Digital Short Fiction and its Social Networks

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Department of English
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Abstract

This thesis considers how the digital medium and social networks affect the short story. I argue that digital short fiction has shown changes, such as signs of becoming more modular or briefer than its print counterparts, and that it has also reflected a shift to the personal or semi-autobiographical story. Digital short fiction has also been used increasingly to market a publisher’s or author’s name or non-digital works. I begin contextualizing this shift in Chapter 1 by analyzing different approaches to the study of the short story, including an overview of generic and historical scholarship, and I conclude with a working definition of the short story. In Chapter 2, I analyze early digital short fiction along with the themes of contemporary fiction in general that have been affected by digital media, social networks, and other changes. I also consider digital short fiction in the context of its publication media, postmodernism, and changes in communication in general. In Chapter 3, I verify these considerations with responses to questionnaires sent to writers of short fiction both on the Web and off. By studying these writers’ conceptions of the short story, preferred publication media, and writing habits, I build on the working definitions of the short story from Chapters 1 and 2. In Chapter 4, I consider the effects on the short story and conclude that we can update print-based conceptions of the short story to include born-digital short fiction and accommodate the contemporary shift in general to
modularity, open source, social networks, and the focus on the self. Rather than establishing a concrete definition of what short fiction is at this time, I conclude that a better approach is to replace pre-defined categories with an acknowledgement that the short story is perhaps shifting closer to pre-print storytelling roots, although within the confines of current limitations such as copyright and the attention span of contemporary readers. Although we cannot fully quantify these changes at this time, I argue that they impact the short story and require scholars to consider its paratexts and publication media differently than in pre-Web years.
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Preface

In this thesis, I address three research questions: 1) How do the digital medium and social networks affect the short story? 2) How is the digital short story affected by the shift to marketing as its purpose? 3) Does the digital medium affect the reading of short stories?

My method combines an unstructured qualitative survey of representative working short-story writers, a review of the digital output of large publishers and production companies, and a reading of critical and scholarly literature on the short story and on the impact of digital media and social networks on it. I sent survey questionnaires to writers who had published or circulated short stories both on the Web and off. Participants answered questions about their preferences for publishing (digital or non-digital), their experience in creating and editing their born-digital short stories, their views about whether they wrote and edited differently for digital and non-digital publishers, and their use of social networks to advertise their name or writing. I also encouraged participants to share additional information. Some gave web-page statistics about readership access, and others discussed their reasons for joining online communities and writing short stories instead of longer fiction. Several described their opinion of the quality of online fiction.

From researching the first question, I concluded that the digital medium and social networks (including the open-source or open-access movements) increase the writer's semi-autobiographical or personal content in the short story, and affect reader expectations with respect to its structuring. Digital publishing of short and especially fan-fiction stories also raises concerns about authorship and copyright; some production companies creating born-digital, original stories are including designers as coauthors of a work. These changes show a push-back to the pre-print, oral storytelling roots of the short story by emphasizing the role of the
community and collaborative authorship. Sharing stories freely rather than selling them for profit also shifts away from print-based distribution methods.

In response to the second question, I concluded that the turn toward marketing as a purpose of digital short stories affects the content, chosen format, and length of the genre. Briefer digital short stories can more easily be used to market a writer’s name or a publisher’s imprint than those that are longer. Digital stories can also include multiple formats such as audio, larger text, or various file types for downloading on different devices, in order to customize the reader’s experience. Writers use short stories on the Internet to sell their other works. Some publishers also encourage writers to advertise their works online in social networks. Writers of fan-fiction stories, however, promote the fan object instead.

After researching the third question, I concluded that an online reading environment shortens the attention span of the reader, and that the digital short story, like other types of fiction, shows signs of becoming briefer than its print counterparts. People who are accustomed to reading online also have altered expectations and will find novelty in reading short stories in platforms that are typically used for non-fiction. The digital short story adjusts to such changes in readership.

These research questions, the method that addresses them, and the conclusions drawn from them highlight the importance of the short story’s paratexts, processes of production, and materiality to its subject matter and interpretation. The online communities of writers and readers influence the genre. Paratexts are an essential aspect of digital short stories because community feedback and the extended network form part of a story’s content. Digital short stories are also connected to their postmodern context. A born-digital genre enhances the treatment of loss, disorientation, trauma, and the self. The study of born-digital short stories also draws attention
to the performative aspects of the work, similar to what would be required when studying oral storytelling.

More broadly, I show that both a Book History perspective and qualitative social-science research methods can contribute to literary interpretation. Collaborations among critics, writers, and reading communities are potentially useful in studying contemporary literary forms that are born-digital. My research conclusions suggest that contemporary literature and the digital short story are dynamic phenomena that require a living, community-based approach, unlike much fiction from pre-digital times. Rather than researching how critics define the short story, I create my own definition empirically and argue for a broadening of pre-defined categories carried over from print and other media.

I demonstrate that academics must sometimes intervene to save the online short story from failure when marketing and readership do not sustain the genre. However, a build-it-and-they-will-come approach does not create sustainable resources and communities to support the digital short story. Instead, surveying the needs of a particular community, conducting iterative feedback, and encouraging upkeep from a resource’s users are essential to ensuring that a resource develops according to their needs. Academics who construct the digital short story using top-down methods often create experimental works that serve their own critical purposes rather than the interests of readers and other writers. My conclusions show that the digital short story will evolve and thrive on its own without academic intervention, but online economics require alternative publishing models in order to sustain the short story within its social networks. As with the university press, academic intervention can be useful if material that is considered scholarly valuable fails to be sustained in this publishing context. Combining academic projects, publishers who capitalize on the marketing potential of the Web, and Web
communities of writers and readers ensures that this new type of contemporary fiction will not need to be rescued. The short story will, however, be different than how it was perceived before digital media.
1 The Background of Short Fiction Writing on the Web and Studies of Digital Short Fiction

1.1 Introduction: Digital Short Fiction and its Social Networks

Both readers and scholars may wonder where to place the short story in today’s social media world, which consists of quick access to YouTube videos from Facebook status updates and a growing number of people who are becoming accustomed to reading shorter chunks of text. Many writers and publishers now see the benefit not only of publishing in print, but of using the marketing potential of the World Wide Web to connect to a larger audience by tapping into social media on the Internet. These works might also change to accommodate digital dissemination venues that can reach a wider audience more efficiently than with oral or print-based dissemination. All forms of fiction and non-fiction, the short story included, are thus affected in a way that requires scholars to consider their paratexts and publication media differently than in pre-Web years. What we perceive to be a published work has become more complicated as both amateur and professional writers can now distribute their stories to a large audience at little cost and without a large amount of technical skill.

This thesis re-examines the short story in its current context by analyzing digital short fiction from a book history perspective. Within the discipline of English, works of digital fiction can be difficult to classify according to older, print-based genres and other classification methods. Interdisciplinary fields such as Book History and Humanities Computing, however, have been examining the evolution of publishing and dissemination as they relate to both print and digital communication. To describe this study as being within the field of book history may seem anachronistic because the Web is often posited as being contrary to the book, but it is in fact an ideal field from which to undertake this work. Book history looks at the paratexts,
processes, and materiality of books as the means through which literature has been produced, disseminated, and received:

*Book History* is devoted to every aspect of the history of the book, broadly defined as the history of the creation, dissemination, and reception of script and print. It publishes research on the social, economic, and cultural history of authorship, editing, printing, the book arts, publishing, the book trade, periodicals, newspapers, ephemera, copyright, censorship, literary agents, libraries, literary criticism, canon formation, literacy, literary education, reading habits, and reader response. (\textit{Project MUSE – Book History})

Because the way in which books are currently produced is directly affected by current publication and dissemination technologies and the development of digital literature, the study of short fiction as it is affected by its publication media, communities, writers, and readers is particularly relevant to the study of book history.

The importance of incorporating digital texts—and not just digital short fiction—into the study of book history has been acknowledged in recent major book history conferences, such as the Society for the History of Authorship and Publishing (SHARP) 2007 Conference themed “Open the Book, Open the Mind,” which highlighted “how books develop and extend minds and cultures, and also how they are opened to new media and new purposes” (SHARP, 2007). The importance of research into digital culture was also recognized in The Bibliographical Society of Canada’s 2007 Conference, “Beyond the Text: Bibliography in the Digital Age.” SHARP’s 2009 conference theme, “Tradition and InnovatioN,” explored recent changes in the field. In particular, the recent social networking developments on the Web were reflected in panels such as “Text and Technology: Web 2.0 Applications and Book History.” A number of researchers
within the field of book history examine the transmutation of works from one transmission
method into another, such as from oral to written documents or from manuscript to print (Müller,
2002). However, the incorporation of research into the transmutation from print to digital (Luna,
2007), or digital publications and online communities in general, has only just begun to receive
attention within the field of book history, mostly through questions as shown in the title of
Angus Phillips’s article, “Does the Book Have a Future?” Phillips asks,

> If the book has had its day, what would be the test? When readers are avid followers
of fiction on their mobile phones? When children study using laptops and are
leaving behind the use of print resources? When less than half of all adults in the
world’s largest economy read literature? When a successful publisher sells off its
print program to concentrate on electronic resources and services? When dictionary
users consult electronic pens for a definition or translation? This is the world now,
and if some of these trends continue, the future of the book in its traditional sense is
certainly under question. Yet if we apply other tests—for example, the number of
books published each year or the success of individual writers such as J. K.
Rowling—the book remains resilient in the face of changes in technology, culture,
and society. Paradoxically, the world going digital is helping to keep the book alive,
with the possibility that books may remain in print indefinitely while being available
to buy anywhere in the world. (547)

Phillips acknowledges that the book will likely continue alongside developments in digitized and
born-digital texts. However, discussions such as Phillips’s that focus on the book itself, rather
than the type of material contained within books, can be problematic because certain genres such
as short fiction or functional texts such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and other modular texts
work better as digital publications. These genres have moved more easily to the digital medium, due to faster searchability and other tools afforded the digital reader. On the other hand, the codex is still more appropriate than the computer or e-book readers for reading longer texts for pleasure purposes, such as novels and even short story anthologies, and rather than becoming obsolete, the print book has just become more specialized. This process of specialization changes both the texts that are produced within print books and the texts that are available digitally through the Web.

Some might suggest that digital technologies and texts fall under the realm of popular culture studies rather than English or Book History. However, because most born-digital texts can lose important characteristics when removed from the cultural context and medium in which they are created and circulated, the context and medium should be essential aspects of the texts when studying the short story. This research therefore updates the study of short fiction and the short story within these fields of study and contributes to the debate that has existed over the process of canonization for a number of years, as expressed in works such as Terry Eagleton’s Introduction to Literary Theory (1996), “What is Literature” and “The Rise of English,” and Astrid Ensslin’s Canonizing Hypertext (2007).

Not only the publication of fiction has changed in the past twenty or so years, but also its writing, editing, and the means through which writers gain inspiration for their works. Even in its composition and the processes of publication, fiction has been digital for quite some time, as noted by Luna (2007). Mainstream publishing and advertising have also been moving to more audio, visual, and video formats. One only has to view, for example, podcasts and blogs from
Yale University Press\(^1\) that include links to an author’s site, biographical information, and other marketing information, to see this shift to publishing in various formats in order to reach as wide an audience as possible. The digitization of publishing and marketing through social networks affect the type of fiction circulating and the way in which various works of fiction become more well known than others.

Open access as a movement in content in general is also something that needs to be taken into consideration when studying contemporary literature. Open access may make it easier to collaborate with others, collage content, and enable authors to choose Creative Commons licenses that would allow others to share and remix. The Joyland short fiction site, for example, uses a donation model for revenue for its open-access stories: “If you enjoyed this story please send a tip to Joyland securely through Paypal. What was this story worth to you? You can donate any amount you like and it all helps” (Moore). Testing these models requires new collaborations between literary scholars, business academics, publishers, and writers, in addition to an understanding of online communities.

I chose to study digital short fiction, rather than novel-length fiction or poetry, because short fiction or texts that are modularly organized into shorter sections have been embraced more easily by readers on the Web than longer-length works. I also chose this subject because the digital short fiction that has been incorporated into standard literary discussions has tended to focus on the formal differences of the work compared with print, as with hypertext works, and I wanted to explore other aspects of digital short fiction. Many types of short fiction exist on the

\(^1\) The Yale Press Log is available at http://yalepress.typepad.com/yalepresslog/. The Press also has an e-newsletter and posts news about new books or events on Twitter, with 5,677 followers as of April 5, 2010. Yale UP also has a page on Facebook, with a link to “Become a Fan” directly from the Yale UP website, in addition to various links to bookmark the Yale UP page using social bookmarking sites such as del.icio.us.
Web: fictional blog entries; collaborative writing projects; aspiring and established authors posting their in-progress material online for feedback from a community; fan-fiction sites that follow an author’s particular fiction structure or characters and create new fiction based on this; and authors posting finished works that had either been previously published in print or were not accepted for print-based publication venues. Also, some works straddle the divisions among videogame, story, and interactive works, and continue to resist inclusion in literary studies perhaps because many scholars may not know how to categorize these works. Short fiction can also more readily employ the Web’s social networking potential, especially when marketing the works of an author or imprint, collaborating with others, or connecting to a community based on an author’s works. I elaborate on this in Chapter 2 by analyzing some works of digital short fiction, and in Chapter 3 when studying the collaboration and publishing preferences of writers.

This information about the collaboration and publishing preferences of contemporary writers discussed in Chapter 3 was gathered by advertising information about my study in various online writing communities and sending questions to people who responded to my advertisement. This was not accomplished without help from my own connections who were already part of writing communities or who knew of people who had published stories online, and so coincidentally, the study of short fiction writers that I use to verify many of the points made in Chapter 1 and 2 would not have been successful if I had not been able to employ my own social networks. I elaborate on this study, and its results, in Chapter 3.

Some literary scholars have begun to examine born-digital materials, such as Steven Jones in *The Meaning of Video Games* (2008) and Matthew Kirschenbaum in *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (2008), which I expand upon in Chapter 1. Many writers, however, as shown in my study in Chapter 3, do not consider themselves to be published until
they have published in print-based publication venues, although some authors have also noted that this perception is changing due to the added benefit of more exposure to their names and stories through online publication. But to truly incorporate the short story as it exists today into the study of English literature will await the shift in the dominance of print-based conceptions of the short story in the minds of both writers and readers older than the born-digital generation.

