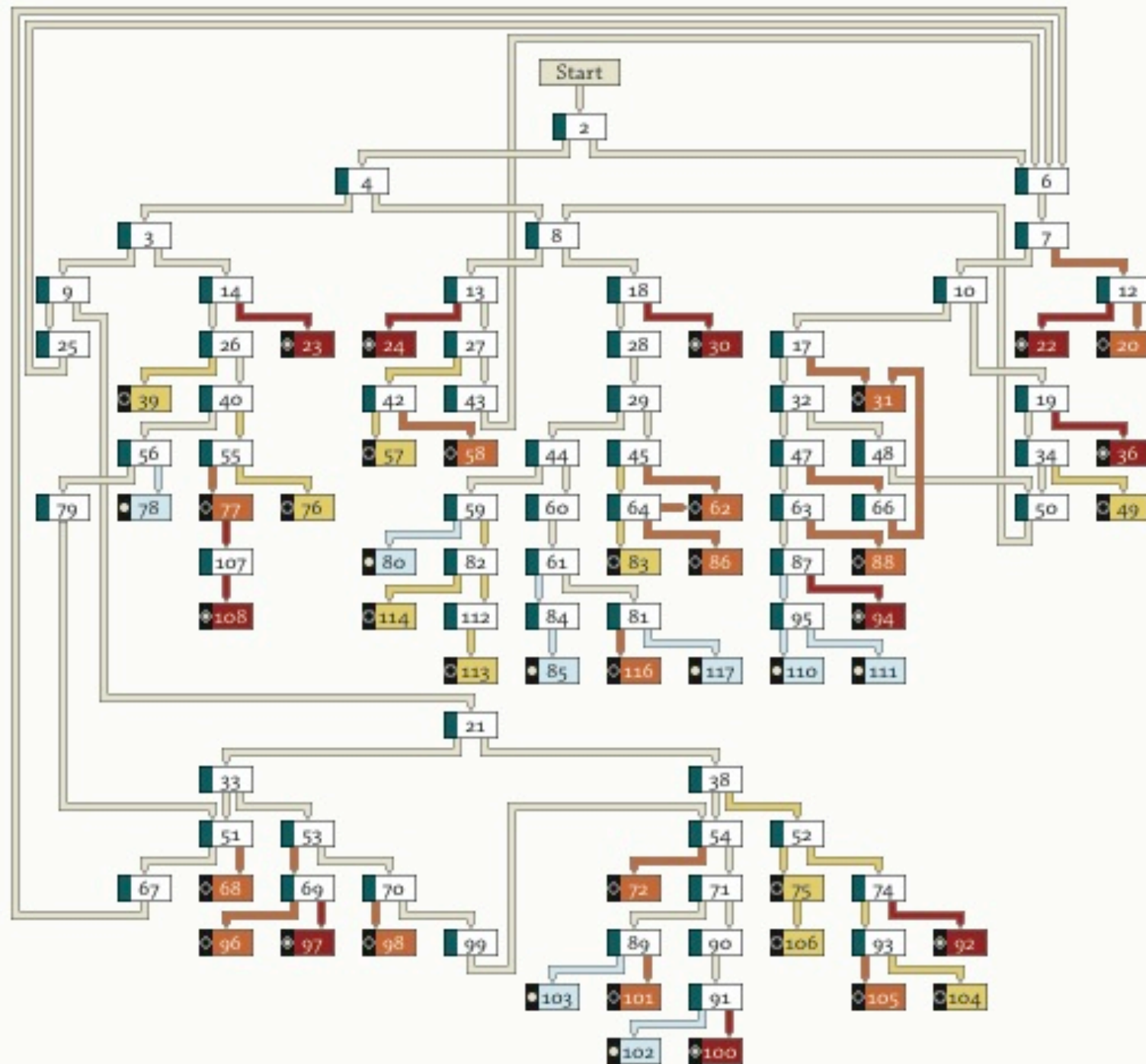
The cable attaching you to the *Maray* is extended to its limit. You have come to rest on a ledge near the canyon in the ocean floor that ancient myth says leads to the lost city of Atlantis.

You have an experimental diving suit designed to protect you from the intense pressure of the deep. You should be able to leave the *Seeker* and explore the sea bottom. The new suit contains a number of the latest microprocessors enabling a variety of useful functions. It even has a built-in PDA with laser communicator. You can cut loose from the cable; the *Seeker* is self-propelled. You are now in another world. Remember, this is a dangerous world, an unknown world.

As agreed, you signal the *Maray*, "All systems GO. It's awesome down here."

If you decide to explore the ledge where the Seeker has come to rest, turn to page 6.

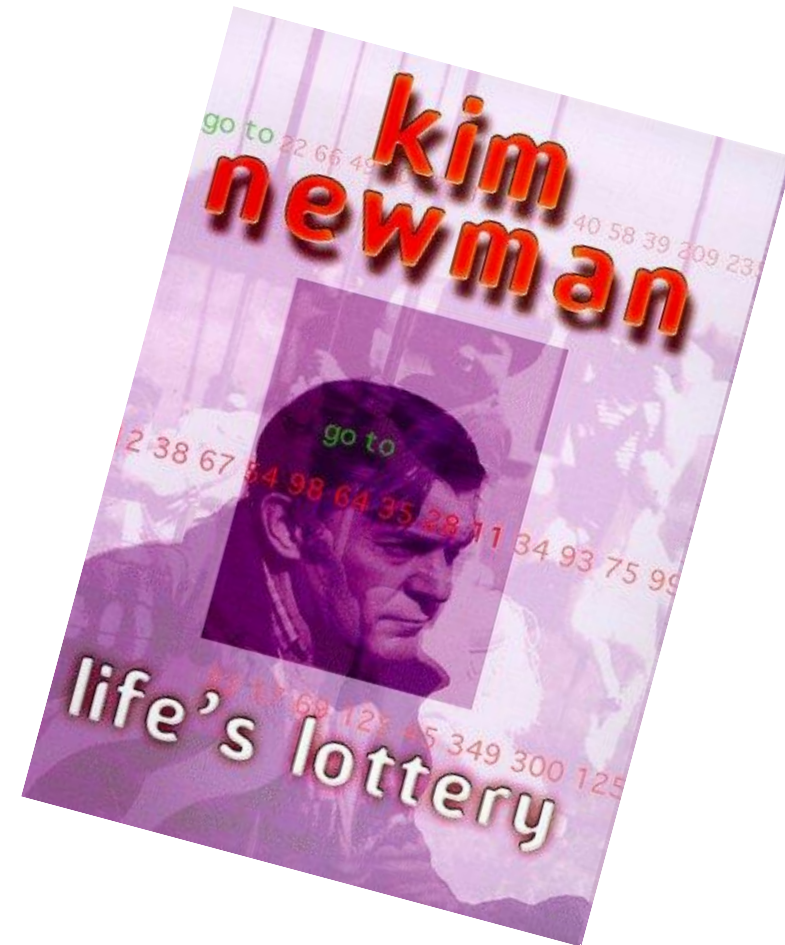
If you decide to cut loose from the Maray and dive with the Seeker into the canyon in the ocean floor, turn to page 4.



