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2003

Hypertext: A Sacred (He)Art?: Cor ad Cor Loquitur from Augustine to Shelley Jackson.

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***Cor ad cor loquitur* from Augustine to Shelley Jackson**

It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality, in* its *reality which is that of the being.*
Emil Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*
1971

Begin by considering yourself—no, rather, end by that. . . . For you, you are the first; you are also the last.
Bernard of Clairvaux, *de consideratione* II. iii. 6
*c.*1150

For now, while [the soul] is still in the body, it is said to her, "Where is your God?" But her God is within, He is spiritually within and spiritually beyond: . . . the soul cannot succeed in finding Him, except by passing through herself.
Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps. 130* 12

Self-discovery, self-exploration, the creation of the self or the Subject is a human preoccupation that goes beyond the postmodern era. The epigraphs that begin this paper show that the human concern with how language and representation play a crucial role in the formation of the subject flows back through time from our present to Augustine, the fourth-century master of the art of self-knowledge, and beyond. When Augustine started writing his *Confessions*, the self as something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity, was already well established. In his *Confessions*, Augustine uses *cor ad cor loquitur*, or to put it plainly, having a heart to heart with God. Such a conversation was meant to change his life by teaching him how to revise himself in Christ's image. In other words, *cor ad cor loquitur* is a lesson in subjectivity.

Today, as someone who is a medievalist, theologian, and techno-geek, I find myself pondering how this ancient and never-ending conversation echoes still, even in the realm of hypertext. And yes! I did say hypertext. As theologian and medievalist, I

wander on my pilgrim way in many different worlds, antique and contemporary. For me,

the hypertext world of Cyberia (that computerized technological world in to which we are

presently evolving) continues the ancient trail of a conversation, of heart speaking to

heart, in which subjectivity evolves. The mechanism of self-reflection, central to *cor ad*

cor loquitur, resides in the rhetorical structure of hypertext. Contemporary pilgrims

negotiating their way as author and audience through the lexias[i] and byways of Cyberia's

hypertext find themselves following in the footsteps of their medieval ancestors who

pondered on author and audience in the book of the heart known as *cor ad cor loquitur*. I

invite you to accompany me as I use the medievalist's lens to investigate how hypertext

is the latest evolution in *cor ad cor loquitur*.

Considering Hypertext

An early pilgrim in the lexias and byways of Cyberia is Robert Coover. In

writing about teaching the very first hypertext courses at Brown University, Robert

Coover describes how he and fellow instructors aimed at examining " . . . the interactive

role of the reader, intentional networks, and the redefinition of the 'author'" (Coover 2).

Detailing the history of this new medium, Coover writes that:

> pioneer narrative hypertexts explored the
>
> tantalizing new possibility of laying a story out spatially
>
> instead of linearly, inviting the reader to explore it as one
>
> might explore one's memory or wander a many-pathed
>
> geographical terrain, and, being adventurous quests at
>
> the edge of a new literary frontier, they were often

intensely self-reflective.

One such "intensely self-reflective" hypertext is Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*. This electronic novel gives life to Mary Shelley's monster's female mate who engages in a heart to heart conversation with her creator, Mary Shelley. As the novel grows in rhizomatic fashion, the monster pursues the remaking of herself beyond her original "monstrous" image. This new image, this new self, is found in the way she is revisioned in her lovers' eyes, one of her lovers being Mary Shelley, the monster's creator. Such a revisioning, particularly through the monster's conversation with her creator, reflects a striking similarity to the dynamic at play in the *cor ad cor loquitur* of medieval Christianity where Christians sought to be revisioned as the image of the creator God was inscribed on the blank page of their heart. The connection between the dynamic at work in *cor ad cor loquitur* and the self-reflectivity of hypertext is borne out in N. Katherine Hayles' analysis of the workings of hypertext.

