

Benjamin (Mako) Hill

Stephen Harris

English 469

14 February 2002

She Hates My Futon and Literary Reinvention through Technology

Gutenberg's bible is not highly valued because it is particularly great, inventive, or ground-breaking book. It is written in a font designed to mirror the Gothic scripts in use by scribes during the period; its paper, letterforms, design, content, and audience parallels contemporary manuscripts. Gutenberg's bible is important in that it acts as a symbol and example of one of the greatest, most inventive, and most ground-breaking technological advances in the history of printing. Gutenberg described his invention as, "an automated scriptorium," but it was only when others used movable type to produce literature that was fundamentally different from that of scriptoria that the power of Gutenberg's invention was fully realized.

Half a century later, the advent of the World Wide Web transformed the Internet from an electronic sandbox for scientists and engineers into a household communication medium for most of the Western world. The web was built upon "hypertext" technology, establishing the medium as a primarily, if not always recognizably, literary form. Like movable type's infancy, the web's early years offered little more than electronic regurgitations of—or crude improvements on—old forms and genres: singing, dancing, "multi-media" picture books. Over time, sites have sprung up exploring new possibilities afforded by the Internet as a literary medium and have, to some extent, begun to transform literature into radically new directions.

One of these new forms includes web-based series exemplified by Craig Mitchell's

popular work of Internet fiction, She Hates My Futon. The work takes a form modeled after previous works of serial fiction—a tradition most famous for producing nineteenth-century works like Charles Dickens' Pickwick Papers but continuing into the twenty-first century in magazines, newspapers, and journals.

The most obvious differences exhibited by web-based serials are material. She Hates My Futon is available only on the Internet. Unlike nineteenth-century serials often sold, read, and discarded on trains, Mitchell's story is read in dark rooms on glowing phosphorus and unrolled on long scrolls across CRTs in fluorescent lit cubicles. Free from the constraints and costs of print, Mitchell uses sans-serif fonts, colors, images, and unusual HTML elements like select boxes to create and convey the setting, mood, and mental processes of the story's characters (See Figures 1 and 2). These superficial differences allow Mitchell to convey different attitudes and to create a narrative style that is unique to his electronic medium.

While Mitchell's fluency in web technology enhances the effectiveness of his communication with his Internet-savvy audience, the nature of Internet publishing help make the communication possible in the first place. The Internet is often championed as a place where "everyone is a publisher." Without funding, without advertising, without an literary agent, and without a book deal, Mitchell is able to throw his work onto a website. Instantaneously, it is available, at no cost, for download and distribution to every continent on Earth. The web allows Mitchell to share She Hates My Futon with an audience and in a way that would not be possible through the economics of print.

This type of economy is further divorced from the world of publishing as technology transforms the role and interactions between the author, audience, and critic. Mitchell checks the

logs for his webserver and knows, with incredible accuracy, how many people have viewed each chapter—how many times. Additionally, Mitchell communicates with his readers through messages on his cellphone and through email. He takes advice, feedback, corrections and suggestions and lets the community shape the direction of the story in a direct manner. In this way, and those mentioned in the paragraphs above, She Hates My Futon not only communicates in a manner different from those afforded by print but also communicates a different message. The future and growth of literature lies in our ability to use new tools to reinvent texts and it is also this process that acts a connection to our literary past.

Works Cited

Mitchell, Craig. She Hates My Futon. May 18 2000. Feb 14 2002. <<http://www.myboot.com/>>.

Figures

Figure 1 –An example of the text and a unique use of hypertext in a select box.

problem with doing the dishes? Have I ever seen the movie "Sleepless in Seattle?" Do I forget to put the toilet seat down? At one point I can hear a radio playing in the background on his end. I made out the lyrics and backbeat of the Human League's song "Human."

You will pretend to like:

"What do you do for a living?"

"I work for Blockbuster Entertainment."

"OK, so you're in the movie rental field,"

"No, I don't rent people movies. I work for Blockbuster Entertainment - the company. I'm in marketing." This sounds more glamorous than it really is. I'd probably be having more fun writing marketing campaigns for paper towels boasting some new

Figure 2 – Themessage the end of the last chapter and an example of the navigation at the bottom of the screen.

(THIS IS NOT THE END... ALMOST, BUT NOT THE VERY END. *This Chapter was posted on 5-17-2000. I'll warn you that it did take me exactly one year to pen this chapter. But last year was a weird blur to me in which I got very little done in my life... This year has a bit more urgency to it for me so I'm going to be writing at a much quicker pace now. You can keep checking back or join the [mailing list](#) to be notified of additions to the website. -Craig)*

< [Chapter 22](#)  Chapter 24 is coming soon >