Within universities, there have been specialized courses and research devoted to electronic or digital literature. However, the separation of this material from first-year survey courses and anthologies shows that digital fiction is considered to be on the periphery and has not developed a place within the general study of English literature, even though most reading, especially by undergraduate students, is now conducted through digital texts. Anthologies sometimes include graphic literature and comics, but inclusion of this material on course syllabi largely depends upon the interests of the individual instructor rather than wide acceptance as an important type of contemporary fiction.

Many works of digital short fiction have gained popularity through sites such as YouTube, academic projects such as The Center for Digital Storytelling, publishers’ marketing experiments, and podcasts, and even when these stories are largely text-based, they tend to incorporate visual and audio multimedia into the text. Unfortunately, however, because of copyright restrictions imposed on digital media from print-based copyright restrictions and conceptions of authorship and ownership, many of these videos are removed because they incorporate copyrighted audio, visual, or textual elements, making it difficult to include them as examples in a more permanent text such as a thesis. As John Feather describes in “Copyright and the Creation of Literary Property,”
the idea that authors ‘own’ their books after publication is a product of European
print culture and its worldwide offspring. Conceptually, it is a complex idea which
might be thought to be in conflict with the whole notion of ‘ownership.’ How can
we sell something and still have a claim to it? In essence, that is the question with
which generations of authors, publishers, and lawyers—especially lawyers—have
had to grapple. The answer that has been developed is that we can distinguish
between a physical object—a book, a drawing, a photograph—and its intellectual or
artistic content. Ownership of the object does not confer ownership of the content.

(521)

The imposition of capitalist conceptions of ownership becomes even more complicated when
there is no physical object to sell and when publishers or authors attempt to impose print-based
conceptions of authorship and ownership, and I elaborate on this in Chapter 1. Attributing this
imposition of copyright to only print culture, or being able to identify a print culture *sui generis*,
is also problematic, however, as Adrian Johns describes in *The Nature of the Book* (1998) when
discussing the use of the term *print culture* by Eisenstein and others. Print changes in different
places and contexts, and to isolate a specific print culture and attributes associated with it such as
veracity is, according to Johns, problematic, since these attributes developed through a collective
consensus over a period of time (2-3).

Perhaps it can be just as problematic to use the term *digital culture*, since the traits
associated with digital texts developed over time and in different contexts, and in many ways a
collective consensus is still developing. Or, to make understanding digital genres even more
difficult, perhaps a property of digital texts is that they develop through consensus within social
networks while also resisting restrictions and limitations that would attribute certain properties to
particular genres. In considering fan fiction and slash fiction\(^2\), for example, Roger Luckhurst acknowledges effects of print-based conceptions of literature on the development of digital literature by noting that the legal aspects associated with print fiction, which have been transported to digital fiction, restrict the properties of digital fiction:

Slash fiction develops within the interstices of mass cultural production, each tale usually prefaced by a legalistic acknowledgement of the corporate ownership of the characters and appealing to the law of ‘fair use’. These legal disclaimers have developed in the wake of some aggressive attempts by copyright owners to stamp out ‘slashed’ versions of their characters (the author of ‘The Vampire Chronicles’, Anne Rice, is notorious in this regard). Queered subversion is a tolerated form, then, and internet technology in fact makes this cultural activity easier to police than older samizdat forms, given the impressive panoptical reach of the newer search engines.

(800)

Although many theorists of digital fiction have lauded the anonymity and freedom typically associated with digital fiction, as discussed in Chapter 2, Luckhurst insightfully identifies here that the Web makes it much easier to police certain forms of writing and thereby control or shape its form. The move in general to open source and open access for various applications and non-fiction programs and publications also perhaps encourages forms such as slash fiction that add to, alter, or, in some cases, “mutilate” (“Urban Dictionary: slash fiction”) the original plotline or characterization; this is an aspect of digital fiction that I examine in Chapter 2.

\(^2\) See definition in Glossary.
I have mostly limited my focus to works that are primarily text based or, to borrow a term from Astrid Ensslin, works that use text as their primary semiotic mode\(^3\) even though they may include a number of other semiotic modes such as images, audio readings, background music, and video. However, when discussing works of born-digital short fiction, it becomes more difficult to focus only on text, especially when considering stories on the Center for Digital Storytelling site, which use audio and images rather than text to tell the story, as I elaborate in Chapter 2.

Within Chapter 1, I give an overview of the generic and historical scholarship of short stories and short fiction at present as it relates to digital short fiction, and I assess our conceptions of the genre of short fiction and the short story. Chapter 2 further places this study within its theoretical context by surveying some of the academic dialogue that has surrounded digital or electronic literature. I also examine some works of digital short fiction and the effect of communities and social networks on the short story. This background on short fiction writing on the Web is followed by a discussion of communities, and in particular the way in which social networks are now part of the medium of works of digital literature and thereby determine the text. The affordances\(^4\) and limitations of the Web are also examined in Chapter 2, along with reasons why devices developed for reading longer works online have not worked well unless these works are organized into shorter sections, even though innovations such as the Kindle and e-book readers now exist. Many participants from my study of short fiction writers acknowledged this attribute of fiction on the Web in their responses to my questions, which I

\(^3\) See definition in Glossary.

\(^4\) See definition in Glossary. Applying the term *affordance* in the context of texts and, in particular, the short story, is effective because it reminds us of what the medium or particular work does rather than just what it says.
elaborate in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 examines responses from participants in the communities that surround and emerge from short fiction on the Web, including ones that are formed by fans, publishers, academics, and independent writers. The social Web context and changes in how we understand short fiction are explained in Chapter 3 when assessing these responses from digital short fiction writers, from fan-fiction writers to writers who are now publishing short fiction in online magazines while also continuing to publish in print. These writers can give insight into whether our conceptions of the short story need to be updated to include its social networks and the vast array of stories that are not published in print or in the same form that has traditionally been associated with the short story. Just as the oral tale is studied in connection with its community or its tellers in a particular moment in time, so the social networks and medium need to be considered when studying certain works of digital short fiction. In order to do so, however, our conception of the story itself needs to change.

Rather than updating the definition of the short story, this thesis offers an updated approach to short fiction that considers its larger social context and medium. From the overview of generic and historical scholarship on the short story, analysis of digital short fiction and its communities, and the study of writers of digital short fiction and participants in literary communities, in Chapter 4 I consider the effects on the short story and conclude that we can update print-based conceptions of the short story and short fiction to include born-digital short fiction and its social networks. Chapter 4 also draws on some of the implications suggested by participants’ responses to questions about their writing and the effect of social networks on the content, form, and study of short fiction. I then offer suggestions for an updated understanding of short fiction that integrates its contexts.
Born-digital short fiction, podcasts, and other audio or multimedia storytelling can be taken into consideration in order to bring performance back into our understanding of what we study as a short story. Most fiction created by Web 2.0 literary communities and their participants falls under the category of fan fiction, but many online magazines or journals now also form a community around their works or authors through various tools such as comment boxes, forums, and other resources. It is important to integrate literary studies with studies of these online communities and a work’s paratexts. I conclude that this is necessary because we are clearly no longer writing and reading only in print, just as, with the printing press and more widespread literacy, people were not only encountering stories through script, early print forms, or the teller of an oral tale, even if they continued to hear some stories read aloud from print and continued to encounter script and early print forms. The digitized short story is still very similar to its print counterparts; however, in light of born-digital short fiction and its lack of easy transmutation to print, we cannot study the short story, whether in print or digital format, as we used to.

1.2 What is a Short Story?

1.2.1 How the Short Story is Perceived Generally

Definitions of the short story by its everyday practitioners and teachers tend to focus on its characteristics of being short (able to be read in one sitting); concise (information does not diverge from the main plot, unlike in a novel); leaving behind a single impression or effect usually built around one character, place, idea, or act; and requiring the reader to input personal experiences or prior knowledge to the story because it is concise (Bennett). One could argue, however, that all texts require readers to bring prior knowledge. Some short stories also cannot be read in one sitting, especially if one considers the more limited attention span of
contemporary readers, as lamented by writers such as Carr (2008). Other teachers of the short story in addition to Bennett characterize the short story as creating a single impression; being highly economical with words, characters, dialogue, and description to “develop a single predesigned effect”; revolving around a single incident, character or period of time; containing minimal denoument or resolution after the climax; and including character development only to the extent required by the story (Watson). But again, one could argue that all works of literature, including plays, novels, and short stories, require authors to develop the character to the extent required by the story, and no more: all genres require some efficiency in character development. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that character development in short stories is generally limited to the major character, and most other characters in short stories do not need to be developed (Watson). There are stories, however, that evade this categorization as well, as in Mansfield’s “The Garden Party,” which shifts at some points to minor characters’ perspectives, although it mostly stays consistent to the major, although flat, character’s perspective. Most literature textbooks will describe the characteristics of short stories by focusing on aspects such as plot, point of view, characterization, setting, tone and style, theme, and techniques such as symbolism and imagery; these characteristics are, however, common to other genres of literature such as plays, novels, and poetry. What, then, is a short story?

1.2.2 The Short Story and its Predecessors

Kennedy and Gioia, the authors of the textbook *Backpack Literature*, along with March-Russell in *The Short Story: An Introduction*, offer another approach to understanding the short story by introducing its characteristics in comparison with its more ancient counterparts. Kennedy and Gioia compare the short story to the fable, the parable, and the tale, whereas March-Russell adds more subgenres to the tale: “parable and fable, the Creation myth, novella, fairy tale, and art tale” (March-Russell 2). These forms, compared to the short story, are
relatively simple in structure because they date back to the time of word-of-mouth storytelling (Kennedy & Gioia 6). March-Russell highlights the fact that “despite its printed versions, the tale is a spoken form that, consequently, implies a speaker and listener,” and therefore it is “context-sensitive to a degree that reading is not” (2). With the tale there is also “an intimacy of address, which is lost within printed literature,” and reading in the “era of mass-production is a more alienated activity” because although a reader might describe to others what he or she has read, the reader is unlikely to retell it (March-Russell 2). With oral tales, we have listeners participating in a tale to an extent that a reader does not, and the positions of speaker and listener are also variable: “the authority for tale-telling is itself transferable from one participant to another” (March-Russell 2-3). March-Russell calls the manner and technique with which the tale is presented the **co-text**, which is the performative aspect of the text that exists in addition to the tale itself.

Interestingly, however, March-Russell does not include jokes in his description of the sub-genres of oral tales, which are probably the only type of brief vignette that still continues to be told orally and aided sometimes through brief humourous anecdotes or jokes distributed through email or social networking sites such as Facebook. These emailed jokes are then either redistributed through email or told orally to another person, although these jokes increasingly use images to put forward their punchline, thereby making it difficult to then pass them orally to another person. Jokes also continue to be one of the only forms that still exhibit a lack of

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5 As elaborated in Chapter 2, many born-digital works of fiction are also context sensitive to a greater extent than digitized or print works of fiction.

6 The ability to take on the role of tale-teller would require skill in telling the story and sometimes respect or a particular role within a community, however.
Kennedy and Gioia describe the oral-rooted fable as “a brief, often humorous narrative told to illustrate a moral,” and its characters are often animals who represent specific human qualities, inanimate objects, or people and supernatural beings (6-7). Within contemporary Western cultures, however, the fable is mostly circulated in textbooks or anthologies rather than orally. Most fables are very short and contain “little decoration” (Kennedy & Gioia 7); everything in the fable leads directly to the moral or message, which is often stated at the end of the fable, and the reader is left to construct his or her own resolution or denouement as the fable often ends immediately after the moral or message. Characters and setting in fables are not greatly developed, and often the fable achieves its effect through its very bareness and simplicity (Kennedy & Gioia 7).

Like fables, parables are a “brief narrative that teaches a moral, but unlike the fable, its plot is plausibly realistic, and the main characters are human rather than anthropomorphized animals or natural forces” (Kennedy & Gioia 9). The tone of parables is also usually more mysterious and suggestive than with fables, and parables are more likely than fables to present their morals implicitly and with openness to multiple interpretations (Kennedy & Gioia 9-10). Parables from the Bible continue to be discussed and passed on by being read (or read aloud within religious contexts or to children), but otherwise do not now circulate among the public. In addition, when parables are read aloud, they are often detached from contemporary audiences by sounding odd from being written in older forms of English, such as the seventeenth-century English of the King James version of the Bible.
Another form of oral storytelling was the tale or yarn, which is “a story, usually short, that sets forth strange and wonderful events in a more or less bare summary, without detailed character-drawing”; its goal is “revelation of the marvelous rather than revelation of character” (Kennedy & Gioia 11). Like fables, parables, and jokes, tales had a clear and distinct goal or purpose; this purpose is not always as clear with the short story.

These forms of short fiction with oral roots are different than the short story because they were “told aloud before someone set them down in writing”; they originated orally rather than in writing, and therefore had to be limited to brief descriptions. Their plots tend to be “less complicated and less closely detailed than a story written for the printed page, whose reader can linger over it” (Kennedy & Gioia 11). The shift to character delineation in the contemporary short story as compared to the delineation of strange or wonderful events or a moral is related to the shift to print, but this can also be linked to the focus on the self in our particular moment in time. The short story, with detailed character drawing as one of its central aspects, can appear to epitomise this self-centred aspect of our contemporary collective personality. One can also, however, see a difference between published-for-print and born-digital short stories because born-digital fiction (at least with early works) tended to focus on the form and not just the character, but still with a focus on the self and trauma, which I elaborate in Chapter 2.

March-Russell, unlike Kennedy and Gioia, adds the art tale, “the artistic or literary fairy tale” (9), as an intermediary between the tale and the short story: “the art tale, then, is an important development since it bridges the gap between the folktale and the modern short story” (10). Hans Christian Andersen is one of the more famous exponents of the art tale, with both original tales and those adapted from oral storytelling. As the short story was developing through print, tales such as the art tale continued to be produced. Similarly, at the beginning of
the twenty-first century, we also have print stories continuing to be produced while born-digital short fiction is developing through the Web, and in many ways these born-digital short stories mix both showing and telling.

One of the ways to recognize a short story compared to a fable, parable, or tale, according to Kennedy and Gioia, is that its main character is fully delineated, whereas tellers of tales relied heavily on summary or terse, general narration (16). Many fables, parables, and tales also relied on the audience’s own repertoire of stock characters and character types in order to get the story across. Short stories usually present the main events in greater fullness, are often more realistic than a tale, and are able to develop a scene in more fullness and detail in a way that can almost make the reader feel that he or she is present in the scene (Kennedy & Gioia 16). Instead of summarizing as a teller of a fable, parable, or tale might do, short story writers “try to show rather than simply to tell” (Kennedy & Gioia 16).