In her media-specific analysis of *Patchwork Girl*, Hayles lists eight points that should be considered when contemplating hypertext. These eight points are connected to the discipline of cybernetics, the field of science concerned with processes of communication and control. Point eight is titled: "Electronic Hypertexts Initiate and Demand Cyborg Reading Practices" (Hayles lexia 13). Explaining what she means by this, Hayles writes:

> Because electronic hypertexts are written and read in
> distributed cognitive environments, the reader necessarily
> is constructed as a cyborg spliced into an integrated
> circuit with one or more intelligent machines. To be

positioned as a cyborg is inevitably in some sense to

become a cyborg, so electronic hypertexts, regardless

of their context, tend toward cyborg subjectivity. Although

this subject position may also be evoked through the

content of print texts, electronic hypertexts necessarily

enact it through the specificity of the medium.

A cyborg is a human whose being is aided, fashioned, remodeled, revisioned by mechanical or electronic devices. Hayles thus suggests that within readers and authors who are negotiating the hypertextual world, hypertext "will enact and express a new subjectivity" (lexia 15). Hayles' statement leads me to reflect on hypertext as the latest evolution in the history of the self-book metaphor, of *cor ad cor loquitur* and its role in subjectivity. To grasp what is at play within hypertext we would do well to examine the forces at work in *cor ad cor loquitur* from its beginnings.

Medieval Narrative and the Book of the Heart

". . .the narrative subject is one subjected, both to a discourse of which he is not the master, and to the will and intentions of other subjects, including not merely other characters but God and the narrator as well." (Vitz 2)

Through the event of the Incarnation, of God taking on human flesh, the human body becomes a privileged site in Christian practice. As much as the body may be the site of sin, it is also the vehicle for goodness, the field where the struggle of salvation is played out. Although early Christians perceived the body and all bodily activity with deep distrust, in proposing the abandonment of fleshly pleasures the body could become

the "temple of the Holy Spirit, " enabling early Christians to move beyond the identity

constructed for them by society (Brown 88-89). To become the temple of the Holy

Spirit, early Christians sought to erase the self so that Christ himself might be inscribed

within and upon the Christian's body. In other words, the body presented opportunity for

identity-making as the Christian became an *alter Christus*, another Christ. This metaphor

of body as text is investigated thoroughly by Eric Jager in *The Book of the Heart*.

In the introduction to *The Book of the Heart*, Jager writes that:

As the written word has taken various material forms

over the centuries, so the self or psyche has been

successively likened to the ancient scroll or the writing

tablet , the medieval manuscript codex, and the modern

printed book. (xiv)

To this list I would like to add hypertext as the newest written material form to which the

self is likened. From the time of Augustine until the printed book was firmly ensconced

in western culture, inward experience was described through the tropes of reading,

writing, erasure, and interpretation, the central metaphor being the heart as a manuscript

codex. Thus in the book of the heart the individual was revealed. The heart as the locus

of the inner life finds its roots in the Bible.

In the Hebrew world, the heart (*lev*) is the center of a person's intellectual and

moral life. Explicating the Hebrew tradition, Michel Meslin writes that the heart "is

man's interior, or *qerev*" (235). The human heart is where God's law resides for as God

says: "I shall put my law within them and write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33). Thus God

and the human speak heart to heart. The inscription of God's law on the human heart

makes the heart ". . . an active center where the ideas and impressions received are transformed into deeds; the heart thinks out man's projects and is the seat of the individual's creative power in the form of consciousness" (Meslin 235).

Continuing his investigation of the heart as the locus of the inner life Meslin moves from the biblical world to the classical world. Meslin argues (236) that the Latin term (*cor*):

> . . . keeps the sense of the Hebrew *lev*, but Augustine
>
> enriches it with his psychological analyses in the
>
> *Confessions*. For him, the heart is the place of interiority
>
> and religious experience, which defines individuality:
>
> "My heart is where I am, such as I am" (*Confessions* 10.3.4)

Indeed, Jager describes Augustine as the pivotal figure in the development of the book of the heart. Reflecting on the image from Jer 31:33 of God's inscribing the law on the human heart, Augustine comes to see this inscription leading to a sense of the inward effects of grace. Thus, Jager argues "Augustine's heart-centered psychology of reading signifies the capacity of God's word, as externally embodied in Scripture, to convert or transform the reader's innermost self" (33). In *cor ad cor loquitur* the disciple reads the heart of God, that is God's word, and is simultaneously read by God who then writes upon the disciple's heart. A new subjectivity is created as God's writing on the heart transforms the disciple into an image of God. This is what Augustine discovers in his own life. Augustine, as the author and narrative subject of his *Confessions*, the story of his conversion, is subjected to the will of God and is changed, converted, translated. Through his continuing heart to heart with God, Augustine is able to look back at the

pivotal moment of his conversion and offer commentary. Thus the *Confessions* is more than a text on Augustine's conversion, it is a commentary on the evolution of his new self birthed through his conversion. In all this Augustine sheds light on the textuality of all human lives.