Life's Lottery (1999)

Increasing sophistication – not a children's book!

- Lexias vary in size from a paragraph of a few sentences to several pages
- Non-linear story, but with an additional narrative if lexias are read in order, rather than by following the directions in the lexias





Ludic Hypertext

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/jamesrbowe/4001776922/>

Ludic Narrative

Game + Story ... but what's in a game?

Different forms of play:

- Competition (agon)
- Chance (alea)
- Simulation (mimicry)
- Disorientation (ilinx)

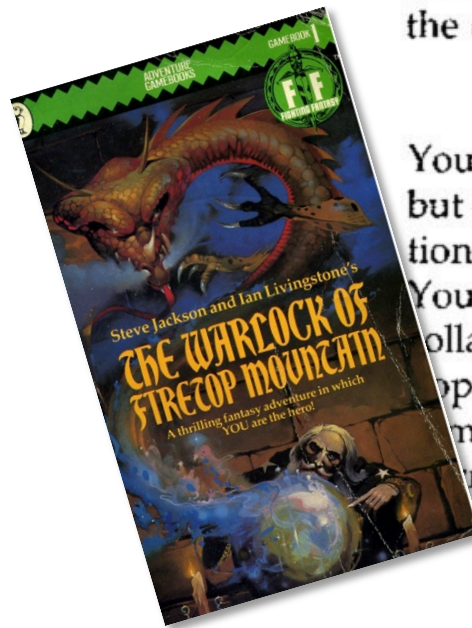
Different types of play:

- Structured, explicit rules (ludus)
- Unstructured, spontaneous (paidia)

Fighting Fantasy (1982-)

Combines CYOA-style second person narrative with Dungeons & Dragons-style rules

- Non-linear story
- Numbered paragraphs (more finely-grained narrative)
- Mixture of explicit and random choices (aleatory reading)
- External state (hit points, inventory, etc)



21

The green blood of the dead Orcs smells foul as it seeps from their bodies. You step around the corpses and investigate the chest. It is a sturdy affair, made of strong oak and iron, and it is firmly locked. You may try to smash the lock with your sword (turn to 339) or leave it alone and go through the open door (turn to 293).

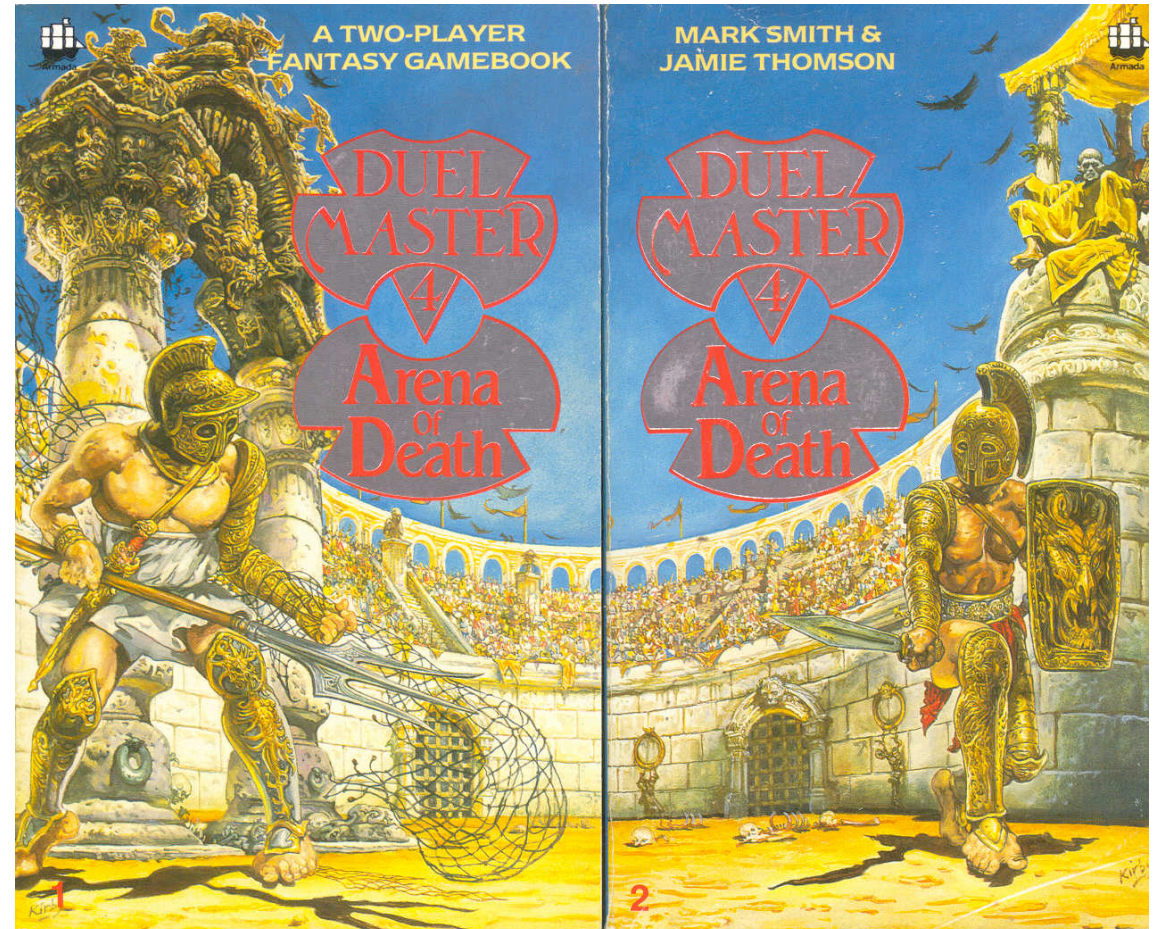
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You poke around looking for signs of secret doors but can find none. You pause to ponder your situation and a small jet of gas hisses from the ceiling. You cough and choke to clear your lungs, but collapse to your knees. Your head spins and you flop to the floor in an unconscious heap. When you come to, you look around in an unfamiliar place. Turn to 4.