Kennedy and Gioia emphasize that there is a distinction between the fable, tale, and short story, but that the short story has not necessarily replaced older forms such as the fable and tale: “Fable, tale, and short story are distinct forms, each achieving its own effects. Far from being extinct, fable and tale have enjoyed a resurgence in recent years” in the writings of Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who use elements of fable and folklore in their postmodern fiction (17). In other words, we can distinguish forms of short fiction such as fables, parables, tales, and short stories, but we can still see elements of the ancient or pre-print forms in the contemporary print short story, and I would argue that based on the responses from writers of fan fiction and digital short fiction analyzed in Chapter 3, much fan fiction and born-digital short fiction is closer to the fable, parable, or tale than the print short story anthologized
or published in magazines before the Web (and continuing to be published in anthologies and magazines alongside fiction published on the Web).

In Ian Reid’s *The Short Story* (1977), he also distinguishes ancient forms of short fiction from the short story and addresses issues of definition and classification of the short story:

At the risk of eroding completely any idea of an essential generic type, a quasi-Platonic form of the short story, we need to be empirically mindful of the changes undergone by short prose fiction before and since its widespread acceptance in the Romantic period as a field of serious literary activity. If the New Testament parable, medieval French *fabliau*, seventeenth-century Chinese *p’ing-hua*, nineteenth-century American tall tale or recent experimental prose poem are to be regarded as outside the pale, they should still provide reference points for us in delimiting the territory of the short story proper. (Reid 4)

Reid acknowledges the influence of these other forms of short fiction on the short story itself, but also does not see the short story as including all short prose forms: “While narrowly prescriptive definitions will not do, since it is already clear that this genre has no monotypic purity, it would be useless to go to the latitudinarian extreme of including in it every kind of brief prose fiction” (8). Reid was writing in 1977, and in many ways the divisions between other forms of short fiction and the short story have become even more blurred since then, with the move to born-digital and Web-based short fiction.

1.2.3 Oral Storytelling

In oral storytelling, audience feedback was a part of the story, the teller was a part of the text, and its performance or *co-text* was never exactly the same as a previous instance: this factor
prevented the oral tale from centering on the teller. The fable, parable, tale, and art tale were in
many ways different than the short story we know today, as discussed in the previous section,
although these predecessors influenced current conceptions of the short story. Authors such as
Thomas King have explored the short story as it is currently defined, through works such as One
Good Story, That One that attempt to bring the changing nature of the oral tale back into the print
short story. Like some other digital literature writers who use the medium to comment on the
form, King uses the structure of the narrative itself to comment on the form and to critique
Western standards of storytelling projected onto indigenous Canadian storytelling and history.
These standards evolved largely from the development of print, however, and the hybrid nature
of King’s stories make them unlike other hybrid forms such as art tales but also unlike oral tales
and contemporary short stories. The title story in the collection begins as follows:

Alright.

You know, I hear this story up north. Maybe Yellowknife, that one, somewhere. I hear it maybe a long time. Old story this one. One hundred years, maybe more. Maybe not so long either, this story.

So.

You know, they come to my place. Summer place, pretty good place, that one…

(King 3)

King tries to recreate the rhythms and themes of oral storytelling in his print stories. The
beginning of his story sounds like the beginning of an oral tale, and trickster figures in the stories
are present to thwart events or change the stories, as one might see in the different tellings of
each tale. Indeed, each of King’s readings of his stories is unique, and it would be interesting to
see how a younger generation of writers would use the born-digital short story to bring indigenous storytelling back into the story. At this point, no writer exists who has done that, although various videos of indigenous North American storytellers exist on YouTube. One can see, for example, a YouTube video of Little Hawk speaking about the wisdom of native American storytelling, in which he also recites a tale told by his grandfather that included a moral about identity and tolerance (Little Hawk). The co-text is very evident in his performance of the tale; he uses his voice to impersonate others, gives the context behind the tale, and also provides a moral by commenting on the inability to own one’s tales, wisdom, or actions. The ending text of the video, “From the heart of Little Hawk,” is preceded by his note that his heart is connected to the rhythms of the planet, or the collective, and he says, “this isn’t me; this comes from a long line of me.”

With oral tales, each telling of a tale is slightly different. However, each reading of a text (whether print or digital) is also different. When discussing the focus on the reading process created by Gibson’s *Agrippa* in which “elements of the work were designed to be consumed by a single reading” (124), Harpold states, “Every reading is, strictly speaking, unrepeatable; something in it, of it, will vary. Recollections of reading accumulate in relation to this iterable specificity; each takes its predecessors as its foundation, each inflects them with its backward-looking futurity” (125). In other words, every reading draws forth something new, or adds something to the old, whether within different readers or within different readings by an individual reader.

We do have the potential to bring the performance of the text back into the reading of it, and in many ways the variations of the performance literalize the variations that already occur in each reading in the reader’s mind. There are, in addition to videos of indigenous storytellers,
videos on YouTube and other websites of authors (and readers) reading prose texts. Amateur authors have also found YouTube, and posting videos on their own websites, to be a good way to market their texts to readers. Rather than assigning books to courses and having students read the texts, we could have entire courses, not just in drama and film departments, composed of performed texts, with the print text, if available, only as a transcript or reference for the performed text. One can see, for example, a YouTube “video,” which is an image of Yeats and an audio recording of “W. B. Yeats Reading His Own Verse” (brychar66). To include performed texts, however, would emphasize the co-text in a way that has usually been associated with the oral tale rather than print or digital texts; writers such as Thomas King highlight this difference.

Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy* is an important source for understanding the oral roots of storytelling and storytelling cultures. Even though Ong’s book focuses on the “relations between orality and writing” (2), it is useful for understanding the relations between print and digital media. Ong acknowledges that “the shift from orality to literacy and on to electronic processing engages social, economic, political, religious and other structures” but that these are “only indirect concerns” of his book, which “treats rather the differences in ‘mentality’ between oral and writing cultures” (3). My focus, however, does involve social, economic, political, religious, and other structures. Ong describes “electronic culture [as] build[ing] on both writing and print,” and states that “our understanding of the differences between orality and literacy developed only in the electronic age, not earlier. Contrasts between electronic media and print have sensitized us to the earlier contrasts between writing and orality” (2-3). It is important to consider the way in which oral literature incorporated other elements such as gestures (Ong 7), as these actions incorporated the visual, audio through voice fluctuations, and so forth. Certain
types of digital literature, such as early hypertext, as discussed in Chapter 2, are a product of the sensitivity to contrasts between these different communication modes.

1.2.4 Print-Based Definitions of the Short Story

In tracing the terms *short story* and *tale*, March-Russell acknowledges that the early definitions of a short story were still rooted in the oral storytelling forms of short fiction, especially in the nineteenth century when the short story was still gaining recognition (1). Even now, various works of English literature remain linked to their roots in oral storytelling, such as poetry and drama, and they can be both read in print and appreciated in performance, allowing readers to be able to appreciate both the literary and representational art aspects of the works. Definitions of the short story are now often rooted in print-based definitions. Short fiction exists on the Internet in both digitized and born-digital forms, but our definitions of literature often centre around print genres such as the novel, even though the novel was itself a disputed literary genre in late-eighteenth-century definitions of literature (Eagleton, 1996).

According to the OED, the short story is “a prose work of fiction, differing from a novel by being shorter and less elaborate; a novelette” (OED, *short story* 8.b., 2009). This definition is an example of the way in which definitions of the short story are often ingrained in print media because the description only compares the short story to other print forms such as the novel. Kennedy and Gioia, however, equate the ability to craft the short story to being able to produce something “finely wrought… [that] has the richness and conciseness of an excellent lyric poem” (16-17). Interestingly, Kennedy and Gioia relate the finely wrought short story to the lyric poem—a form that stems from oral poetry but that took on conventions of its own due to writing
and print\(^7\)—rather than just the novel. Although the short story is often compared to the novel, the comparison of the print short story to the lyric poem may be a more appropriate analogy because it was also shaped by print. But in many ways, the contemporary short story is so different from novels and lyric poetry as to make constant comparisons ineffective.

Kennedy and Gioia also differentiate between literary short fiction and commercial fiction by describing the main interest of commercial fiction as “physical action or conflict,” whereas many literary short stories tell of “a moment of insight, discovery, or revelation by which a character’s life, or view of life, is greatly altered” (Kennedy & Gioia 17). This distinction between literary and commercial short fiction can be useful for differentiating some works, although as with distinctions between genres or even fiction and non-fiction, there are always works that resist inclusion or fall between different categories.

Kennedy and Gioia describe different types of short fiction based on those that are “ancient” compared with the modern short story, as described earlier, and place the origin of the short story in the nineteenth century, when “writers of fiction were encouraged by a large, literate audience of middle-class readers who wanted to see their lives reflected in faithful mirrors” (17). Many of the writers known to be masters of the form were considered as such because they had skillfully represented ordinary life: “in Russia, Anton Chekhov; in France, Honoré de Balzac and Guy de Maupassant; and in America, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe (although the Americans seem less fond of real life than of dream and fantasy)”

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\(^7\) Kennedy and Gioia define the lyric poem: “Originally, as its Greek name suggests, a *lyric* was a poem sung to the music of a lyre. This earlier meaning—a poem made for singing—is still current today, when we use *lyrics* to mean the words of a popular song. But the kind of printed poem we now call a *lyric* is usually something else, for over the past five hundred years the nature of lyric poetry has changed greatly. Ever since the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, poets have written less often for singers, more often for readers. In general, this tendency has made lyric poems contain less word-music and (since they can be pondered on a page) more thought—and perhaps more complicated feelings” (385).
These early short stories, however, were often third-person delineations of ordinary life, rather than semi-autobiographical or first-person accounts of individual experiences.

Much of Ian Reid’s *The Short Story* also assesses questions of length and the short story (“How long is short?” (9)), from assertions such as Edgar Allan Poe’s that the short story should be “capable of being perused at one sitting” (9). He notes the trouble with this distinction because, “as William Saroyan once remarked,… some people can sit for longer than others” (9), which also makes problematic the “‘hard and fast rule’ among contemporary magazines of keeping inside the range of between six and eight thousand words,” as mentioned by Henry James (James qtd. in Reid 9). Length distinctions are problematic because what one editor considers to be a short story may not be considered as such by another. Another possibility, which Reid acknowledges as still inadequate, is to “accept as short stories whatever an author wishes to nominate—or allows to be nominated—as such” (9-10). On the one hand, “genre is not arithmetically defined” as would be presupposed when defining by word count, but accepting all texts nominated as short stories as being short stories can also pose problems as well. One could not submit a three-hundred page novel to a magazine editor and call it a short story, nor could one submit a poem or play, although, as mentioned previously, even these examples cannot serve as concrete distinctions, as prose poetry and performed stories (especially stories that are born digital) evade even these categorizations.

Longer forms of print fiction, such as the novel, can be seen as growing largely from the invention of the printing press and innovations in lighting (Altick, 1998): the novel, with its length, paper costs, lighting requirements, and requisition for long periods of solitary reading, would not have developed and been practical as a literary form without the reading public that
had developed during its early years and the technological innovations that had made novel reading possible. Conversely, oral storytelling existed (and still exists as the primary transmission medium in many societies) because there was not a more permanent and effective transmission medium for general use until print emerged and became feasible for general public use. Similar to the transition from oral to print, a new mode of transmission has emerged, but this mode has the ability not only to mimic many attributes of print and oral transmission but also to develop its own structures and techniques that were not possible in other media.

The way in which different forms of short fiction are distinguished, for example by March-Russell, Kennedy and Gioia, and Reid, can also be an effective means of demarcating the different types of short stories, especially when it comes to the born-digital short story. Fables, tales, and parables are different than the short story largely because they developed orally before they were written down. However, Kennedy and Gioia fail to incorporate born-digital short fiction into their discussion of ancient to present-day short fiction, even though Kennedy and Gioia’s textbook was published in a third edition in 2010. The types of digital short fiction may be different than print short fiction, if born digital, because they were developed for the online medium rather than print or oral. These born-digital stories need to be considered in what we perceive as being a short story, even if they are not print based, and I elaborate on this in Chapter 2.

To answer the question “What is a short story?”, then, at this point we can say that it is generally regarded as a work of fiction that is short enough to be read in one sitting. To assign a word count or page count to make this description more specific would be to impose print-based conceptions of the short story onto a genre that now exists in oral, print, and digital formats. The short story can also exist concurrently in a combination of these formats, such as when a story is
read from the printed page by its author, recorded digitally, and then posted on YouTube. This description of the short story focuses largely on its format, however. Although both format and content oscillate in their effect on each other, when it comes to describing the content of short stories, this has tended to be categorized according to different historical periods and nationalities, as discussed in the next section.

1.3 Historical and National Approaches to the Short Story

Critics such as Reid (1977), Kennedy and Gioia, and March-Russell trace the development of the short story through older forms of short fiction such as the parable, fable, sketch, and tale, or how older texts such as Boccaccio’s *Decameron* influenced the development of the form of the short story (21). Some other critics have focused primarily on national historical approaches.