The concept of "writing" one's life and then looking back to "read" it in the light of God's vision grows stronger in the centuries after Augustine so that by the twelfth century the trope of heart as text develops to the point where the written text itself is seen as a kind of body, that is a corpus. Miri Rubin writes that "[i]n the medieval context the body was a metaphor of metaphors, embedded in the sacramental cosmology as well as in personal experience" (269-70). Hence it is no surprise that around 1330, there appears in Middle English the *Charter of Christ* in which Christ's body is seen as a legal document. The suffering inscribed on Christ's body details the promise of redemption resulting from the fulfillment of the contract of salvation:

> Sone aftyr y-straynyd upon a tre
>
> As parchement owȝt to be
>
> Herknyth and ye schall wete
>
> How this Chartour was y-wrete
>
> Of my face fill downe the ynke
>
> Whan thornys on my hed gan synke
>
> The pennys that the lettris were with wrytene
>
> Were skorges that y was with betyne
>
> How many lettris there-in bene
>
> Rede and thow myste wyte and seene

> With vmcccc fifty and ten
>
> Wowndis is my body blak and whane
>
> Ffor to schew the of my loue-dede
>
> My-sylue Woll the chartor rede. (157-70)

Ultimately, the Christian's heart (*cor*) is linked to Christ's body (*corpus*), allowing Christ to act as author writing on the individual's heart. The nails of Christ's passion become the pens with which Christ inscribes his sufferings on the heart of the Christian turning the believer into another Christ. This trope of heart as book is underlined in the fourteenth-century lyric "Ihesu þat hast me dere I-boght":

> Ihesu þat hast me dere I-boght,
>
> Write þou gostly in my þoȝt,
>
> Þat I mow with deuocion
>
> Þynke on thy dere passioun:
>
> For þogh my hert be hard as stone,
>
> Ȝit maist þou gostly write þer-on
>
> With naill & with spere kene,
>
> And so shullen þe lettres be sene. (1-8)

The speaker calls on Christ to write, to transcribe, the marks of his saving passion from the ideal of his own body to the believer's heart. Thus believers, reading themselves against the copy inscribed by Christ in their heart, can read with tears of sorrow and penitence over their sins. Such *cor ad cor loquitur* creates an ethic of reading that calls for an affective and moral response from believers. The result of such a response is a new subjectivity in which believers know themselves as self-aware readers of the text.

They can read the text of themselves against the text of Christ's body. As Jager writes,
people "began to imagine and understand themselves in expressly textual terms---to read,
inscribe, or interpret their own hearts as a kind of book" (105). For Jager, the medieval
book of the heart is where the origins of the modern individual may be found as the heart
of the believer engages in conversation with the heart of Christ (xix).

Yet as Jager continues his examination of the book of the heart, he sees a
profound change taking place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the
emergence of empiricist psychology. At that point the book of the brain supersedes the
book of the heart:

> . . . the empiricist self is an autonomous secular text
>
> that does not presume a divine original. And the eternal
>
> soul inscribed with indelible divine laws and personal
>
> records, the book of the heart or conscience, has been
>
> exchanged for memorial impressions on the tabula
>
> rasa of the mind or brain that are now the sole guarantee
>
> of personal identity. (Jager 156)

This, however, does not mean the end of *cor ad cor loquitur*. The self-reflexive dialogue
continues with the installation of another scriptural apparatus, the apparatus of modern
"discipline," in which the Logos of society begins to supplant the Logos of God.

Self-book/Self-network/Self as Hypertext

"The law writes itself on bodies. It engraves itself on parchment made from the skin of its subjects. It articulates them in a juridical corpus. It makes its book out of them." (de Certeau 140)

Despite the arrival of empiricist philosophy, the exchange of hearts between Christ and the Christian continued. In seventeenth-century France, for example, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus grew. Marguerite Marie Alacoque, a member of the Order of the Visitation received a revelation from Christ in 1675. Christ informed her that she was his chosen instrument to spread devotion to his Sacred Heart. The picture of the Sacred Heart with which I began this essay is part of the devotion that Alacoque initiated.