Duel Master (1986-7)

Two-player gamebook (agon)

- Non-linear story
- Split across two paired books (even/odd numbered lexia)
- Shared state and synchronization (keywords, WAIT)
- Mixture of explicit and random choices (aleatory reading)

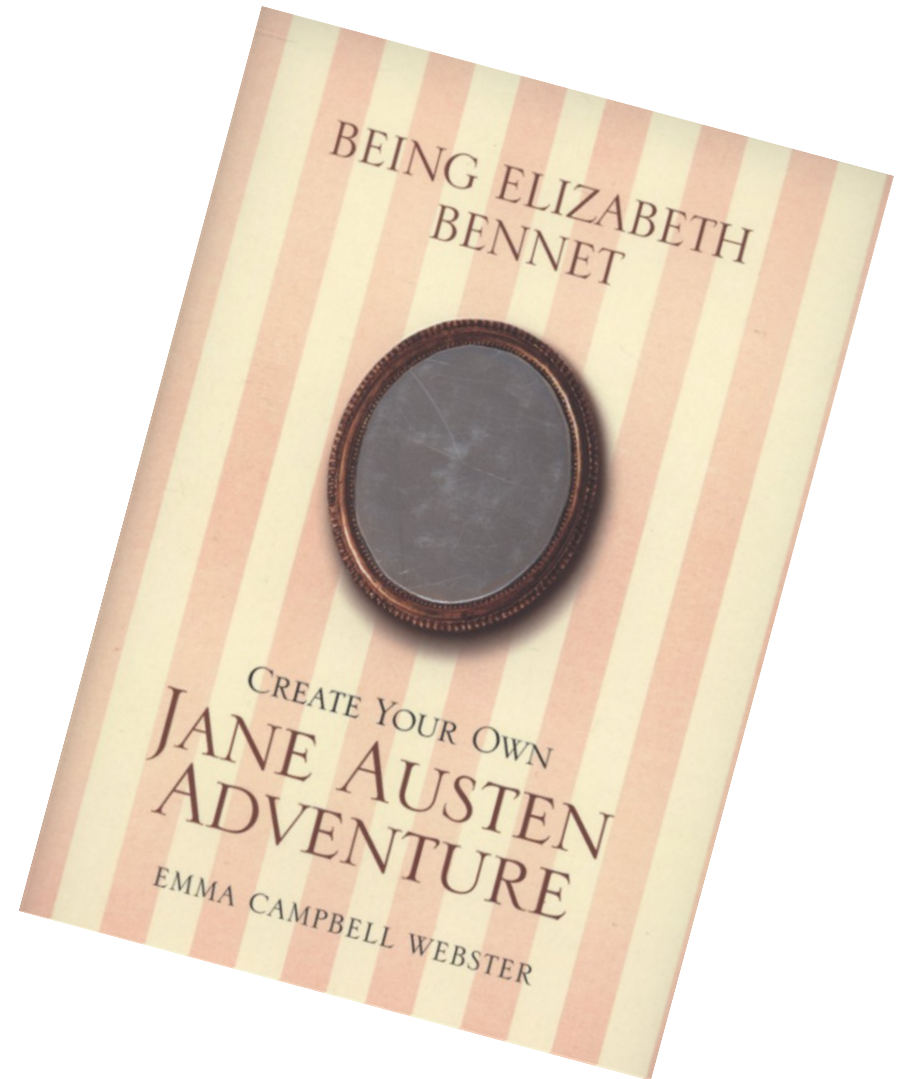


Being Elizabeth Bennet (2007)

Second person narrative

- Again, non-linear story
- Simple rules
- No aleatory aspects

Mimicry aimed at a different demographic to that of other gamebooks!



Dark Cults (1983)

Storytelling card game

- Story assembled from random selection of text fragments (alea)
- Aim is to improvise a narrative around the story

Integral competition (agon)

- Play alternates between players (Life and Death)
- Scores assigned to different card types for each player

Rules ensure well-formed stories

- Card types limit which cards may be played next

Dark Cults (1983)



Card Shark

- A Card Shark node (or card) contains some text, typically a brief, focused passage
- Each card may also specify constraints on the context in which it may appear
- Reader receives seven random cards, based on constraints chooses which card to visit next, repeats
- Social Shark: collaborative, competitive reading
 - Readers take it in turns to play cards
 - Points awarded to readers for the playing of particular cards

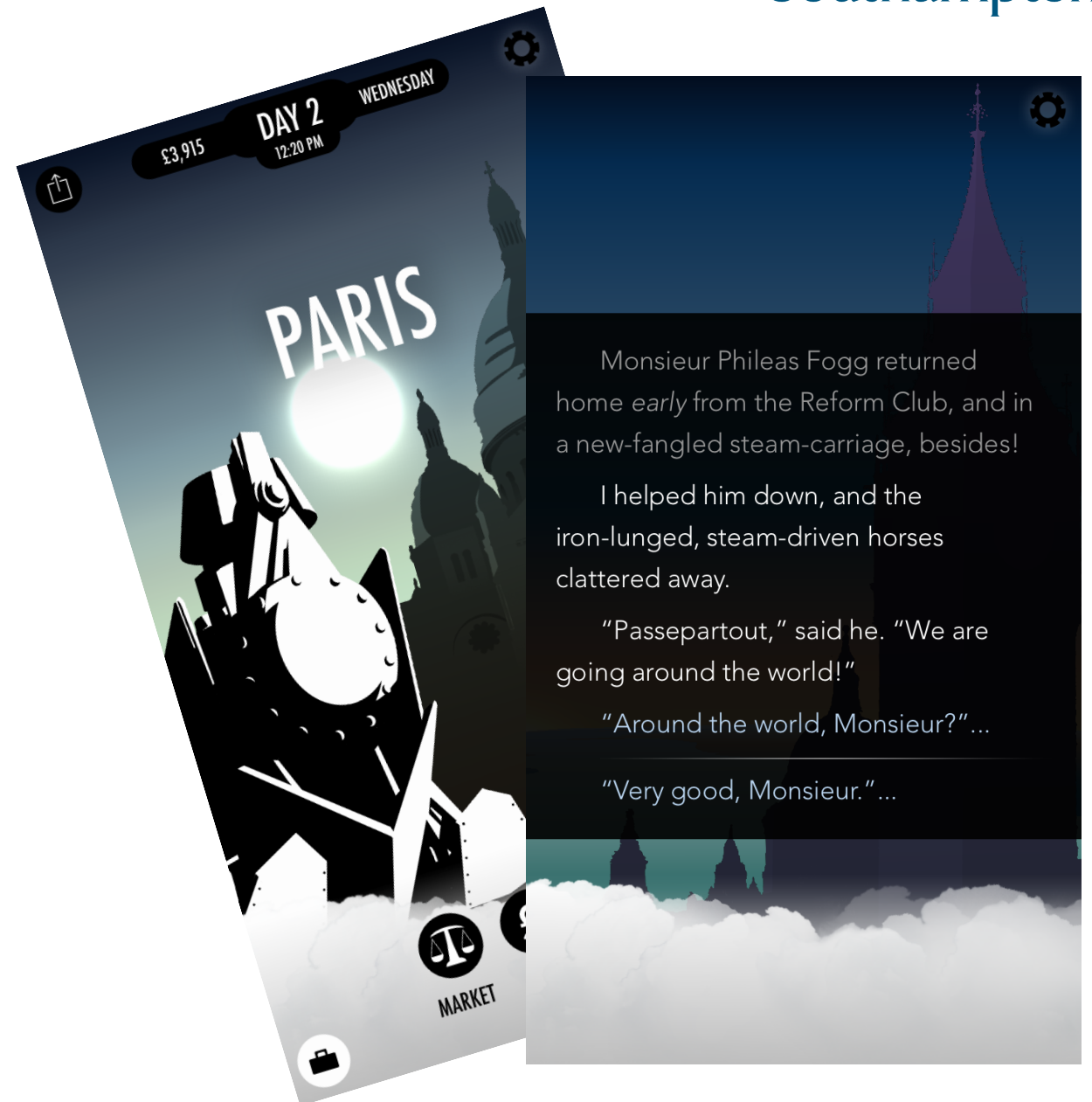
80 Days

Second person narrative

- Non-linear story
- Fine-grained lexia (short paragraphs)
- No aleatory aspects

Some overlap between interactive fiction and (ludic) hypertext fiction

- In general, interactive fiction presents a less constrained choice to the reader (80 Days is an interactive fiction outlier)