The history of the print short story in England is well documented in volumes such as Joseph Flora’s *The English Short Story: 1880-1945*, Dennis Vannatta’s *The English Short Story: 1945-1980*, and in March-Russell’s “Economies of Scale: The Short Story in England” in his *The Short Story: An Introduction*. Documenting the history of the short story by national identities becomes increasingly problematic and exclusive, however, as the world has become more globalized and marginalized. March-Russell also acknowledges this throughout the rest of his volume. The English short story also developed more strongly in the commonwealth countries, in particular the United States, rather than in Britain: “the British, it is true, had been somewhat tardy in recognizing the potential of the short story, a genre sharply defined in theory by Edgar Allan Poe and natural to the practice of the great American prose writers of the nineteenth century” (Flora xiii). Flora cites William Dean Howells’s explanation for the initial development of the short story outside of Britain:
Howells suggested that the form is ‘peculiarly adapted to the American temperament’ because of the national tendencies to speed and impatience. But he also offered a theoretical explanation for the development of the genre in his native land, citing the phenomenal success of American magazines. Howells was, of course, writing as an editor of *Harper’s*, one of the most prestigious of such magazines, but his vision was broad. He saw American magazines creating a climate for short stories almost to the exclusion of the serials that characterized British and continental magazines and newspapers. (xiii-xiv)

The later development of the short story in Britain may have been in part from the availability in America of magazines such as *Harper’s*, although Flora acknowledges that accounts such as Howells’s might be biased from his position within the American publishing industry. March-Russell also acknowledges the influence of the American periodical market, however, and the resulting impact on the short stories when these periodicals declined:

> The image of the short story as culturally marginal relates to its economic position. Though the American short story has survived within the periodical market since the early nineteenth century, its fortunes have fluctuated according to that market’s strength. Today, the American short story depends on a few established titles, such as *The Atlantic Monthly, Esquire, Harper’s, The Kenyon Review* and *The New Yorker*, and a host of ‘little magazines’ associated with university departments. (March-Russell 43)

The increased demand for short stories prompted by the proliferation of periodicals also operated in Great Britain (Flora xiv), along with the “haste and impatience” that might make short stories preferable to longer works, although the later development of the short story in Britain may be
attributed to the longer works such as novels that were preferred by the “Victorian prose giants” (Flora xiv). “Narrative economy was not natural to Dickens and Eliot, and they—like their peers—preferred a broad canvas,” according to Flora, even though these writers did produce “‘shorter’ tales…. [such as] Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843) or George Eliot’s *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858)” (xiv). 8 In other words, the preference of dominant national writers for longer forms such as novels may have affected the development of the short story form, since the “broader canvas” of the novel may have been more conducive than the short story to the Victorian concerns with social order. According to Flora, the short story awaited a rushed, short-attention-span audience with less concern for the intricacies of social decorum and the nuances of human interaction.

Writers such as Katherine Mansfield, however, found the short story to be an effective canvas for representing social concerns, but her use of the form developed after the Victorian era, with stories concerned with criticizing the social order rather than perpetuating it. “The Garden Party” (1922), for example, centres around a moment in the protagonist’s life in which she calls into question aspects of social class. One could also debate whether Mansfield should be classified as a New Zealand or British writer; categorizing writers based on nationality is an aspect of classifying and categorizing short stories that can be even more problematic today.

The novel, according to March-Russell, also affected the development of the short story in America and Britain, in addition to the perception that magazines are more ephemeral or of a lesser quality than books:

8 Many contemporary readers, however, would not classify works such as Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* as “short,” and certainly not a work that could be read in one sitting or fit into other definitions provided by Reid, Kennedy and Gioia, and others, such as character development limited to the main character, and so forth.
Although magazine circulation has ensured an enduring role for the short story in Europe and the United States, it has also fostered the idea that the form is ephemeral. Magazine stories do not have the same physical or cultural status as fiction published in book-form. Even in the USA, where the short story is regarded as a national artwork, the question ‘Where is the Great American Novel?’ continues to be posed. (March-Russell 43)

In short, the development of the short story in Britain, as in North America, was tied to the development of magazines but also to the precedence of the novel in Britain and the status afforded to book publications. This perception is still prevalent in the views of some writers today (as also elaborated by study participants in Chapter 3, especially in the context of online versus print publication in magazines, books, and so forth):

The little magazines were, of course, legion [after World War I], and many did not endure. But their importance to the rise of the modern short story in England is considerable in that they provided many outlets for writers. By publishing short fiction, the more secure periodicals helped writers to support themselves while they also labored on novels. But for many of these writers, the short story was not just a source of income but a vehicle attractive in itself, a challenge worthy of strenuous effort. It is apparent in the 1980s, when the market for short stories is very limited, how fortunate these writers were in finding a publishing climate right for their experimentation. (Flora xv)

In other words, the availability of the publication venues and the associated revenue for writers developed the short story both in North American and in Britain. Flora also sees its
contrapositive as affecting the development of the short story after many of these magazines disappeared:

No single fact can account so decisively for the waning of British achievement in the genre as the decline of publishing opportunities after World War II. Since then, writers have tended to look to the universities and to television for support. Most commentators agree that the climate for the cultivation of the short story is not now nearly so healthy as it was in the first half of the century. (Flora xv)

Since Flora published this volume in 1985, perhaps he would have added that now the Internet is another place where writers are looking for support. Indeed, the economic and publishing apparatus that supports different genres can have a large impact on the form: the three-volume novel “effectively collapsed after 1894” because the circulating libraries, faced with high storage costs and budget constraints, could no longer finance them (March-Russell 47).

Vannatta’s volume *The English Short Story: 1945-1980* covers the period which Flora describes as showing the decline in the short story: “It is no revelation to observe that the years immediately following World War II were for all nations involved at the best a period of transition and at the worst a time of near chaos. The contemporary British short story is the product of a society in often painful flux” (Vannatta ix). Vannatta begins by describing the social and economic context following WWII and its effect on literature. He acknowledges, however, that the effects began before WWII:

Just as the painful uncertainties besetting British society in general had their roots in the end of the Victorian Age, the malaise of post-World War II British literature was not entirely new. Although modernist works are richly interesting, the crowning
achievement of British fiction was the nineteenth-century novel. Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot, Dickens, Thackeray, Hardy, and others composed a group rivaled only by the great French and Russian masters. (xiii)

Vannatta speculates that the novel was more suitable than the short story for Victorian sensibilities because it could unfold in length and intricate detail the nuances and subtleties of life in Victorian England.

Although Vannatta’s assessment may be somewhat subjective, and it may be difficult to define achievements in fiction based on national lines, poetry and drama in Britain also declined in the post-World War II period, according to Vannatta. Instead, he states,

Ironically, Britain’s major contribution to postwar culture has not come in the high culture areas of art, classical music, serious literature, and so on... but in varieties of popular culture. BBC radio has been a trendsetter for decades (and has also provided one outlet for short stories); and British television…. Since the Beatles’ invasion of the early sixties, British rock ‘n’ roll groups have garnered fame and fortune. And in literature, if we grope to determine the true value of ‘serious’ contemporary British fiction, we have no trouble with such popular fiction forms as science fiction, the detective novel, and fantasy where Arthur Clarke, Agatha Christie, J. R. R. Tolkien, E. R. Eddison, C. S. Lewis, Mervyn Peake, and many more reign. (Vannatta xiv)

According to Vannatta, it was Britain’s contribution to popular culture that stood out compared to developments in either the novel or short story form. “Popular fiction forms,” along with music, radio, and other works that do not fall into “high culture” are what stand out. The precedence of the popular forms may be linked to television and the foregrounding of these
forms of entertainment, however, which shows the effect of these communication technologies even on the cultural output of the postwar years.

As nations became more intertwined through trade and cultural exchange, however, tracing genres such as the short story became more problematic than with genres such as the novel that developed during different periods in history. Even isolating stages in the development of the novel to different nations can prove difficult, however. Perhaps by luck Britain had a few prominent figures in popular culture such as The Beatles and its science fiction authors, detective novel authors, or fantasy writers. But because of increased cross-border influence in cultural or creative products between countries in the postwar years, it becomes difficult to isolate the development of the short story or anything, for that matter, to a specific nation because of the lack of national isolation in cultural or creative works. This influence has been lamented by writers such as Margaret Atwood (1982) when assessing the American influence on Canadian culture, and was also shown in efforts by publishers such as McClelland and Stewart in developing the New Canadian Library series in the 1960s. Flora and Vannatta trace the development of the short story within Britain in two distinct time periods, but as acknowledged by both writers, the genre developed elsewhere and was influenced by writers in other parts of the world. Isolating the development of the genre to one particular region or country is even more problematic when discussing the history of the form since 1980, especially when countries such as Canada now tend to de-emphasize a homogeneous national identity; questions such as “What is it to be Canadian?”, rather than being redundant, proliferate on national broadcasts such as the CBC. One would think that a crown corporation such as the CBC that is meant to serve as a reflection of the Canadian national identity is likely to find the constant questioning of the Canadian identity to be problematic as it attempts to represent the Canadian identity. However, the CBC also seems to have employed the story as a way to
represent the facets of the Canadian identity, through its radio broadcasts and podcasts such as on CBC Radio 3 that distribute various “Canuck tales.” They still ask, however, “what is a Canadian story?”

Canada’s position in relation to Britain and the U.S. is unique, particularly in terms of the anxiety of influence by the United States, described earlier. The prelude to CBC Radio 3’s stories centres around the 2010 Winter Olympics, which many have considered the most nationalistic event in Canada so far in the twenty-first century. However, the discussion that introduces the stories focuses on the question of what it is to be Canadian and what a Canadian story is. Some of the stories are “shaped by the geography,” “unique Canadian images and objects” such as the maple leaf, and stories from older Canadians. “I think that a strong Canadian theme is that we feel the natural world very strongly,” one interviewee says. The “Canadian stories” on CBC Radio 3 are autobiographical stories told from the perspective of different types of Canadians, and an attempt seems to have been made to have a regional variety of perspectives, even though stories from the prairie provinces are not represented as well as those from the East coast, the North, and especially Toronto and Montreal. The regional disparity reflected in this podcast may show the way in which the Canadian identity tends to be represented by Canadians and also by people from other countries, since most of the English Canadian television and radio media are headquartered in Toronto.

Each of the audio-recorded stories on the CBC radio site is accompanied by a thumbnail image of the teller, and the set of stories is framed within commentary by the host Lisa Christiansen. Some people, such as Revival Dear, tell a story that someone else has told them. These are audio recordings of various people telling Canadian stories, but the set of stories is enclosed by discussions of what it is to be Canadian, and some would argue that if the Canadian
identity is more regional than national, then the podcast provides an inaccurate reflection of “Canuck stories” by emphasizing some Canadian regions over others. However, being unable to include all facets of the Canadian identity within the set of stories may be part of the larger difficulty of defining local, regional, national, and global identities:

The impact of globalisation, an emerging economic reality since at least the early 1970s, but accelerating after the link-up of financial markets and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc at the end of the 1980s, has drastically altered the meaning of locality. To be local… is a practical impossibility when invisible economic processes routinely interpenetrate everyday social activities. In the integrated world of finance, data and capital, where everything and everyone is in transit, there are no longer any peripheries but neither are there any centres. (March-Russell 146-147)

Perhaps the act of attempting to represent the Canadian identity, and criticisms that the set of stories are centralized or do not represent all facets of the Canadian regional identity, are irrelevant if both centres and margins cease to have the same resonance they had before the globalisation of the past forty years.

Podcasts such as on CBC Radio do show that stories are being created and published, although perhaps in a form that is different than in stories that use text as their primary semiotic mode. David Williams believes that digital literature shapes our perceptions and our sense of community. In “Boundary Breakdowns: Portents of the Digital Revolution in The English Patient,” Williams discusses the effects of digital media on perception and community. Although Williams focuses mostly on how Ondaatje’s The English Patient shows the effects of changing communication technologies on the self (from orality to print and then electronic communications), he makes some important observations on the changes in how people form
communities after print and after the introduction of the digital medium. Williams describes the

decline of nationalism as being related to the development of the digital environment:

To persons acculturated to a hypermedia environment, the boundaries of the nation
are likely to seem more permeable, or less distinct, than they do to persons
acculturated to print. A nationally imagined community—‘naturally’ shared by all
who read the same newspapers and books, watch the same television programs, and
inhabit the same contiguous space—ceases to be common or necessary. Instead,
imagined communities now forming around digital media are more ‘hyperpluralistic
and fragmented—the very antithesis of the modern mass community’ (Diebert 195).
For audiences are fragmented, on the one hand, by so-called ‘narrowcasting’ through
cable and direct satellite broadcasting to the point that mass audiences rarely exist to
share the story of a national community…. apart from PBS and CBC, global media
conglomerates have tended to prefer stories that cross borders and appeal to wider
audiences. (Williams 225-226)

Williams associates nationalism with print media and fragmented communities with digital
media. Although the boundaries may not be so separate, with both media existing alongside
each other, Williams observes the way in which the Web can further problematise national
distinctions or boundaries in literature and, consequently, when describing the contemporary
short story.

Williams addresses other aspects of community formation online that affect national
identities and the formation of a national literature:
In other ways, however, two-way or interactive communication, the staple of Web-based communications, has been forming imagined communities that do not have to include the folk in neighbouring provinces or states, let alone the next-door neighbours. Already, ‘there are more than 10,000 specialized USENET groups on the Internet each of which involves largely unmediated communications among people from around the planet’ ([Diebert] 197-8). (Williams 226)

Published in 2000, Williams’s article is limited to the social networks that were developed at the time in which he was writing, but even in the late 1990s and early 2000s one could see the development of communities structured around aspects different than geographical location, religious, ethnic, or other traditional formations. The ability to classify works of literature to different geographical locations and religious or ethnic communities is affected by this change in the structure of communities:

Communities of shared interest are thus growing up, irrespective of place, ‘on such specialized topics as alt.politics.greens; alt.politics.libertarian; alt.politics.radical-left; alt.fan.dan.quayle; alt.sex.bondage; or alt.tv.simpsons’ ([Diebert] 198). And the community of such groups is being further determined by software ‘‘agents’… that will electronically scan global networked databases each morning to provide individuals with their own exclusive news package tailored to fit their own unique interests’ ([Diebert] 197). In other words, the paradigm of mass communications—in print and in broadcast media—has now broken down, along with other boundaries that have tended to support individual and national identities. The Information Age points to a possible end of the era of nationalism. (Williams 226)
Indeed, perhaps nationalism has been replaced by something else, such as community formation around common interests or other aspects not related to a nation or region, and I elaborate on this aspect in more detail in Chapter 3 when examining the responses of various writers of digital short fiction.