For some the heart continued to be seen as superior to the brain. Pascal wrote that "[i]t is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason" (278). Nonetheless, as medical science reduced the heart to a pump, philosophers began to reposition the self to the brain. Hence as Jager pointed out the book of the brain came to replace the book of the heart.

What becomes more problematic for Jager is the loss of the book metaphor as we enter the twenty-first century. According to Jager, the rising trope of brain as computer means the loss of textual metaphors completely. To underscore his point, Jager quotes Illich: "As the intellectual historian and critic Ivan Illich summarizes the matter, 'The book has now ceased to be the root-metaphor of the age; the screen has taken its place'." (qtd. in Jager 172). But Jager has neglected the possibility of a new textual metaphor for the self, that of hypertext.

A consideration of the self as hypertext is entirely in order. As Jager has shown, textual metaphors of self evolved from self as codex into self as printed book. Does that

mean we are now headed for the e-book of the heart? Probably not, but an investigation of the self as network, as hypertext, allows the continuation of *cor ad cor loquitur*, albeit in a newly evolving form.

Cor ad cor loquitur is in many ways a spatial practice. In the medieval practice of the book of the heart, God writes on the believer's heart and a new subjectivity evolves. How then is hypertext to be explored as a spatial practice? One way is to play with the word "metaphor." In Modern Greek, the vehicles of mass transit are called *metaphorai*. So when you take the bus, you travel by "metaphor."[ii]

Negotiating hypertext means traveling by "metaphor." Lexias are selected and linked together by hyperlink. As hypertextual author and reader you travel on your pilgrim way following various itineraries in the mass transit of hypertext. This spatial practice of hypertext profoundly affects the spatial practice of *cor ad cor loquitur*.

In the earlier textual metaphor of the book of the heart, a new subjectivity arose in the human person but not in God. In the conversation of *cor ad cor* loquitur the sacred heart of Christ is inscribed on and transforms the human heart. Thus God as ultimate author is unaffected. The heart to heart conversation of hypertext however, means that both author and reader have the possibility of a new subjectivity.

Jager is short-sighted. The trope of the brain as computer does not mean the end of textual metaphors in the realm of subjectivity. Rather the heart to heart conversation of hypertext means a new textual metaphor is available, the self as hypertext.

In his discussion of hypertext, Gaggi points out that unlike the printed word which carries a sense of private ownership, hypertext is really a conversation "that encourages a value system that emphasizes the solving of problems and the growth of learning by and

for the good of the community as a whole" (106-7). This echoes the structure of *cor ad cor loquitur*, for here the individual is not at the center but is part of an ongoing conversation. Indeed, as Gaggi describes it, in hypertext "[t]here is a polyphony of voices, and the authority of each of them is continually qualified by their mutually commenting on one another" (111). This sense of commentary and conversation, of an exchange of hearts, is seen in hypertext narratives.

A book has a pre-established order. The reader progresses from paragraph to paragraph, from page to page. But in hypertextual literature "the narrative is not a clearly delineated path but a textured space available for exploration" (Gaggi 123). This enhances the sense of dialogue since the reader has the responsibility of navigating from lexia to lexia, which can be organized in different ways. Thus the reader can return any number of times, literally reading the hypertextual narrative in various ways. That ability to navigate actively also gives the reader the role of author. Rather than passively consuming the text constructed by a conventionally authorial author, the reader is empowered to engage more powerfully in conversation with the hypertext. "There is no center of the text, . . . no clear unitary authorial voice," Gaggi writes (105). Instead the text is initiated and returns to its original creator as something different, for a participant, whoever she or he may be, can alter or add to what has been received. The individual, the subject in hypertext plays a "risky interactive game of agency and construction, of constituting and being constituted" (152) while negotiating the *metaphorai*, the transit system of hypertext. This idea of self as hypertext can be seen in Shelley Jackson's hypertextual narrative, *Patchwork Girl*.