Hypertext Comics

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/dolmansaxlii/5606944557/>

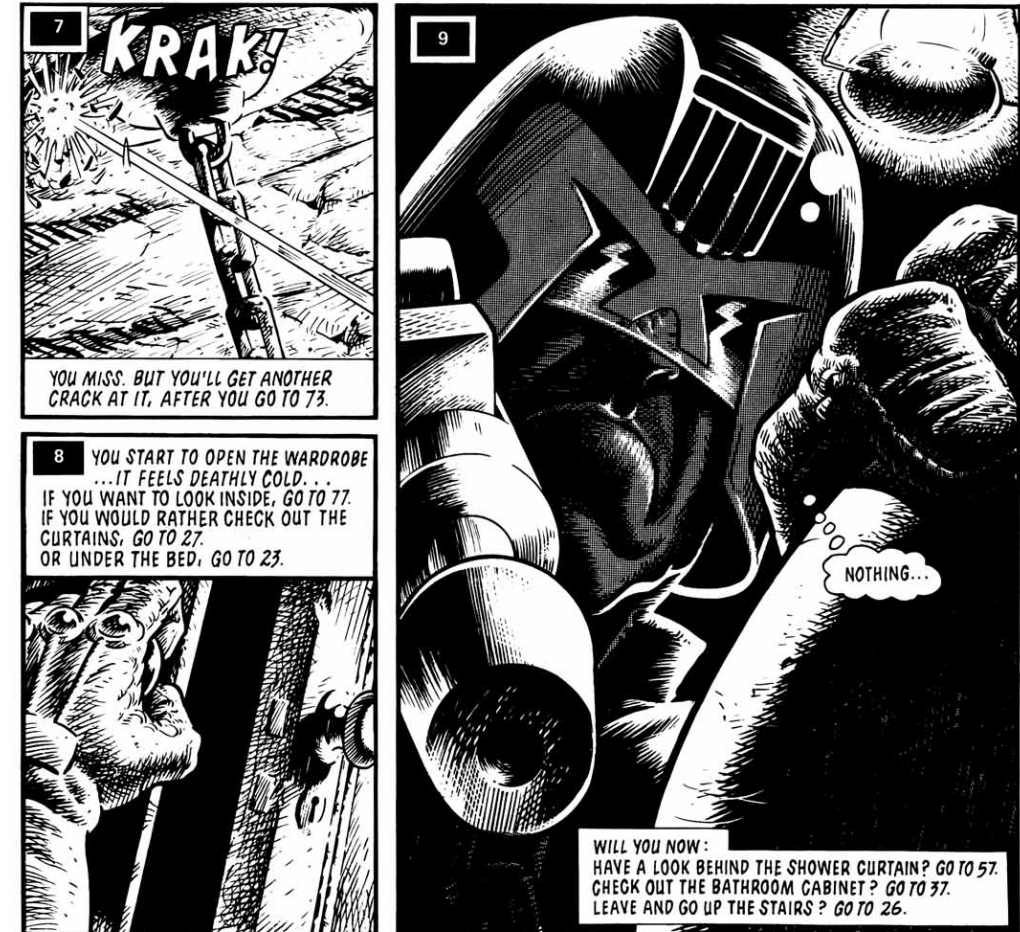
Hypercomics (1986-)

Early hypertext comics based on gamebooks

- Dice Man 1-5 (1986)
- You are Maggie Thatcher (1987)

Typically second person narrative

- Numbered frames/pages
- Explicit choices in captions
- Ludic elements

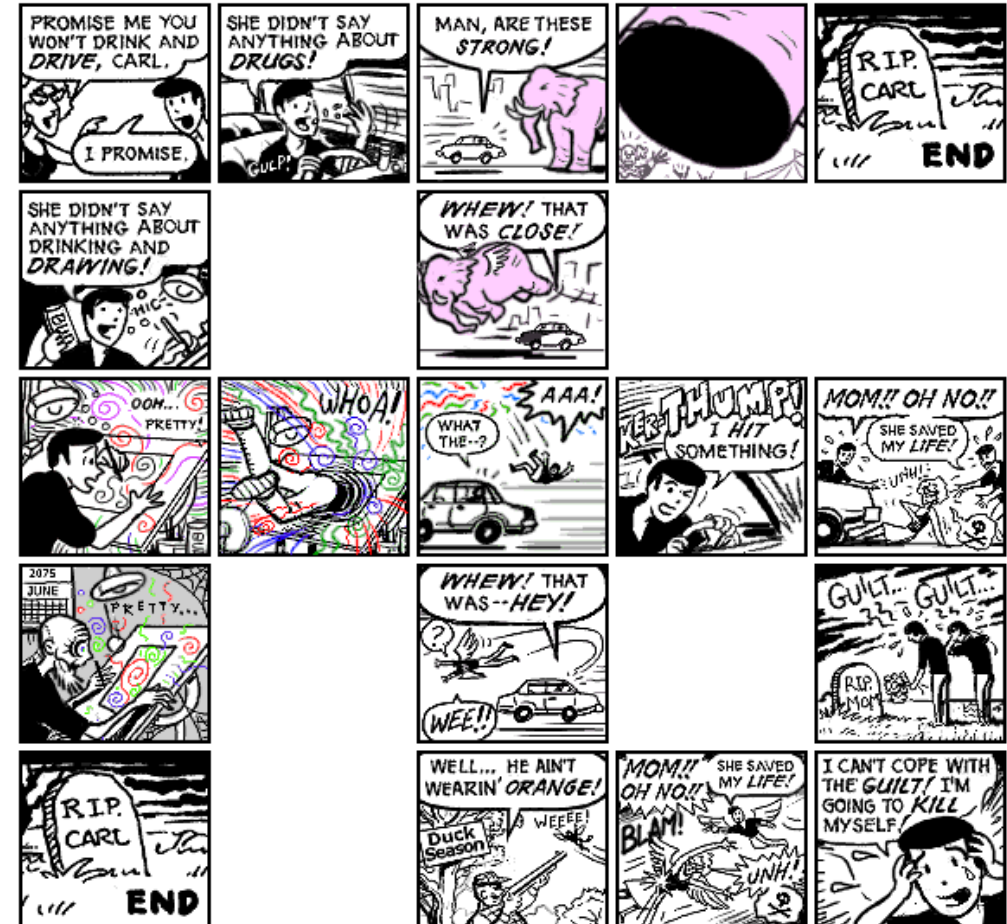


Carl (2001)