1.3.1 Evolution of the Short Story

Some critics still see the short story as springing to life with its current attributes in the mid-nineteenth century by writers such as Hawthorne, Poe, and Turgenev, and aspects of the publishing history of the short story have made writers such as William Boyd ask, “why has it taken so long for the short story, as a literary form, to evolve?” (Boyd). Boyd, judge of the National Short Story Prize in Britain, ponders this question in his article, “A Short History of the Short Story”:

the cultural history of the published short story is only a few decades longer than that of film. The answer [to why it has taken so long for the short story, as a literary form, to evolve], of course, is to be found in industrial and demographic processes. The short story had always existed as an informal oral tradition, but until the mass middle-class literacy of the 19th century arrived in the west, and the magazine and periodical market was invented to service the new reading public’s desires and preferences, there had been no real publishing forum for a piece of short fiction in the five to 50-page range. It was this new medium that revealed to writers their capacity to write short fiction. (Boyd)

Unlike Kennedy and Gioia, March-Russell, and Reid, Boyd sees the short story as existing within the oral tradition as the tall tale, art tale, or so forth, rather than seeing these oral forms as
predecessors. Boyd sees the short story as not having a publishing outlet until the nineteenth century, however, and it was not until that point that writers were able to make use of the genre:

Readers wanted short stories, and writers suddenly discovered they had a new literary form on their hands. The way the short story effectively sprang into being in its full maturity almost proves my point. There were no faltering first steps, no slow centuries of evolution. The fact that in the early to mid-19th century Hawthorne and Poe and Turgenev were capable of writing classic and timeless short stories virtually from the outset signals that the ability had always been dormant within the human imagination. The short story arrived fully fledged in the middle of the 19th century and by its end, in the shape of Anton Chekhov, had reached its apotheosis. (Boyd)

The printed short story awaited a mass middle-class literacy, which did not come about until the nineteenth century, during which time Boyd sees the short story as springing into life “in its full maturity.” According to Boyd, this showed that the short story is something that is natural to the human imagination that just needed the publishing and distribution apparatus in order to come to life. But Boyd’s assessment includes some assumptions on what the short story is: that the ability to write short stories seemed “natural” or “dormant” because the form had already been circulating as fables, parables, and tales. Forms linked to oral storytelling were in many ways different than the short story, however, as discussed earlier. And if we think of mid to late nineteenth-century stories, or in particular the stories by Chekhov, as being the model of excellence or perfection of the form, it leaves little room for being able to include born-digital short fiction into the canon of what we consider the short story to be as a literary form.

Boyd’s assessments of the short form as being more natural to us than longer forms is perhaps a more effective way to conceive of the short story and its evolution, or what Boyd sees
as its lack of evolution, especially when applied to a digital context. This view does not hold up a particular set of stories as a model and instead focuses on human behaviour and expectations at a particular point in time:

The short form is, conceivably, more natural to us than longer forms: the anecdote that lasts several hours is going to find its listeners drifting away pretty soon. The stories we tell to each other are short, or shortish, and they are shaped. Consider what happens in the telling of a tale: even the most unprofessional anecdotalist will find him or herself having to select some details and omit others, emphasise certain events and ignore the irrelevant or time-consuming, elide, speed up, slow down, describe key characters but not all, in order to head—ideally—towards a denouement of some sort. A whole editing process is engaged, almost unconsciously, of choosing, clarifying, enhancing and inventing. (Boyd)

The writer must always consider the attention span of his or her audience, and the reader’s attentiveness can vary considerably from one medium and context to another. With print, the reader is able to leave the story suspended on the page and come back to it, and the reader can go back over passages that are very detailed or descriptive. With the oral story, stock characters and settings had to be used instead of detailed descriptions. With the print short story came the ability to put forward details of the characters’ thoughts for the reader to peruse and come to his or her own conclusions; with oral storytelling, these conclusions often had to be presented much more directly, as with the moral in Aesop’s fable “The North Wind and the Sun” and even in art tales such as “Godfather Death,” as put into writing by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm. The third-person descriptive details in the stories of writers such as Alice Munro, which are arguably the aspects of Munro’s storytelling that have allowed her to master the form by enabling the reader
to form his or her own conclusions without the need for editorial omniscience, would not have been possible without being able to unfold these details on the printed page:

It was an odd thing to see my mother down at the barn. She did not often come out of the house unless it was to do something – hang out the wash or dig potatoes in the garden. She looked out of place, with her bare lumpy legs, not touched by the sun, her apron still on and damp across the stomach from the supper dishes. Her hair was tied up in a kerchief, wisps of it falling out. She would tie her hair up like this in the morning, saying she did not have time to do it properly, and it would stay tied up all day. It was true, too; she really did not have time…. I was given jobs to do and I would sit at the table peeling peaches that had been soaked in hot water, or cutting up onions, my eyes smarting and streaming. As soon as I was done I ran out of the house, trying to get out of earshot before my mother thought of what she wanted me to do next. I hated the hot dark kitchen in summer, the green blinds and the flypapers, the same old oilcloth table and wavy mirror and bumpy linoleum….It seemed to me that work in the house was endless, dreary, and peculiarly depressing; work done out of doors, and in my father's service, was ritualistically important.

(Munro)

Munro’s narrators, many of whom are childlike or somehow naïve, allow her to create a defamiliarized perspective through an innocent or naïve narrator, creating dramatic irony and perhaps making her observations more effective because readers realize that they are using their own wisdom and life experiences to understand the story. In the above excerpt, Munro comments on the lives of women in the mid-twentieth century, although in a way that reports details from direct observation and without predigested judgement or editorializing, as one
would have with a child’s perspective. This level of detail is not possible in forms that cater to readers with shorter attention spans.

There is a complexity to Munro’s prose and a level of intricate detail that allows the reader to make his or her own deductions. Because of the lack of attention in the audience of the oral story and in the digital reader, this level of detail is difficult to achieve while also holding the reader’s attention. The ability for the character to appear to converse with the reader is also something that was not possible with oral storytelling, unless, of course, the storyteller acted as the character as well:

…. Stokesie’s married, with two babies chalked up on his fuselage already, but as far as I can tell that’s the only difference. He’s twenty-two, and I was nineteen this April.

‘Is it done?’ he asks, the responsible married man finding his voice. I forgot to say he thinks he’s going to be manager some sunny day, maybe in 1990 when it’s called the Great Alexandrov and Petrooshki Tea Company or something. (Updike 20)

This excerpt from John Updike’s “A&P,” a story published in 1961 which largely embodies the anti-establishment sentiment of the 1960s, would not have had the same effect if the voice of its teenage narrator had not been projected through various commentary that he makes, which readers are privy to through the omniscient point of view of the short story.

With born-digital short fiction, we also have unique characteristics enabled by the form. Of course we can still access digitized versions of print short stories in PDF, html, and so forth after they were initially published in print, but these are not the same as born-digital works that have been written for the Web. The need to consider the reader’s attention span is especially
pertinent when it comes to writing for the Web. Workshops at conferences such as “Writing for the Web” at IBM’s CASCON 2006 show that those producing Web content know that different techniques are required for Web writing: some of these techniques include

- Writing effective content in a clear, concise style
- Putting important information near the top of the page
- Writing clear, meaningful ‘microcontent’ such as headers and navigation
- Providing effective hyperlinks
- Judging how your copy looks, not just when you see it on paper, but also when readers glance at it quickly, or skim it
- Using effective keywords and writing good metadata. (IBM)

Although the workshop organizers were referring to non-fiction writing, the expectations for the non-fiction writing on the Web affect expectations for fiction accessed on the Web. If readers or users are accustomed to particular ways of accessing information and reading online, they will likely carry some of these expectations and experiences to reading fiction on the Web:

Unlike readers of books or magazines, people usually consult Web pages with a specific purpose in mind. Web readers are often described as being impatient or having a short attention span. They also tend to look for particular types of information, which means scanning a lot of pages before reaching their target page. And they don't scroll unless the reason to do so is obvious. (IBM)

If people are accustomed to consulting Web pages with a specific purpose in mind and with a short attention span, readers may prefer works of digital short fiction that are organized similarly to information in other pages they have accessed online.
A story on Tor.com can illustrate this difference between digitized-from-print stories and stories that were written for Web publication, although it still contains many attributes typically associated with written-for-print fiction, such as extended description of setting and character, and it can easily be printed by selecting to download it as a PDF. In many ways, however, this story can be seen as a hybrid between born-digital and written-for-print stories. For example, it has some paragraphs that are shorter, as in journalistic writing, which are composed of only one or two sentences, and it also contains some paragraphs with extended visual descriptions or details of the thoughts of the characters:

When Lucian approached with the letter, Adriana had been sitting at the dining table, sipping orange juice from a wine glass and reading a first edition copy of Cheever’s *Falconer*. Lucian felt a flash of guilt as she smiled up at him and accepted the missive. He knew that she’d been happier in the past few months than he’d ever seen her, possibly happier than she’d ever been. He knew the letter would shock and wound her. He knew she’d feel betrayed. Still, he delivered the letter anyway, and watched as comprehension ached through her body. (Swirsky)

The visual details and description of characters’ thoughts in this paragraph are typical of the short story written for print. It is also much longer than what most Web readers can read on the screen (41 pages when printed from the downloadable PDF), and most readers likely printed the story and read it from the printed page. Indeed, when I was only a few paragraphs in, I already wanted to know how long the story was and how much more I would have to read, but the scroll bar on the side was not a clear indication of its length because the comments at the bottom of the page extended the length of the page past the end of the story. Although this story was the runner up in the storySouth Million Writers Award, and many of the comments remark on its
quality, I found myself unable to keep reading on the screen, and I ended up listening to the story through the podcast instead while I was cleaning and cooking.

It is this ability to transmute the story into multiple formats that makes me see it as a hybrid of a born-digital and written-for-print story. It could easily be included in a print anthology, but it includes other aspects that Web readers have come to expect, in particular the ability to change its format by separating its content and display, and the ability to distribute it to others through social networking sites such as Facebook, StumbleUpon, and so forth. It includes an image above the text of the story, and on the left-hand side of the page are options to print, download (in PDF, mobi pocket, html, or epub formats), listen (through one’s built-in audio player or by downloading), share on various social networking sites or by email, or bookmark. One can also choose to jump to the comments about the story at the bottom of the page, if one wants to see what others have said before reading the story. These options included on the left-hand side of the page for this story are the most effective for publishing stories online, and user comments after the story affirm the effectiveness of providing the story in a number of formats. If users prefer not to read on the screen, they can print the story; if users want to read the story using an ebook reader on smaller devices such as Blackberrys, they can download the story in this format; and if readers want to just listen to the story while using the text as an anchor, they can do this as well. On being able to listen to the story, one user named Irene said, “I'm looking forward to listening to it later. I appreciate the time you guys put into the audio versions..it's a nice way to re-discover the stories” (Swirsky). Another user named Starry said, “Ailing, I can't tolerate the screen for long, but I can still enjoy the story in audio!”. Other posts ranged from general comments about how much readers enjoyed the story to comments on the story’s use of description and imagery, such as one by sevra28: “This story was recomended [sic] by Mia. I really loved it. It's so descriptive and I could visualize what was going on. I have never been on
this site before I think I’ll bookmark it.” JFDIV1985 commented, “I found the structure tedious. Flashbacks are tricky.” theoxfordgirl said, “Engaging and well-paced. The PoV of an abuse survivor very sensitively handled, among other things I greatly enjoyed.” The story employs the Web’s ability to quickly distribute stories in multiple formats catered for different types of users, and this is something that the users responded to in a positive way.

Because the story is available both in its text and audio formats, it is also perhaps more similar to a performance rather than the short story anthologized in a print anthology. Here we have both the inert, archived text that is left behind after a performance—similar to what we have with plays—and at least the audio aspect of the performance if not the other sensory aspects of the performance of the story (visual, tactile, kinaesthetic, and so forth). With the audio reading of the story, we have the reader’s emphasis and intonation, especially when dialogue is being read, and the pace speeds up at moments when the action of the story speeds up. Without the performance of the story, one could argue that we have been dealing with short story corpses. With “Eros, Philia, Agape,” readers could read the story aloud, or have someone else read it for them, but there was no option to switch to this format in the published version of a print anthologized story. To completely move the story to something akin to the performance involved in a play, however, the publishers would have had to include a video of the author reading the story or perhaps show the story being acted out, and have the reader present during the live performance. There are, however, stories being distributed in digital format that include these performative aspects, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

The audio text of Swirsky’s story is also slightly different, in ways that would not even be noticeable without following the print version of the story alongside the audio, due to barely perceptible misreadings. The text reads, “Lucian stood at the base of the driveway and stared up
at the house. Its stark orange and brown walls blazed against a cloudless sky. Rocks and desert plants tumbled down the meticulously landscaped yard, imitating natural scrub,” but the audio reading leaves out “stark orange and brown walls blazed against a cloudless sky. Rocks and desert plants tumbled down the”—an almost imperceptible change that left out details that would likely be lost on the listener but not on the reader of the text.

There are a few other things to note about this story, which will be returned to in Chapter 2 when discussing digital short fiction in more detail. Its theme is similar to other common themes of the contemporary short story, especially online fiction, by being about an abuse survivor, homosexuality, loss, and visual detail and trendy or cliché things and places (“slick brown hair and shiny teeth”; “gelato”, “chardonnay”; “Mazatlan”; androids).

In sum, according to Boyd, shorter forms are more “natural” because they reflect the reader’s attention span. But with print came the ability to keep a story suspended, momentarily, while the reader moved on to other activities, thereby making every reading, regardless of the length of the text, a reading of a chunk or smaller section of a larger story. “Eros, Philia, Agape” is an example of this. Reading on the Web may not offer this same ability to leave a story suspended because readers would have to remember where they were within a text and return to the particular spot while avoiding other distractions that may be present within the medium, such as email, social networking sites, and other Web pages. Works of born-digital short fiction, such as those from the Dreaming Methods site discussed in Chapter 2, may also be difficult to return to mid-point (although the shortness of these stories makes them fairly easy to read in one sitting). In order to finish “Eros, Philia, Agape,” I had to listen to it while performing other tasks: I could not keep engaged with it on the screen, and I was not interested in printing it. I do
not think this has to do with lack of interest in the subject of the story, but rather my lack of attention and focus when reading on the screen.

Reading on the Web produces the need for shorter or more modular texts, but this may be a product of our current technological developments. New digital reading devices, such as the Kindle, are being released or improved upon every year, and more people are becoming accustomed to using these devices or e-book reader interfaces within one’s computer. We can at least say that at this point in the development of e-reading devices, some writers have been asked to shorten their stories for digital publication. Participant N, discussed within Chapter 3, who has published in both print and online magazines, was asked by the editor of an online magazine to shorten the story, whereas this writer was not given the same request by the editors of print magazines. The qualities of shortness or modularity, easy navigability, visual appearance, metadata for ease of searchability or greater likelihood to be in search results, and conformity to other attributes of Web documents in general, become important considerations also in the publication of digital fiction.