Patchwork Girl and the "Informing" of Reader and Subject

"'Patchwork Girl' makes us all into Frankenstein-readers stitching together narrative,

gender, and identity, for as it reminds us: 'You could say all bodies are written bodies,

all lives pieces of writing'." (Landow)

Patchwork Girl is a hypertextual narrative founded on Mary Shelley's

Frankenstein. The protagonist of the narrative is the female companion to Frankenstein's

monster. In Mary Shelley's novel, just as Frankenstein finishes assembling the female

monster he tears her apart again in horror. As a reader of *Patchwork Girl*, we are left not

only to pick up the pieces of the monster but also to play the part of putting her back

together in various ways. Quite simply, Shelley Jackson leaves us the space in her novel

to record our own comments that may be commented upon in turn.

Keeping in mind the idea of hypertext as mass transit, the terminus a quo for

Patchwork Girl is a black and white image. Thus the reader meets the protagonist who

has been stitched together. Linking from there, the reader travels to the title page, a

crossroads where five routes are offered: "a graveyard," which contains the stories of the

creatures whose parts make up the female monster; "a journal," which is Mary Shelley's

journal where she writes of her interactions with the female monster; "a quilt," "a story,"

and "broken accents," which is a collection of metatextual reflections on writing lives.

The reader can take any of these routes traveling from lexia to lexia.

In an early lexia, the monster tells us: "I am buried here. You can resurrect me,

but only piecemeal. If you want to see the whole, you will have to sew me together

yourself" (graveyard).[iii] Quickly, the reader is introduced to the idea that she or he is

piecing together the story, just as Shelley Jackson wove and stitched together elements

from *Frankenstein* and Baum's *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*. Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*, is woven as a character into *Patchwork Girl*. And, of course, the monster is a weaver of herself:

> My birth takes place more than once. In the plea of
>
> a bygone monster; from a muddy hole by corpse-light;
>
> under the needle, and under the pen.
>
> Or it took place not at all.
>
> But if I hope to tell a good story, I must leapfrog
>
> out of the muddle of my several births to the day I
>
> parted for the last time with the author of my being,
>
> and set out to write my own destiny. (birth)

Interestingly, in the confluence of needle and pen in this lexia, there is an echo of inscription from the medieval trope of the book of the heart. This echo continues in N. Katherine Hayles' analysis of *Patchwork Girl* when she describes the narrative as a "hypertextual corpus": "Like the female monster's body, the body of this hypertext is also seamed and ruptured, comprised of disparate parts with extensive links between them" (lexia 23).

Continuing the theme of stitches, sewing, and seams, the narrator of *Patchwork Girl* points out that "[t]he comparison between a literary composition and the fitting together of the human body from various members stemmed from ancient rhetoric. *Membrum* or 'limb' also signified 'clause'" (typographical). This concept, dare I say, is "fleshed out" in the female monster's flexible frame which is mirrored in the linked hypertext structure of the narrative.

Building on the concept of flexible forms the narrator comments that for all

humans:

> our infinitely various forms are composed from a limited
>
> number of similar elements, a kind of alphabet, and we have
>
> guidelines as to which arrangements are acceptable, are
>
> valid words, legible sentences, and which are typographical or
>
> grammatical errors: "monsters." (bodies too)

In other words, the female monster is born, is pieced together, from the wounds of her

writing. This sense of being born from the wounds of writing closely parallels the

medieval concept of the book of the heart, in which Christ's nails not only mark his

wounds but inscribe like wounds on the heart of his follower.

The difference between the medieval textual metaphor of the self as codex and the

contemporary textual metaphor of the self as hypertext is that in hypertext we are

authored by many as opposed to one. The narrator explains:

> We are inevitably annexed to other bodies: human
>
> bodies, and bodies of knowledge. We are coupled to
>
> constructions of meaning; we are legible partially; we
>
> are cooperative with meanings, but irreducible to
>
> any one. The form is not absolutely malleable to the
>
> intentions of the author; what may be thought is contingent
>
> to the means of expression. (bodies too)

Our subjectivity, as Hayles would say, is therefore one of "subject-as assemblage"