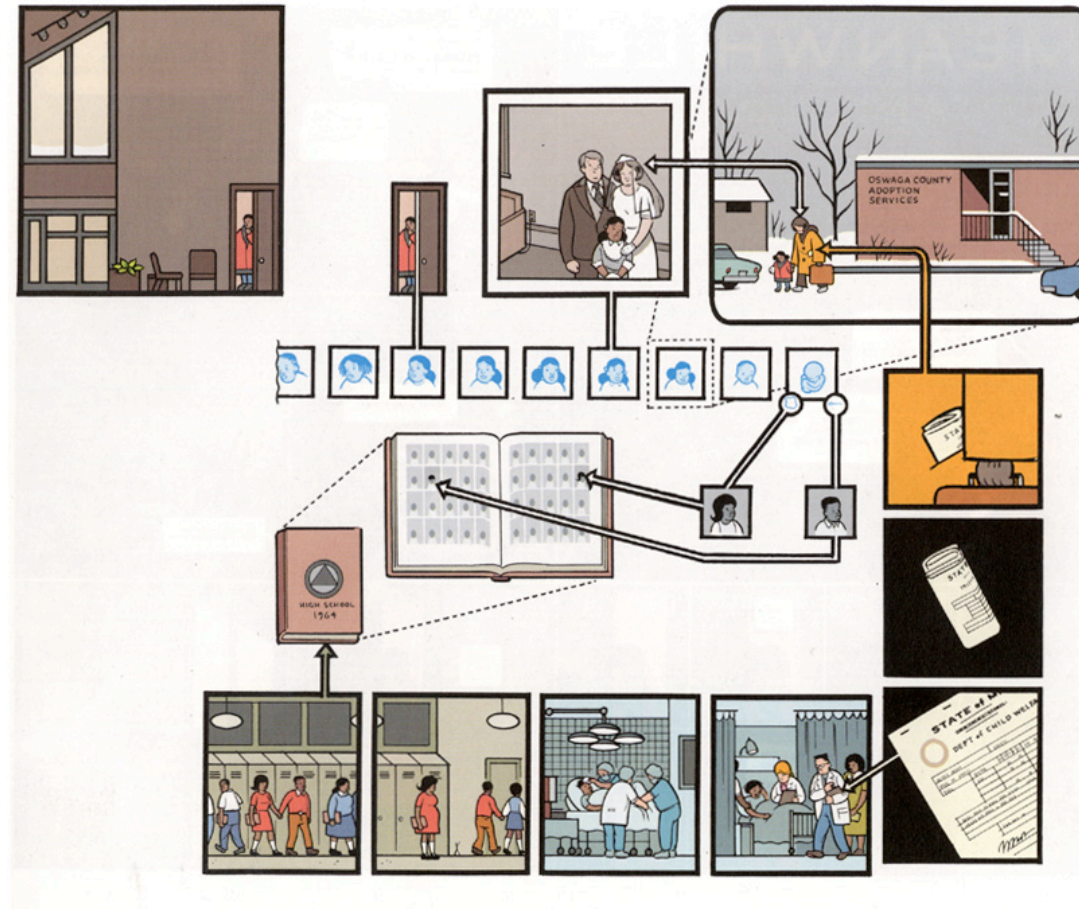
Implicit choices in alternate frames

- Relies on left-to-right, top-to-bottom reading conventions
- Spatial juxtaposition of frames on the printed page permits multiple reading paths

Examined by Scott McCloud in
Understanding Comics

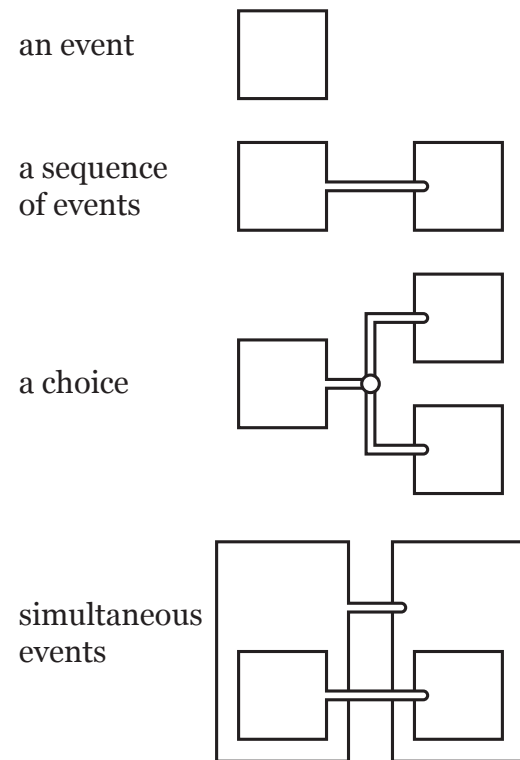


Jimmy Corrigan (2001)



Meanwhile (2010)

Visual grammar for linking:



Tabs for inter-page navigation





Hypertext Poetry

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/rossap/4160004956/>

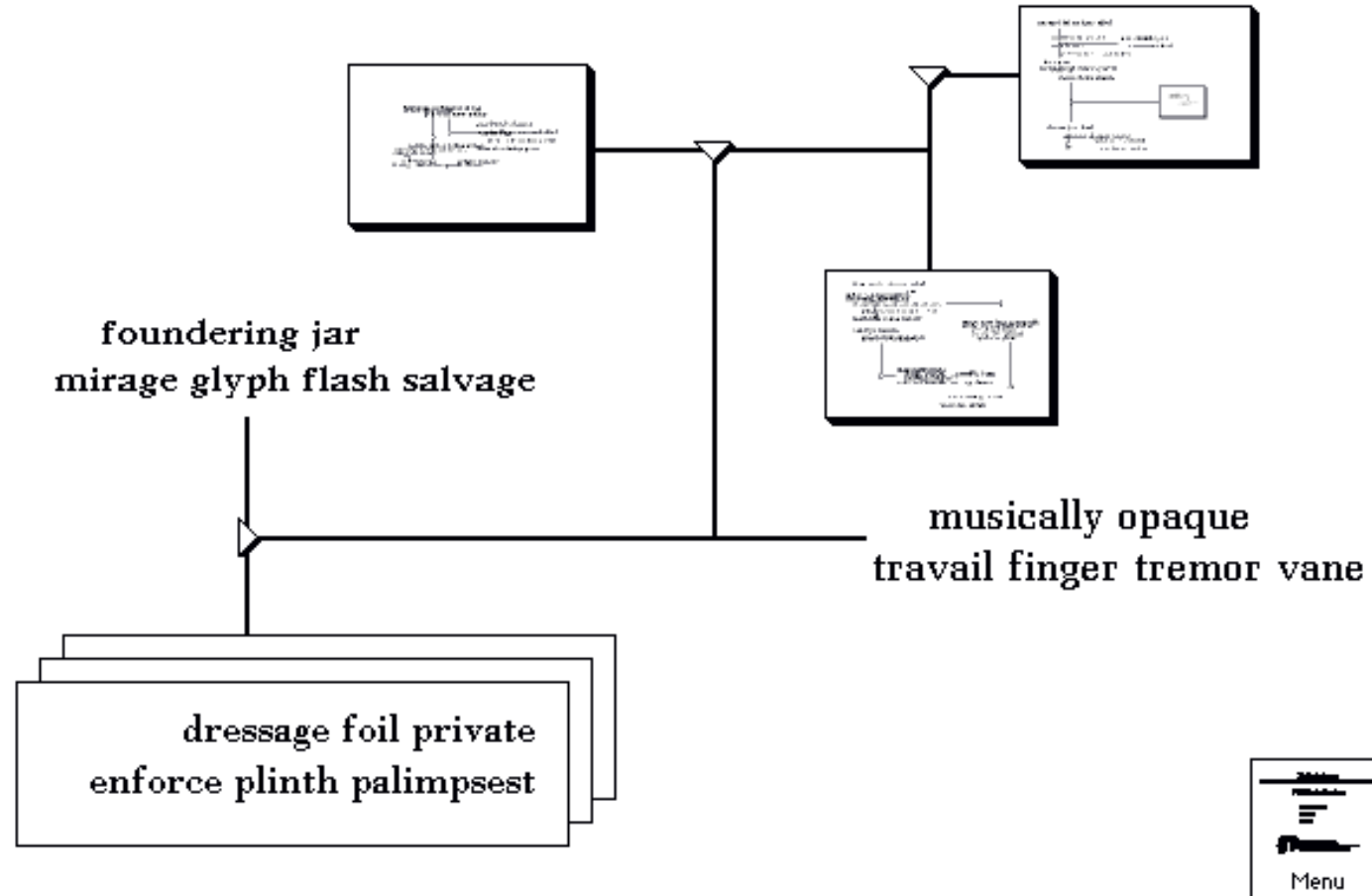
Cent Mille Milliards De Poèmes (1961)

Book of sonnets

- Each of the fourteen lines is printed on a separate strip
- 10 alternatives for each line
- Reader chooses which of the ten alternatives to read for each line
- $10^{14} = 100,000,000,000,000$ poems



Hypertext Poetry



A circular yellow sign with the text "STAGE DOOR" in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. The sign is mounted on a curved metal handle that is attached to a light-colored cylindrical post. The background is a bright blue gradient.

**STAGE
DOOR**

Hypertext Drama

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/slimjim/2169745303/>

Drama vs. Hyperdrama

Traditional drama:

- presents the playwright's (and director's) preferred account (narrative) of a story
- distinguishes between on-stage and off-stage

Hyperdrama:

- allows the audience to follow different narratives (and to choose when to switch narratives)
- continues action off-stage

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (1966)

Additional narrative centred on minor characters in Hamlet

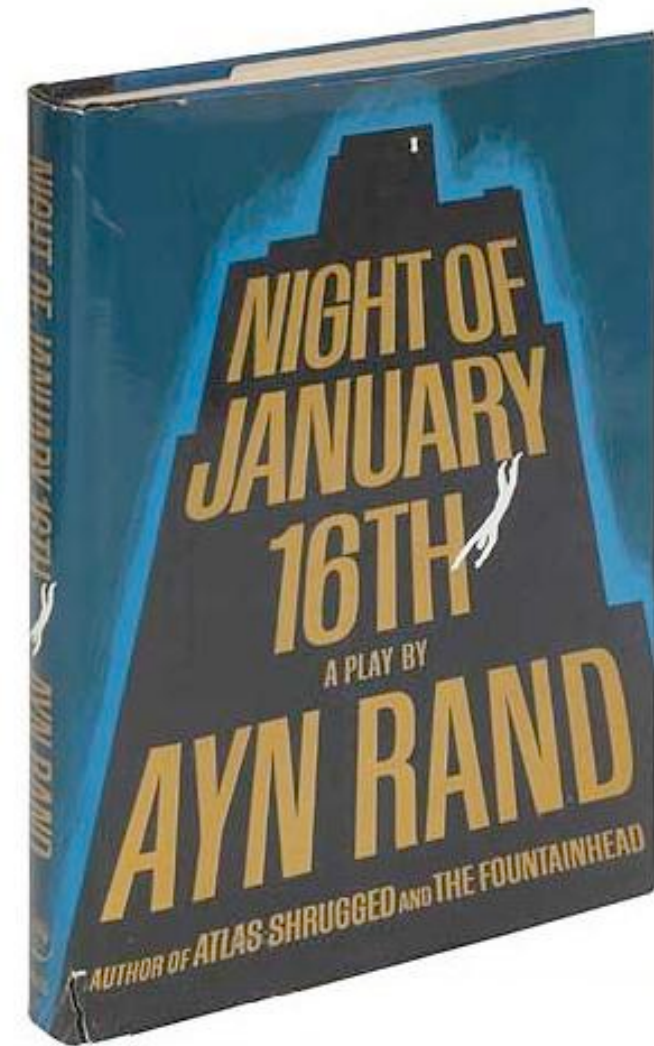
- Non-ergodic, therefore not hyperdrama



Night of January 16th (1935)