As discussed further in Chapter 2, the overall themes of contemporary literature seem to have changed. Assessments such as Boyd’s that see the short story as staying the same since the mid-nineteenth century therefore limit the consideration of forms such as the born-digital short story that still contain many aspects of the nineteenth-century short story but with elements that allow them to function well in the digital medium and to attract the generation of readers who are digital natives. As will also be discussed in Chapter 2, perhaps in some ways the short story is not the place to ruminate the effects of technologies on conceptions of the self and the self-centredness of the contemporary Western world, since the contemporary short story is itself part of this moment and is used to express this focus on the self or individual while also not being
conscious of this focus. A sermon by Richard Chartres, Lord Bishop of London, delivered at the marriage of William Windsor and Catherine Middleton (an event that stands out for 2011), like many sermons, emphasizes a particular aspect of human behaviour and encourages collective introspection. Lord Chartres’ sermon is noteworthy here because he comments on self-centredness in our society in a way that perhaps written fictional forms can no longer do because, in their immediacy from germination to posting or publication, they lack the distance and objectivity that written forms were afforded in the past:

In marriage, we are seeking to bring one another into fuller life. It is, of course, very hard to ween ourselves away from self-centeredness, and people can dream of doing such a thing…. by making this new relationship, you’ve aligned yourselves with what we believe is the way in which life is spiritually evolving, and which will lead to a creative future for the human race. We stand looking forward to a century which is full of promise and full of peril. Human beings are confronting the question of how to use wisely the power that has been given to us through the discoveries of the last century. We shall not be converted to the promise of the future by more knowledge, but rather by an increase of loving wisdom and reverence for life, for the earth, and for one another. (“The Royal Wedding”).

One could argue that the shift to character delineation in many works of contemporary literature represents a self-centredness that is emblematic of the twentieth century, while it is also something that one hopes our future generations will move away from. Our current forms of communication, however, encourage this self-centredness.
1.4 The Short Story Collection and the Short Story Cycle

Short story collections in which an individual story can also be read as part of the whole collection, like a novel, emphasize the ways in which short stories and longer texts such as novels are similar. This emphasis is different than what is commonly emphasized when theorists compare the two forms, however. Novels are often organized into smaller chunks or chapters, or around individual events within an overall whole, which might each focus on a particular aspect in the development of the story. The main difference with the novel, however, is that the reader may not feel a sense of closure or resolution until the entire text is finished, as Lohafer identifies in *Reading for Storyness* (2003) when referring to feelings of closure in the short story. When considering longer works such as novels and the way in which they are also organized more modularly, it is important to consider the short story collection or the short story cycle, and anthologized versions of the short story.

March-Russell also discusses the anthology and the short story cycle. According to Russell, our current anthology “has its roots in the annual gift-books which were published during the nineteenth century” (53). Although March-Russell claims that these gift books did not have a large effect on the aesthetics of the short story, they did introduce “the idea of an edited anthology, in which tales were included according to criteria other than a miscellaneous arrangement” (54). They were also “compendiums of recently published fiction” in a form that lent the stories more permanence than newspaper and periodical publications (54). There are also single-author collections, which “tend to sell or to be borrowed from public libraries if the writer’s name is already familiar, usually if s/he is a popular novelist” (53). These edited collections add additional considerations to the short story:
Edited collections presuppose issues surrounding the selection of writers and texts, the extent to which anthologies set the agenda for the making of literary canons, and the degree to which anthologies publicise the work of individual writers, or groups of writers, within the marketplace. Then, there is also an aesthetic concern: the extent to which reading several short stories together violates Poe’s contention that a short story is to be read as a single and self-sufficient unit. (March-Russell 53)

When short stories become part of a collection, the form of the collection can also change the content of the story by emphasizing certain motifs or themes. Writers whose political or personal views are at odds with those at the centres of power, for example, may not be included in edited collections, along with writers whose stories do not fall into a trendy or popular theme, and “anthologies that publish new writing do so with clear commercial and aesthetic aims; to play upon current trends in publishing or to reinvigorate the tradition of the short story” (54).

Another type of collection is the short story cycle, which authors such as James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway used as a method of “capturing the many points of view that constitute an objective reality without either dissolving the text altogether or subsuming these multiple perspectives within the homogenising tendency of the realist novel” (March-Russell 103). The interlinked short story, otherwise known as the cycle, sequence, or composite novel, afforded them this ability (103). This form has blurred the boundary between the short story collection and the novel, as shown in the definition of the the short story cycle by critics Forrest Ingram and Susan Garland Mann:

[It is] either a pre-conceived set of tales, such as Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), a series of tales that expands in order to elaborate a theme discovered in the course of writing, for example William Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished* (1938), or separate tales that are
reassembled so as to form a recognisable pattern, for instance John Updike’s *Olinger Stories* (1964). The stories may be united through the use of a recurring character…, a location or community…, or a dominant motif such as the theme of motherhood. (March-Russell 103)

Others, such as Robert Luscher and J. Gerald Kennedy, have said that the short story cycle should instead be regarded as a sequence, in which themes and motifs progressively develop, so that while the stories can be read both individually and as part of a whole, the act of reading becomes the accumulated perception of successive orderings and repeated patterns. This accumulative process underlines Luscher’s ideal of what he describes as ‘an open book’. Here, the reader is invited ‘to construct a network of associations that binds the stories together and lends them cumulative thematic impact (in Lohafer and Clary 1989: 149). (March-Russell 103).

In other words, although the stories are connected in that they follow a central character or particular themes and motifs, their connections and associations require more work to piece together by the reader than when reading a novel. Critics Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris have used the term “‘composite novel’ in which an extended narrative is composed not only from shorter prose sections but also other genres such as poetry and drama” (March-Russell 105). This would require even more connections to be made on the part of the reader. In any case, these forms show how the overall collection, anthology, or material in which a story is published, or its frame and format, impact the individual story, even as the story can both be read as part of the larger whole and on its own.
Alice Munro’s short story collection *Who Do You Think You Are?* serves as a good example of how stories can function in a collection and how their meaning can change when they are taken out of other publication contexts such as magazines. Two stories in the collection, for example, are considered “less satisfactory than the other stories,” or cause the collection to be “weak in the middle” (Martin 101), and Walter Rintoul Martin cites the revision of the stories from their original magazine publication to fit into a collection as the reason for this weakening of the stories:

It seems that there were three stages. In the first, *Who Do You Think You Are?* was to contain a dozen stories, eight about Rose [the main character of the collection] … and four about Janet…. Dissatisfied with the disproportion, Alice Munro devised a second plan which evened the score, giving six stories to Rose and six to Janet; she did this by transferring ‘Mischief’ and ‘Providence’ from Rose to Janet. Finally, at the last minute, dissatisfied with the division itself, resolving that the book must contain only Rose stories, she removed three…, which would appear later in *The Moons of Jupiter*, transferred ‘Mischief,’ ‘Providence,’ and probably ‘Who Do You Think You Are?’ from Janet to Rose, and added ‘Simon’s Luck,’ another Rose story, thus reducing the total in *Who Do You Think You Are?* from twelve to ten. This provides a possible reason why, in ‘Mischief’ and perhaps ‘Providence,’ which were moved from Rose to Janet and then back again to Rose, there is some uncertainty of purpose. (Martin 101)
The above analysis shows how the content of a story changes when it is adapted to fit a particular form: in this case, the form is the short story collection. Although Martin argues that the two stories “Mischief” and “Providence” make the middle of the collection appear weak, which he attributes to the revisions done by the author in which Munro changed the characters of the stories at the last minute, the revision may also have strengthened the main themes of the collection *Who Do You Think You Are?* precisely because the persona of the stories’ main character may appear to be inconsistent to the reader. In other words, Munro may have realised that this inconsistency of character in the collection would help to demonstrate the inconsistency of the main character’s identity at that point in Rose’s life, thereby furthering within the overall collection the development of Munro’s theme of identity and false appearances.

Conversely, Martin also notes the lack of “faltering” in purpose in “Royal Beatings,” the first story in Munro’s *Who Do You Think You Are?*, from its original publication in *The New Yorker* before it was published as part of the collection. He states, “the revision of the story as it appeared in *The New Yorker* (14 March 1977) entailed changing the protagonist’s name from Nadine to make it a Rose story” (Martin 101). Martin did not notice any faltering in purpose within the first story adapted from its original magazine publication and inclusion into the collection, even though its inclusion also necessitated a change in the protagonist’s name. Perhaps it was only the name, rather than the character’s traits, that needed to be changed in order to incorporate it into the collection, which helped to keep a consistency within the stories. “Royal Beatings” is also the first story within the collection, and because it acts as an exposition

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9 One can also see, for example, the individual short stories in Margaret Laurence’s collection *A Bird in the House* (1970), which function individually and also have a different meaning as a collection.
from its placement, any stories that followed this opening story would be expected to be connected to it.

Other short story collections such as Neil Bissoondath’s *Digging Up the Mountains* connect the stories along a common theme rather than a common central character and therefore may require more work by the reader to create the associations between the stories. However, this also allows the author more freedom to cover different perspectives without having them connect to a main character’s life. All of the stories in Bissoondath’s collection follow the experiences of immigrants, and the opening title story, “Digging Up the Mountains,” introduces the themes of uprootedness, disillusionment, violence, and the search for identity that connect all the other stories. By not limiting the perspective to one character as Munro does within *Who Do You Think You Are?*, however, Bissoondath is able to portray the multifaceted Canadian identity that is often a shifting compilation of different origins and experiences.

Bissoondath’s characters are mostly immigrants from Trinidad who have moved to Canada, which reflects Bissoondath’s own experience as he also moved from Trinidad to Toronto in 1973; he also, however, includes characters from other countries such as Japan. Some of his characters settle in Europe or Latin America rather than Canada, and some stories are written from a female’s perspective. Most of the stories in the collection use third-person point of view, but some, such as “The Cage,” which is about a Japanese girl who immigrates to Toronto to escape a culture and family that she sees as confining her but to which she ultimately returns, are written in first-person point of view. The use of first person point of view is perhaps to emphasize her lack of identity, as we never learn her name. The reader, upon approaching this story after reading the first few stories in the collection that are written from the perspective of characters who are from Trinidad, has to piece together who this character is through details such
as “Our family name is well known in Yokohama” and “At the Shinto shrine in the backyard my father mumbles the names of his ancestors” (37). Although we never learn the narrator’s name, the reader eventually learns that she is female. Other stories in the collection, when read with the others, force the reader to feel the disorientation or questioning of identity that is often the immigrant experience, by making it unclear where each story is set and who the narrator is until further along in the story. In this way, each story gains a new meaning and impact when included as part of the collection, and if removed from that context, the stories would not achieve the same effect.

Many of Bissoondath’s stories have been anthologized in Canadian fiction textbooks, and doing so often removes the additional layers of meaning that an author can create by linking stories within his or her own collection. As seen in Chapter 2, this same connection-making on the part of the reader can also exist within works of digital short fiction, and when the works are removed from their publication context, their meanings can also change.

1.5 Classifying Genres, Literature, and Media

Considering what a short story is and tracing its history, as in the preceding sections, is to also attempt to understand it as a genre. However, to classify a text within a particular genre, and to consider the short story as a genre, can be problematic. In *Kinds of Literature*, Alastair Fowler discusses the function of genre in literature. In considering literature as a genre, and how works are subdivided into different genres, he states,

> Every genre, too, has multiple distinguishing traits, which however are not all shared by each exemplar. If literature is a genre, the idea of defining it is misconceived. For… the character of genres is that they change. Only variations or modifications of convention have literary significance. (Fowler 18)
Defining what is literature, and dividing literature into different genres, is problematic because it is to identify a work in a way which is stable rather than in flux. Fowler asserts that he is not saying that literature cannot be identified, but rather that historical variation has to be taken into account when theorising about what literature is (Fowler 18). What a society defines as literature may in fact be more of a reflection of the society at that time rather than a clear indication of what literature is (Fowler 18). When it comes to individual works of literature, “each work of literature belongs to at least one genre” or at least has “a significant genric element,” but “their relation to the genres they embody is not one of passive membership but of active modulation” (Fowler 20). In other words, works cannot be categorized into genres such as the short story without also influencing that genre and being influenced by the genre.

Defining what is literature in general can also be difficult, especially when trying to categorize digital texts. As Terry Eagleton noted in “What is Literature” in his introduction to *Literary Theory*, the notion of “literature” has changed depending on the time period and context of the definition:

There have been various attempts to define literature. You can define it, for example, as ‘imaginative’ writing in the sense of fiction—writing which is not literally true. But even the briefest reflection on what people commonly include under the heading of literature suggests that this will not do. Seventeenth-century English literature includes Shakespeare, Webster, Marvell and Milton; but it also stretches to the essays of Francis Bacon, the sermons of John Donne, Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography and whatever it was that Sir Thomas Brown wrote…. Nineteenth-century English literature usually includes Lamb (though not Bentham), Macaulay (but not Marx), Mill (but not Darwin or Herbert Spencer). (Eagleton 1)
Eagleton in this passage shows the complexity in defining literature, since such definitions often reflect the political and cultural context of a period. If we are to define literature by its use—if it is to serve as an example of good use of language and form, or as a vehicle for political messages—our present-day conception of literature also reflects its current purpose and functionality, although this conception is not entirely up to date because it does not consider the use of literature in social media.

Contemporary short stories, whether published in print, digital, audio, or other formats, modulate the short story genre and what we consider to be literature, and they also reflect the institutions and society. One of the first contemporary short stories that I came across in researching stories for this thesis was called “Secondhand Body.” Although the story was easily available through the *Whiskey Island Magazine* when I first accessed it in 2008, by 2010 the magazine had changed into a different format for its back issues, which made the content not as accessible as it had been when the magazine was only published online. Then in mid-2011, I searched online for the story again, and found it at issu.com, a digital publishing platform that displays the story as page-turn PDFs so that it looks like it would in the print magazine format. The story is quite short—taking up one page when printed from the online publication—and its paragraphs are also very short, some of which are only one sentence long. Examining this story made me wonder whether short story writers who submitted to online publications were asked by editors to alter the format or content of their stories, by shortening the story, changing its paragraphs, or somehow writing in a different style. The shortness of the story and the shortness of its paragraphs made it appear more like a newspaper article, and its lyrical first-person narration appeared similar to editorials or short poems. Its theme, about feeling disconnected from one’s body or current self, is also contingent with some other works of contemporary fiction that I had found. I wondered how this story compared with other short stories being
published digitally, and how this story compared with short stories published during different publication periods: from the first short stories being circulated in the nineteenth century to those published in various magazines and periodicals in the early twentieth century, to stories now being published in print or digital formats (or both), which are often accompanied by audio or other multimedia formats. I wondered if online publication promoted a journalistic style of writing, or if a change in style was also visible in other media besides digital media, such as in print. I wondered if there was a noticeable change in the content, themes, style, and format of contemporary short stories in general, and if this change extended to printed communication such as newspapers and monographs. If there is a change, I wondered if it was due to online publication or other factors: other media such as television and radio and their effects on reading habits over the past number of years, or changing societal structures and the way people form communities.