(lexia 29). In *Patchwork Girl* Shelley Jackson points out that the concept of "subject-as-

assemblage" should not be so startling, especially when we keep in mind contemporary

biology where

> the body . . . is chimerical. The animal cell is seen to be
>
> a hybrid of bacterial species. Like that many-headed
>
> beast [the chimera], the microbeast of the animal cells
>
> combines into one entity, bacteria that were originally
>
> freely living, self sufficient and metabolically
>
> distinct. (bio)

In fact, in hypertext it is more than the subject that is assemblage. The author is

assemblage too. As a character in *Patchwork Girl* Mary Shelley talks about herself as

author and confesses:

> I have a crazy wish! I wish that I had cut off a part of
>
> me, something Percy would not miss, but something dear
>
> to me, and given it to be a part of her [the female monster].
>
> I would live on in her, and she would know me as I know
>
> myself. I fear this but crave it. I do not know if she would
>
> want it. But I could graft myself to that might vine. Who
>
> knows what strange new fruit the two of us might bear?
>
> (female trouble)

This is what Jackson calls writing as collage.

In a presentation called "Stitch Bitch: the patchwork girl," Jackson describes

authors as those who

> set up rendezvous between words never before seen in company,

> we provide deliciously private places for them to couple. . . .
>
> In collage, writing is tripped of the pretense of originality,
>
> and appears as a practise of mediation, of selection and
>
> contextualization, a practise, almost, or reading. (10-11)

In helping us to see hypertext as a collage, Jackson, through the characters in *Patchwork Girl*, brings us to a realization of how we conceive identity at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Identity is a collage that uses appropriation, assemblage, and the blurring of borders and edges. The monster states it exactly when she says:

> I am a mixed metaphor. *Metaphor*, meaning something like
>
> "bearing across", is itself a fine metaphor for my condition.
>
> Every part of me is linked to other territories alien to it but
>
> equally mine. Shin bone connected to the thigh bone, thigh
>
> bone connected to the hip bone: borrowed parts, annexed
>
> territories. I cannot be reduced, my metaphors are not
>
> tautologies, yet I am equally present in both poles of a
>
> pair, each end of the wire is tethered to one of my limbs.
>
> The metaphorical principle is my true skeleton. (metaphor me)

Through describing herself as metaphor, the monster reminds us of what we noted earlier, that negotiating hypertext means traveling by metaphor. The monster recognizes that the only life she can lead is that of a pilgrim, a nomad. As a pilgrim her life will be a journey of "movement and doubt---and doubt and movement will be my life, as long as it lasts" (afterwards).

That brings me to where I began. Jager's work showed clearly that the mechanism of self-reflection central to *cor ad cor loquitur* could be found in the medieval book of the heart. But his concern that the trope of the brain as computer means the end of textual metaphors in the realm of subjectivity is false. In *Patchwork Girl*, Shelley Jackson shows us that hypertext is simply the latest textual metaphor for the self. The practice of *cor ad cor loquitur* continues. The individual may no longer engage God in a solitary conversation through which the image of God is inscribed on the believer's heart, creating a new subjectivity. However we are still pilgrims searching for that sense of identity in conversation, heart to heart. In our postmodern world we still find ourselves constructed in a textual fashion. No longer are we constructed by the Logos of God alone. Now our *cor ad cor* stretches across a broader field. We have moved beyond seeing ourselves as reflected as self as codex or self as book. In hypertext we can describe ourselves as constructed by the Logos of society. We are both subject and author, writer and written. As George Landow says: "Sooner or later all information technologies, we recall, have always convinced those who use them both that these technologies are natural and that they provide ways to describe the human mind and self" (Landow). For us, self is a hypertextual narrative.

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[i] Ilana Snyder offers this definition of "lexia": "Lexias are units of local stability in the general flux of the hypertext" (46). To put it in plain English, a lexia is a chunk of text. These chunks of text do not follow in a linear sequence. As the reader follows hyperlinks in a hypertext, she or he moves from lexia to lexia via the hyperlinks embedded in the document.

[ii] The genesis for this allusion to hypertext as spatial practice is derived from the work of Michel de Certeau who writes of stories as *metaphorai* and spatial trajectories (115).

[iii] The words in parentheses at the end of quotations from *Patchwork Girl* refer to the titles of the various lexia.

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