Courtroom drama by Ayn Rand, centred on a murder trial

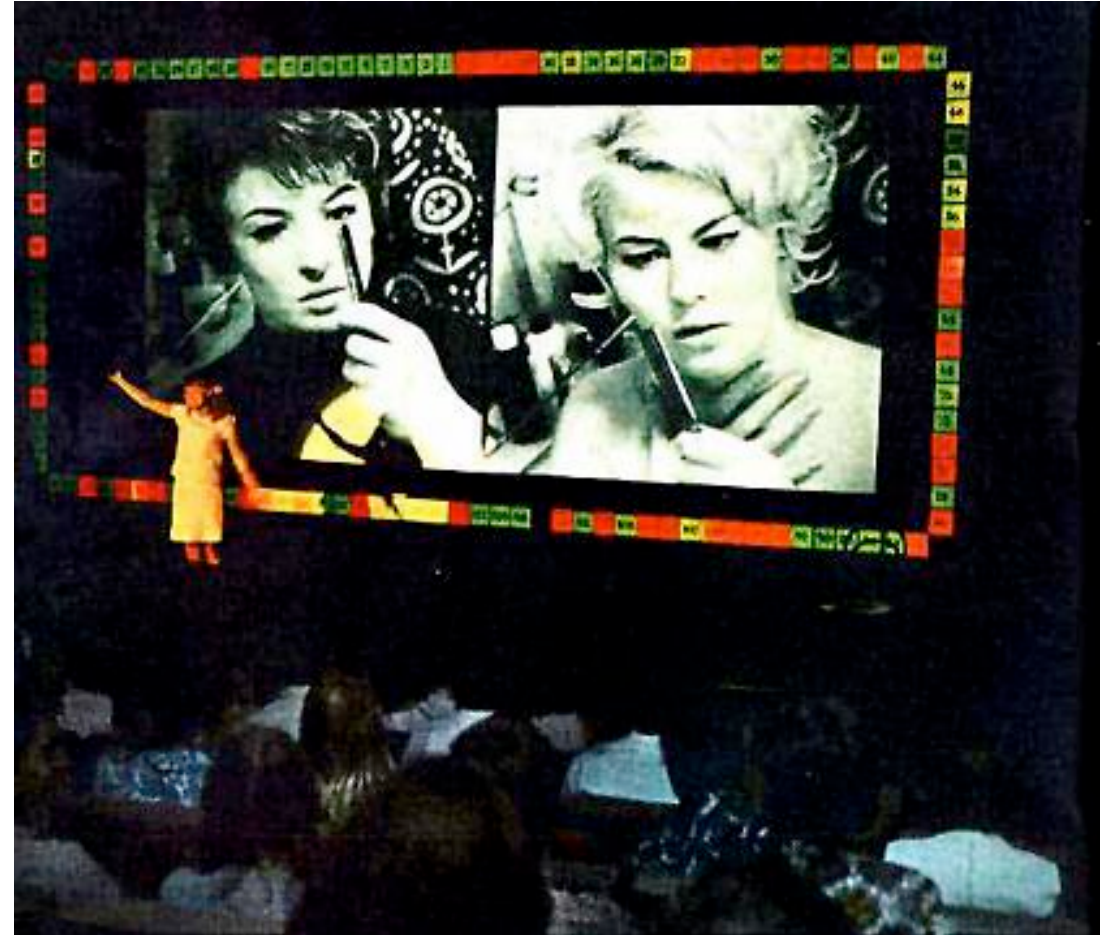
- Members of the audience are selected to form a jury
- The jury's verdict determines the ending of the play (ergodic)



Kinoautomat (1967)

Czech experimental interactive film

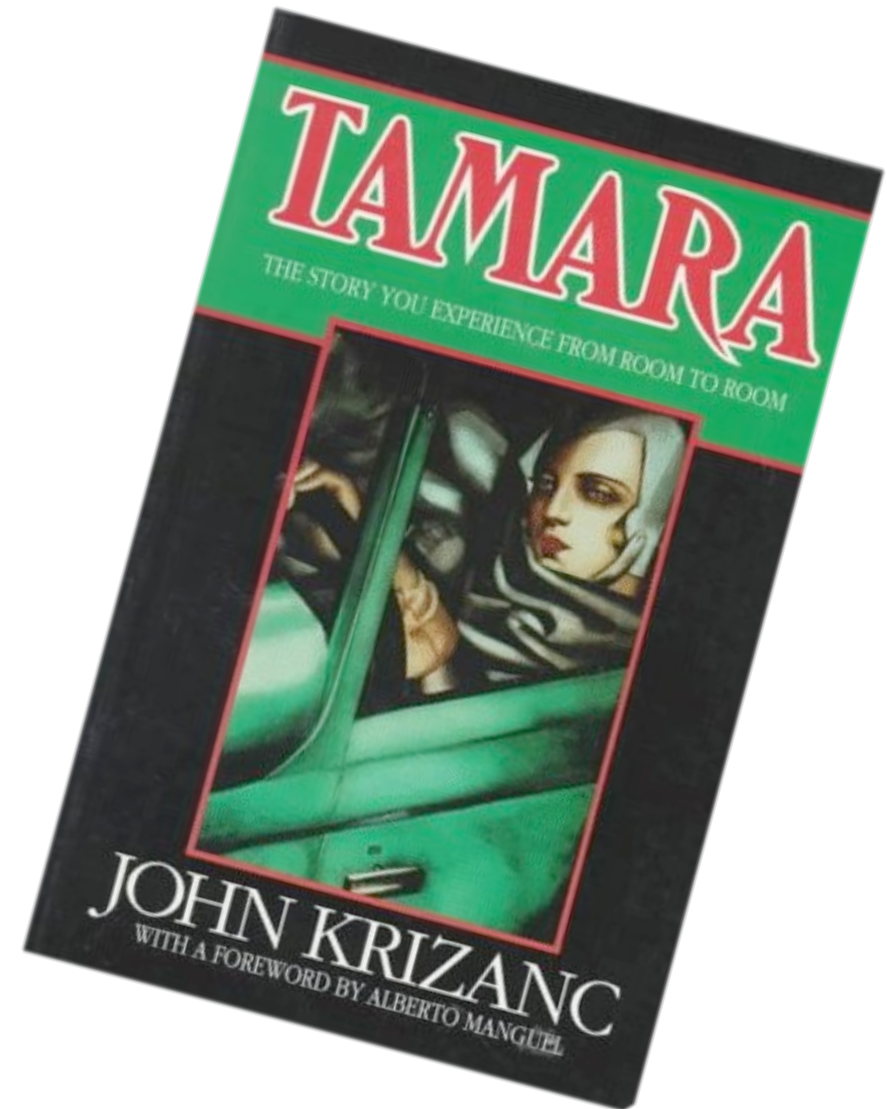
- First shown at Expo 67 in Montreal
- Film is stopped at intervals and audience is asked how they think the film should be continued
- Audience votes on two options (red/green) with the majority determining the future path of the film (ergodic)



Tamara (1981)

Play takes place in a large house

- Actors perform simultaneously in up to nine different rooms
- Spectators must choose which actor(s) they follow (ergodic)
- Multiple narratives