In October 2010, the change in the format of the print Globe and Mail newspaper showed the effects of digital media on reading materials in general, including print newspapers. The changes included “a smaller overall size, colour featured on every page, more graphics, slightly glossy paper stock and an increased emphasis on certain sections, including the lifestyle areas” (CBC News). Only as an aside, the CBC added that “The Globe website has also been given a refreshed look” (CBC News): in other words, the change to the website was not considered to be as important since websites undergo redesign much more regularly than print versions of serials. The print redesign was created as a “game changer,” according to publisher Phillip Crawley, to address the needs of the current generation of readers:

People who grew up reading a physical paper every day are aging and many have become comfortable with getting news in other ways — on their BlackBerrys and
iPads, for instance. Meanwhile, younger readers, already more inclined to search the
web for information, feel little attachment to print products. As a result, advertising
revenues for print newspapers have dropped considerably in recent years. (CBC
News)

If changes are visible in the needs of readers of both print and digital non-fiction, one can
hypothesize that there would be similar changes when it comes to reading works of fiction.

In his article “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”, Nicholas Carr also addresses some of these
changes in reading habits by drawing on his own experiences and those of people he knows. He
states,

I’m not thinking the way I used to think. I can feel it most strongly when I’m reading.
Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get
captured in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I’d spend hours strolling
through long stretches of prose. That’s rarely the case anymore. Now my
concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety, lose the
thread, begin looking for something else to do. I feel as if I’m always dragging my
wayward brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has
become a struggle. (Carr)

Although the Internet and quick availability of information was lauded as something that would
extend our mental capabilities (Bush, 1945), Carr asserts that the way in which we access
information has negatively changed how we think: many people can no longer immerse
themselves in lengthy texts because they have become accustomed to reading shorter snippets of
information.
When writing about the transition from oral to chirographic cultures, Walter Ong also noted in “Writing Restructures Consciousness” in Orality and Literacy (1982) that communication media affect thought: “Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness” (78). One only has to teach a first-year English survey course to see the preference of many younger readers for shorter, digital texts rather than longer, print texts. In this context, one would think that short stories would proliferate as the fiction of choice for the current generation of readers; however, if short fiction is circulated by these readers, it is often through social networks such as Facebook or sites such as YouTube and with text accompanied by audio, image, video, and other visual media.

One interesting example of the multimedia story being distributed through social networks such as Facebook is “The Digital Story of the Nativity.” It is published on YouTube by a user called excentricPT, who describes the video as “How social media, web and mobile tell the story of the Nativity. Christmas story told through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google, Wikipedia, Google Maps, GMail, Foursquare, Amazon... Times change, the feeling remains the same” (excentricPT). As the description indicates, the YouTube video tells the nativity story, a story with which most people in Western culture are familiar and which makes the content of this story perhaps more like an oral tale than most works of print short fiction. The story begins by showing someone (in the role of the narrator) typing in the words “story of the nativity” into a Google search and then clicking on a Google maps link to Nazareth. The video then shows a cellphone with an image of Mary and a message from Archangel Gabriel that says, “Mary, you’re going to give birth to the Son of God.” The narrator types *holy spirit* into Wikipedia, and the resulting Wikipedia page is shown. The story continues with a screenshot of
Holy_mary@gmail.com signing in to her account and sending an email to joseph.carpenter07@gmail.com with the subject “Annunciation” and message “Joseph, we need to talk. I am going to be pregnant. Xoxo. reply ASAP.” The user then books a flight from Nazareth to Bethlehem and chooses a donkey as an option under the list of rental vehicles. The video moves to Joseph’s Twitter page and shows him entering the message, “Going to Bethlehem with Mary for the census.” A cellphone is shown with the foursquare application and a map that shows only one vacancy. The user clicks on the check-in button, and we see Joseph’s status being updated to say that he is nervous. The video also shows a status update that Joseph bought a cow and a donkey in Farmville, a Facebook game application. Joseph then creates an event in Facebook to announce the birth, and the three wisemen confirm their attendance. The rest of the video continues in a similar way, with the three wisemen using Google mail to email each other to ask what to get the baby, with the user going to Amazon.com at one point to buy frankincense, gold, or myrrh, and then uploading a YouTube video of the nativity. In the background throughout the video, the song “Jingle Bells” is playing, and the entire video is just under three minutes.

This is just one example of a story that is commonly passed around through social networks on the Internet. It retells a story that most people would already be familiar with, so it does not require an exposition as the context and details are already known to the reader. The story is also humorous because it tells a familiar story in a unique way using social networking platforms that people are familiar with. The story’s humour may also be why people circulate it to each other through these social networks. In this way, the types of stories being circulated through social networking sites may be similar to the types of vignettes that would be circulated orally: certain stories may be circulated because they fulfill a particular purpose, such as to make the audience laugh. These purposes may be different than stories circulated in print because, like
the oral tale, in order to hold the reader’s attention, “The Digital Story of the Nativity” had to be brief and its purpose very straightforward: to create humour. In other publication venues, a story may appear in a newspaper because it is short and humourous or entertaining; a story may appear in a magazine such as *The New Yorker* because it is entertaining but perhaps also insightful, well-written, or stylistically different; and a story may appear in an academic anthology because it somehow represents a moment in the development of the genre or epitomises the aspects of a quality short story. Different media and different publications embrace stories based on different criteria, and these criteria affect the development of the form.

In *Reading for Storyness* Susan Lohafer asserts that there is no need to save the short story from other forms, although her discussion within the chapter “A Short Story and Its Nonfiction Counterpart” focuses on whether the short story as a genre would be threatened by creative nonfiction. She states,

> The short story does not need to be ‘saved’ from its nonfiction imitators. Genre distinctions need not be battle lines. However, they are more than old scratches in the sand. I believe that the difference between short, highly crafted fictional and nonfictional narratives is more than an accident of venue, or a literary straitjacket, or a kind of truth value. It derives from the way we process information at the most elementary level. Two of the most basic cognitive processes are counting and chunking. Recounting and storying. The first is the basis of nonfiction, the second of fiction. In nonfiction, we save what we know. In fiction, we model how we know. In our cognitive infancy, we learn the scenario of the flames and the flesh. Stories save *us*, not the other way around. (Lohafer 165)
New developments such as creative nonfiction, according to Lohafer—and by extension digital literature, much of which is autobiographical or semiautobiographical—do not threaten the genre of the short story. Rather, different developments such as creative nonfiction or digital literature reflect aspects of how we process information, and genre distinctions—such as between short, creative non-fiction and short, creative fiction—are relevant, yet they need not be “battle lines.”

Most of Lohafer’s focus in *Reading for Storyness* is on analyzing the works of various short story writers by using preclosure: having readers identify points within the stories where they could possibly end or where the stories within the stories are concluded. She avoids “the dominant critical discourses of the day” such as “feminist or Marxist/materialist or psycholinguistic or other existing theories” in order to “offer instead a new paradigm, one that is indigenous to the short story and useful to readers of most critical persuasions” (Lohafer 5). She is able to bring to light new observations about the stories of authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Kate Chopin, Julio Cortazar, Katherine Mansfield, Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, and other authors by having readers identify these preclosure points, something she sees as “indigenous” to the short story because its “manageability” offers preclosure points that can be identified within the story. Lohafer’s work, in this way, moves beyond the early work within the field of short fiction studies, including work that attempted to define the short story along national lines:

For a time, we were concerned with definitions and taxonomies. What is a short story? What are its markers? Following in Poe’s footsteps, we thought the imminence of closure was the signature feature of the short story genre. Papers on ‘how stories end’ are still on the programs of short story conferences.
However, for many people now, structural analysis and genre classification no longer matter. Whatever a story *is*, however it *behaves*, the important thing is what it *reveals*. It’s a magnifying glass for examining the techniques of impressionism, say, or the assumptions of postmodernism, or the social data caught in its prism.

Famously associated with ‘submerged populations’ and the ‘lonely voice’ of the individual, the short story is a window on marginalized identities. Scholars have crowded round. The story is viewed as a cultural diorama. (Lohafer 1-2).

Lohafer’s focus on preclosure points allows her to examine what the story reveals rather than what the story is or how it behaves. And similar to other theorists such as March-Russell and Luckhurst, Lohafer identifies the association of the short story with marginalized or submerged populations. After focusing on preclosure points in Raymond Carver’s “Cathedral,” Lohafer states that “there are ancient tales of conquest and discovery, but it is the achievement of the ‘modern’ short story to dignify the smallest of increments in perception and understanding” (Lohafer 112). These small increments of perception were able to be identified and analyzed within the story by finding preclosure points. This focus was also a shift away from the work that she and others conducted in the 1970s that “concentrated on the kinship between the lyric poem and the short story, which is closer than the tie between story and novel” (Lohafer 2). In other words, Lohafer and other critics were moving beyond comparisons of the short story with other forms such as the lyric poem or the novel and to “an exploration of the idea of genre itself” (Lohafer 3), which she elaborates in her coedited collection *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads* (1989). As noted earlier, however, most introductions to the short story, as in Kennedy and Gioia, still compare the short story to the lyric poem or the novel. Short story theorists such as Lohafer show that the field has moved beyond attempts to define and categorize the short story.
or compare it with other forms such as poetry or novels; however, most scholars not specializing in the short story still offer these comparisons.

In addition, much of Lohafer’s work is still exploring the best way to theorise the short story at this time, since she applies interdisciplinary techniques from fields such as cognitive science and psychoanalysis in order to theorise the short story in a way that is indigenous to the form. However, one could argue that borrowing techniques from cognitive science may not be analysing short stories in a way that is natural to the form: these same techniques could be applied to all works of literature and may not be unique to the short story. Steven Jones notes that “Interdisciplinary work is sometimes what happens on the way to change within a single discipline” (8). March-Russell, however, sees this shift in theoretical focus as part of the field’s way of justifying its existence:

In the movement away from the poetics of literary criticism towards an empirical form of data analysis, American short story theory was attempting to justify itself as part of an academy increasingly under attack from central government and widely seen as divorced from the rest of society. The rise of cognitive psychology within short story criticism, in which the equally ‘technical language’ of aesthetics is displaced for a quantifiable and mathematically recognisable product, has to be seen within the context of universities seeking to legitimate their relevancy to contemporary society. (85)

In other words, the move to interdisciplinary, empirical, or scientific methods in the study of literature has been criticized by some as being linked to our economic and socio-political moment in time. But on the other hand, using interdisciplinary techniques may be part of the intermediary between genre categories or definitions and whatever we are moving toward:
“Theories of genre can be confining, but they can also be liberating, if genre is conceived as an activity of story making in which the reader can participate. I redrew this story, but with the help of four other hands—Jill’s, Pete’s, Jim’s, and Fran’s—but it was Carver’s edifice we were tracing. His hand guided ours” (Lohafer 112). By conceiving of genre as an act of “story making,” Lohafer has used the concept of interpretive communities and built on the work of theorists such as Stanley Fish in order to reconceptualize not just the genre of the short story but also the notion of all genres. By having readers identify preclosure points within short stories, Lohafer draws on Fish’s “interpretive communities”:

Fish claims… that what determines an interpretation’s validity is not the identity of the reader or the norms of aesthetic theory but the ideals and methods of the reader’s ‘interpretive community,’ the group of scholars who accept and apply a common strategy and evaluate performances of it (Is There 171). New Critics, authorial humanists, phenomenologists, structuralists, Derrideans, feminists, and Marxists break into diverse communities whose discourse institutions disseminate, students master, scholars judge, and journals and publishing houses distribute. To reject the absolute ground of an author’s intention or a text’s structure is not to consider any interpretation as good as any other or to lapse into a vacuous relativism, as critics say; rather, since the community of similar interpreters judges an interpretation, some interpretations are better or worse than others, at least for that community. (Goldstein)

As noted earlier by Fowler, genres are constructed by the culture and its readers, and if genre categories are allowed to be written by readers, rather than considered fixed categories,
incorporating digital short fiction into our discussions of the short story becomes less problematic.

Janice Giltrow and Dieter Stein have also contemplated genre categories in their edited collection *Genres in the Internet*, although they focus on blogs, professional education genres, and even genres of literary criticism rather than the short story. Many of their observations can be applied to the study of short fiction, however, especially as it is affected by online publication and distribution. According to Giltrow and Stein,

In its newness, its rather sudden and compelling appearance in the life of language, CMC [Computer-Mediated Communication] is peculiarly inviting to discussions of genre. It both overturns and reinstates those aggregations of discourse features which indicate function; it both defies and confirms the familiarity which sparks recognition of discourse types. CMC is, in short, an ideal field for the testing, comparing, and revising of concepts of genre—an ideal arena to initiate cross-disciplinary discussions of genre. (1)

Although discussions of genre are not new, new media highlight issues of genre distinctions “with new full force” (Giltrow & Stein 1). Discussing genres of the Internet also becomes problematic because some genres may seem new when in fact they may be “an old one in a new medial garb” (2).

Giltrow and Stein also recognize that considerations of context become important when discussing genres on the Internet:

Copying, pasting and hyper-linking, the CMC ‘text’ with its new ‘fluidity’ (Nentwich 2003) trespasses its own borders, creating vectors on which genres can travel into one
another’s territories. In turn, the notion of ‘context’ can range from context defined by the narrowest co-presence heuristics operative in focused interaction to context defined by wider historical measures or by the broadest critical-theoretical analyses.

(2)

Context changes when it comes to genres on the Internet. With the short story, its community of readers and writers is now connected to the medium in which the story is published, and the text itself also links to other genres outside its own “borders.” Giltrow and Stein focus on mainly nonfiction genres on the Internet, in which advertising and other genres may overlap, but this overlapping is also present within fictional genres on the Internet. When borders of form and function appear to be crossed, the reader can usually pick up on this by conventions associated with different genres: “Insofar as language users develop this sensitivity to form, form and function may be characterised as ‘fused’—a condition going beyond ‘interlockedness’…. Over time language users come to both anticipate agglomerations of form in functional contexts and also produce them in response to these mutual expectations” (3). In other words, this fusion of form and function develops from particular rules of cooperation developing over time.