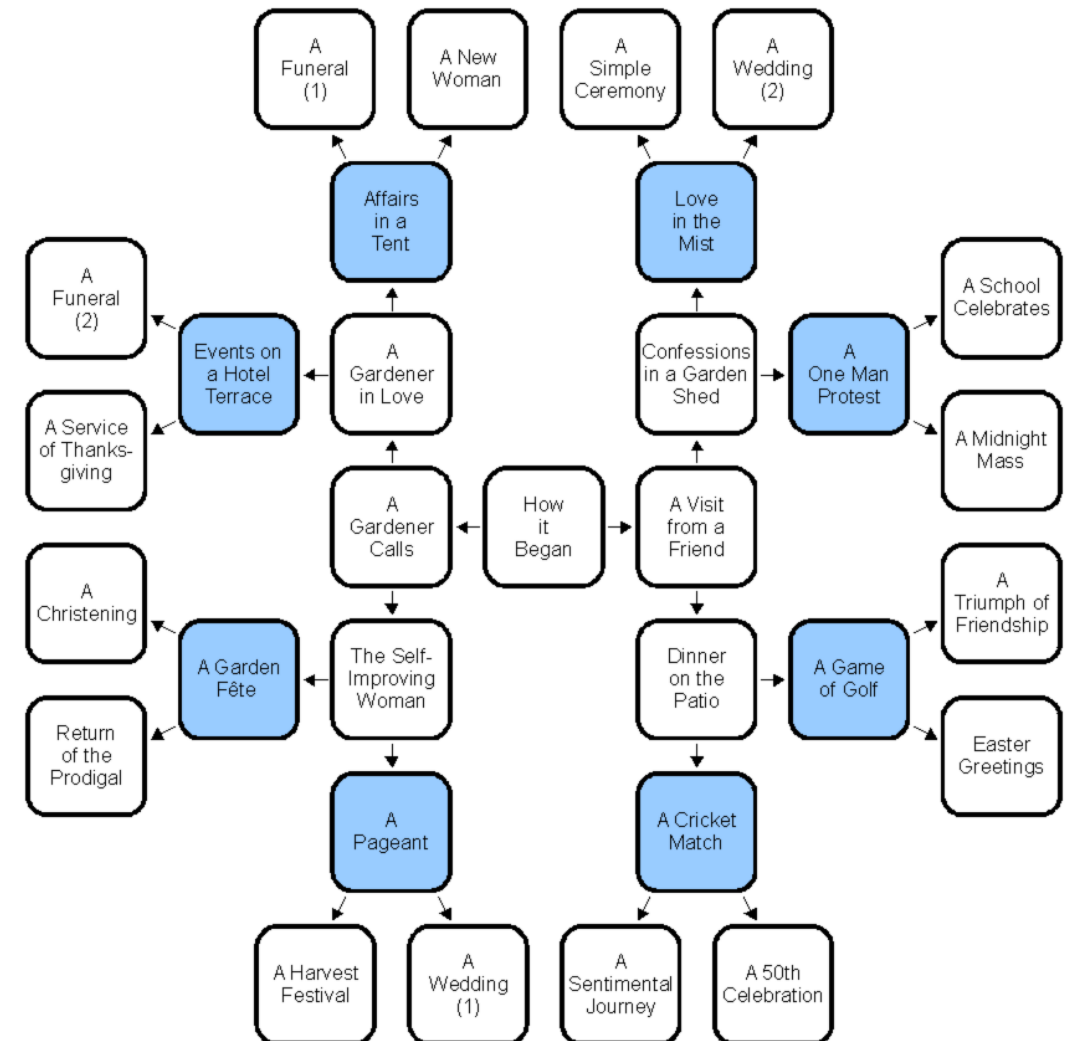
Intimate Exchanges (1982)

Group of eight stories originating from an opening scene

- Two actors play all of the roles in the play
- Story repeatedly splits in two
- Sixteen possible endings
- Non-linear story

The actors choose which path to take at each split, not the audience

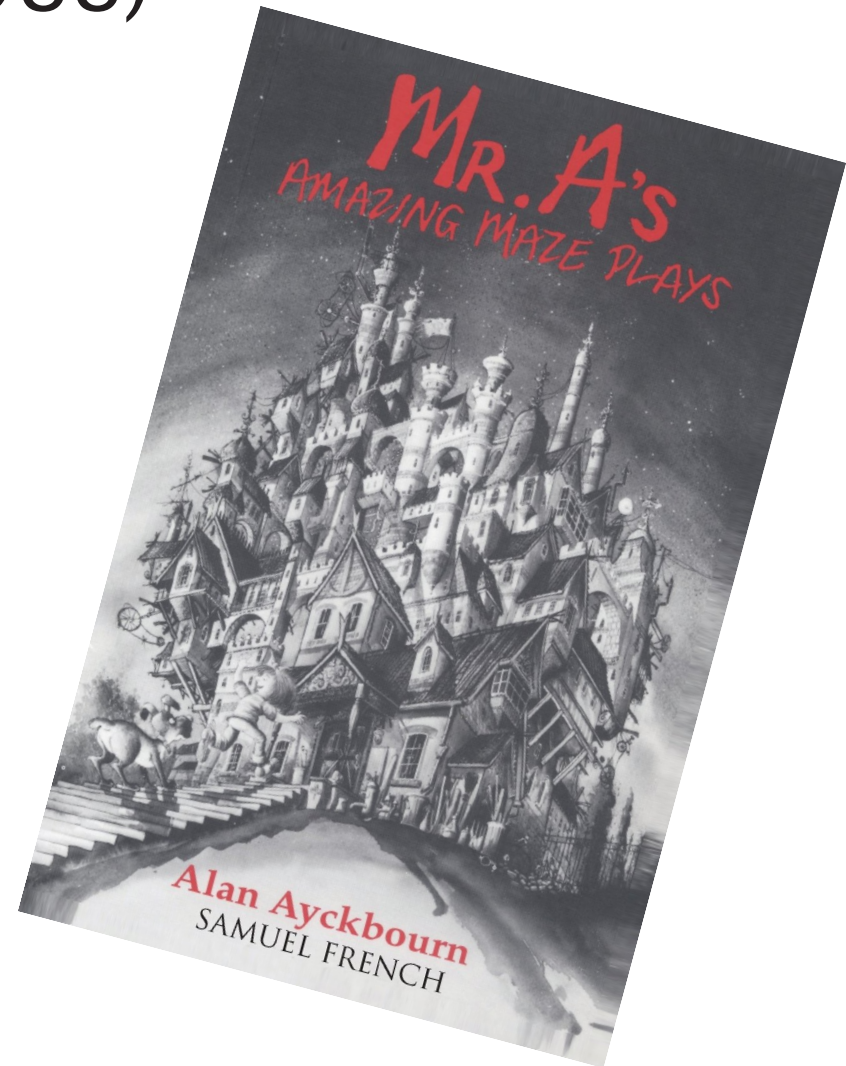
- Non-linear, but not conventionally ergodic!



Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays (1988)

Children's play in which the main characters (a young girl and her dog) explore a deserted house

- Main characters take directions from the audience (ergodic)
- 30 locations in the house, not all of which are visited in a single performance
- Non-linear story



Timecode (2000)

Film composed of four overlapping narratives

- Filmed simultaneously as four continuous 90-minute takes
- Screen divided into quarters, all four films projected at same time
- Audience 'choose' which sub-film to watch (ergodic)



Puss in Book (2017)

Interactive children's film from the Shrek franchise

- Film broken up into a series of episodes
- Binary choice presented at the end of each episode



Black Mirror: Bandersnatch (2018)

Interactive film written by Charlie Brooker

- Repeated binary choices throughout film



Summary

Non-linearity is the essence of hypertext

- Hypertext fiction may be non-linear in story, narrative or text
- Non-linearity may equally apply to poetry, comics, film and drama

Hypertext is also ergodic

- Non-trivial effort typically manifests itself as choice
- May also involve ludic elements

Next Lecture: Web Graph