Characteristics associated with particular genres do not just spring into life fully formed, just as Adrian Johns (1998) argues that certain attributes of “print culture” did not come into existence fully formed without undergoing a period of development.

With a reconceptualization of the notion of all genres, there is possibility for the development of all forms and not just the short story. Wai Chee Dimock, in “Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge,” connects Bolter and Grusin’s (1999) notion of remediation to the theory of genres:
As with media, so too with genres. None does its work in isolation, and none without a continuous stream of input from other genres…. Extending the concept of remediation, then, we might want to coin a somewhat awkward term, a gerund, *regenreing*, to highlight the activity here as cumulative reuse, an alluvial process, sedimentary as well as migratory. (Dimock 1380)

As an example of “regenreing,” one can look at John Barber’s speculation on the future of e-books in the March 17, 2011 issue of *The Globe and Mail*. He states,

> Everybody knows that what we call an e-book today will evolve into something quite different as text sheds its Gutenberg-era shackles, but nobody knows what that is or what to call it. Neither do the Goggles, the Vancouver duo of Mike Simons and Paul Shoebridge (creative directors at Adbusters magazine), whose recent hybridized whatzit, Welcome to Pine Point, is currently playing on NFB.ca. It's not a website, it's not an interactive documentary and it's not a ‘vook’ (video-book hybrid), according to its creators. Instead, they have taken to calling the production, which explores memory through the story of a small mining town erased from the map, a ‘liquid book.’ It's a format that allows ‘exploration within the narrative,’ according to Mr. Simons, "but channelled exploration.” (Barber A.7)

Barber calls this detachment from print-based forms “Liquid Books,” one of the seven trends he says should be watched for within the near future and which will ultimately direct the future for publishers. Other trends he identifies, which I also note in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, are “The Textual Mix Tape,” or the development of technologies such as Bookriff that allow customers to repackage, repurpose, resell, and mash up texts, something akin to iTunes for text; “Small Presses Speak Up,” or the development of both self-publishing through small presses and the
conversion to audio books of literary fiction from independent publishers; “Slow Publishing,” which refers to the way in which print publishing on a small scale may see a reemphasis as a craft; “Charge More, Sell More,” or the experience of some authors which showed that selling small runs of a book was more profitable than giving it away for free;\(^\text{10}\) “A Lender Be,” or the fight by libraries and others to remove restrictions on the distribution or lending of digital copies of books; and, even more pertinent to my focus, “The Short Story Revival,” which Barber describes as the prediction of the resurgence of the short story facilitated by experiments in the digital medium (A.7):

No literary phenomenon is more often predicted - nor persistently elusive - than the ‘short story revival.’ But hopes for short fiction have reached a new pitch with the dawn of the e-book, promoting a number of adventurous online experiments. One of the most successful is Joyland, a ‘hub for short fiction’ created by Emily Schultz and Brian Joseph Davis of Toronto. Recently Joyland partnered with Toronto's ECW Press to create and market e-book-only story collections - an experiment publisher David Caron hopes will ultimately decide the question of whether or not short fiction has an audience in the 21st century. (A.7)

The short story has experienced a resurgence in the digital world, but not in the same form in which it has been defined through print media. Short fiction definitely has an audience in the twenty-first century, and claims that it does not may be efforts by publishers to save the print short story, similar to the site “Save the Short Story,” as mentioned in Chapter 3. What is

\(^{10}\) This is contrary to what Barber calls the “Internet myth” that giving books away for free on the Internet increases sales of print copies.
difficult to predict is where that audience will be accessing its short stories and what those short stories will look like.

Joyland has made its stories available via its Web site and also through e-book collections of these stories, which are published on its site under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 Unported License. This license allows readers (or licensees) to copy, distribute and transmit the work under the conditions that they must “attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work)”; “may not use this work for commercial purposes”; and “may not alter, transform, or build upon this work” (Creative Commons). Although organizations such as the Center for Digital Storytelling have already made their works available through their Web sites, because these stories are streamed audio and text, it would be difficult for someone to make a copy of the story. The stories on the Joyland site are text, however, and could easily be transmuted to other forms, such as print, or incorporated into other works (what Barber refers to as the “Textual Mix Tape”). They also look very much like print short stories. In other words, I do not consider them to be born-digital, although all texts today can be considered born-digital to some extent. The stories on the Joyland site do appear more like other online media, newspaper articles or blog entries. The story “Interview Questions for Randy Savage,” for example, is a semiautobiographical discussion that appears like a blog entry, replete with a newspaper-like date line. Other stories on the site are similarly lyrical or editorial. Whether this shift to editorializing the short story will occur on a large scale, however, is something that would have to be studied from a number of years into the future.

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11 Interestingly, Dimock notes that on a macro level genres, even in the age of copyright and the promotion of original content, encourage the opposite of originality: “Through their admixed newness and oldness, they carry on the expressive forms that human beings collectively inherit” (1380).
Considering the genre of the short story at this time therefore forces us to consider not only established categories such as author and editor but also generic categories in general:

What exactly are genres? Are they a classifying system matching the phenomenal world of objects, a sorting principle that separates oranges from apples? Or are they less than that, a taxonomy that never fully taxonomizes, labels that never quite keep things straight? What archives come with genres, what critical lexicons do they offer, and what maps do they yield? And how does the rise of digitization change these archives, lexicons, and maps? (Dimock 1377)

Digital texts have changed the consciousness of our generic classifications and subsequent questioning of them based on the generic elusiveness of forms such as born-digital short stories, more so than many other forms such as the e-book. By rethinking genre generally, or changing our consciousness of genres in other forms, the boundaries of our creative output and what we classify as literature can also change our critical and creative output.

The previous discussion of genres and literature, historical and national approaches to the short story, and the short story collection or cycle has hopefully shown some of the difficulties in categorizing a work of fiction (or non-fiction, as noted by Lohafer) as a short story, along with difficulties in recognizing particular short stories as representing a national literature. In addition, there are problems with considering stories outside of their publication contexts, even though writers such as Poe have considered one of the fundamental attributes of a short story to be its ability to be complete on its own. At the end of section 1.2, we left off with a preliminary definition of the short story that focused largely on its format. We said that to answer the question “What is a short story?”, then, it is generally regarded as a work of fiction that is short enough to be read in one sitting. To this, we added Poe’s contention that it must be complete on its own. To isolate the content of the digital short story is to also link it to contemporary fiction
in general, however, and as will be discussed within Chapter 2, many of the themes present in contemporary works of fiction—loss, fragmentation, violence, disillusionment, disembodiment, and so forth—are a product of our moment in time and of our ruminating the effects of technologies within the works that we produce within these technologies. Historical context is important, then, and historical surveys, some of which were described in section 1.3, still have merit. However, the link between historical context and nation perhaps needs to be severed, or at least deemphasized, when discussing digital short fiction, since its boundaries are even less nation specific than contemporary fiction in general. My own interests have revolved around the Canadian short story, but to only study the digital Canadian short story and its social networks would have been difficult because the digital story does not stem from a regional or national identity.

Because much contemporary reading is conducted through digital devices, one cannot consider what a short story is without also considering the effects of digital reading practices and conventions associated with digital texts. As noted earlier in this chapter, a short story can be defined in a number of ways: by its brevity compared with longer forms; by its ability to develop characters and add detail in a way that is different than what forms rooted in oral storytelling were able to do, such as the fable, parable, and tale; and by its modularity or ability to be incorporated into other contexts that can add additional layers of meaning or change its meaning altogether, such as with the tales in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* that are framed within a larger narrative. But these definitions do not fully consider all of the short stories that are currently being told, produced, distributed, and collected, and in order to gain a better understanding of the short story at this time, we also have to examine in more detail works of digital short fiction and the different attributes that may be associated with born-digital stories, which I discuss in the next chapter.
2 Examining Digital Short Fiction and its Communities

2.1 Early Digital Short Fiction and the Academic Communities that Theorised it

Mainstream media often do not support a homogeneous, cohesive view of culture; today, what is often marketed as the correct view of the world is one that promotes fragmentation over cohesion, multi-cultural over uni-cultural, and a variety of voices over one dominant viewpoint. The short story collection, as discussed in Chapter 1, can often be used to reflect this fragmentation or heterogeneity. The stories in Munro’s collection were connected by a main character whose identity shifts as she goes through the process of defining herself. Bissoondath’s characters were connected through their experience of disconnection, loss of identity, and confusion, which the author recreates in the experience of the reader through the arrangement of stories in the collection.

One might wonder whether our cultural artefacts (texts, works of art, and the paratexts that surround these works) are linked to this movement in culture. Many works that exist on the Web, and that have gained a large audience, have done so because they somehow represent a fragmented group, but as seen with short story collections and the content of much contemporary fiction in general, this is also a result of our moment in time, especially when dealing with trauma and violence. When describing the introduction by Zadie Smith to the anthology The Burned Children of America, for example, March-Russell states,

Smith regards the collection’s underlying theme as sadness, and while she makes no direct reference, her comment that ‘the frequency of mass-death apocalyptic fantasy in recent American short stories can’t be an accident’ locates this trauma within the events of 11 September 2001 (in Cassini and Testa 2003: xv). Except that most of the
collected stories predate the attacks upon the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, in some cases by several years. Therefore the packaging and Smith’s introduction play upon recent political events in order to give the collection an unnecessary contemporary resonance. In effect, the publisher is using the literary anthology’s ability to document a cultural moment in order to increase sales. (60)

Although Smith links the stories to September 11th, 2001, it is for marketability rather than historical accuracy that the stories are linked to this violent moment in American history. If the trauma of the stories is not linked to September 11th, 2001, there must be some other trauma or source of disorientation that these stories emblematize.

This disorientation can stem from various changes in the past twenty to thirty years. Rather than supporting a longer-reaching perspective, which in the past tended to be dominated by organizations such as religious or political groups, people may now feel expected to be a rebel by joining various pseudo-subversive groups. This trend may have been shown in the proliferation of various Facebook and other social networking groups. Much of the digital literature that is created therefore represents a standpoint from one or more subversive groups that seek to stand up to a dominant ideology, a standpoint that has ironically become the dominant ideology in itself.

A survey of digital short fiction covers many of these subversive groups that play a part in this general cultural moment. Early digital literature such as hypertexts were often used as an outlet for feminism, as with Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* and theorizing by authors such as Katherine Hayles. Early digital literature was also used sometimes as an outlet for technological determinism or idealism. But some of these works have been criticized for representing a shift to “postmodern vacuousness” (Thompson), something that has been lamented on some blog posts
about these authors and their works. Even before the advent of the blog, however, postmodern scholarship, rather than just postmodern works of fiction, was attacked for creating what Sokal and Bricmont called “fashionable nonsense.”

2.1.1 Influences on the Early Development of Digital Short Fiction

It is important to analyse the academic writings on digital short fiction because they are, at least with early digital short fiction in the form of hypertext, what guided the early development of the form. March-Russell also comments on this link between some types of short fiction and the academic communities that theorise them: “By effectively fetishising interpretation as a struggle with the text, academic criticism not only appropriates certain kinds of short story but also promulgates an exclusive form of reading practice” (78). In other words, theorising about the story can alter the development of the form while also removing academic discussions of the short story from the reading being practiced by the general public.

Many early hypertext scholars also created their own hypertext works, and many of these works are meant to serve as an example of the points scholars are making in their scholarship or in the theories of other scholars in their fields. Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* and Katherine Hayles’s writings on this work (and others like it) are examples of this process. *Patchwork Girl*’s overall meaning is quite straightforward: it is “like the female monster’s body, [and] the body of this hypertext is also seemed [sic] and ruptured, comprised of disparate parts with extensive links between them” (Hayles, cited in Joyce 45). In “Hypertext and Streams of Consciousness: Coherence Redefined,” Jukka Tyrkkö comments on this link between hypertext works and theorizing about them:

Hypertext, and hyperfiction in particular, has been seen as a textual reflection of (post)modern culture and the increasingly fragmented nature of the contemporary
condition. One of the pioneers of hypermedia theory, George Landow (1994, 1), has described hyperlinking as the embodiment of ‘Julia Kristeva’s notions of intertextuality, Mikhail Bakhtin’s emphasis upon multivocality, Michel Foucault’s conceptions of networks of power, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s ideas of rhizomatic, ‘nomad thought’.’ Current hyperfictions are plainly oriented toward subversive storytelling in the vein of the avant-garde, where authors refuse to present simple truths and turn their backs to on [sic] Aristotelian narrative arches—and in so doing challenge the very definition of what narratives are. And yet…. We construct coherent narratives out of our readings. The challenge facing both readers and scholars working on hyperfiction is to discover how we do this, and to enjoy the fact that we do. (20)

*Patchwork Girl*, like many early hypertext works, is a literary critic’s delight: it can easily lend itself to a host of different literary interpretations and publishable articles. Also of note is the way in which the themes of hyperfiction were subversive or about resisting narrative definitions. As Elisabeth Joyce acknowledges, however, theories by Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous are “driving Jackson’s work” (Joyce 45), and so of course when a creative work is made particularly with literary theoretical interpretation in mind, it will be easy to create literary theoretical articles about the work. But in spite of all the Frankenstein references and metaphors in *Patchwork Girl* and the critical pieces written about it, the authors do not discuss how these critical works can themselves be like Frankenstein making an object for his own purposes. In this way, the genre of literary hypertext supported the academic community that was theorizing about fictional works and about the digital medium, and early literary hypertext as a genre can be seen as being, at least in part, constructed by academics.
Hypertext literature, and much early digital literature, was written with the goal of reflecting on the form (especially the hyperlink) and how the conventions of the digital medium can be used to change literature, rather than just on a particular message or other goal of the author. Any early hypertext literature can serve as an example of this. *Patchwork Girl* and a number of other hypertexts such as Stuart Moulthrop’s *Victory Garden* and Stephanie Strickland’s *True North* are more of a commentary on the genre of literary hypertext and how the link can be used as a rhetorical tactic to dis-joint or patch together bodies of text, than they are about a particular theme or message. The primary message or purpose of Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* is to demonstrate how women’s bodies are constructed or commodified, using the modular aspects of the text and hyperlink to show this; this is different than fiction that has a plot and uses a narrative to get its point across to the reader. In this sense, some digital literature might tend toward the category of art or video game rather than literature.

In their use of multiple narrative perspectives, these early hypertext works are similar to William Faulkner’s novels and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*: one of their primary purposes is to comment on the form of the traditional novel or to use an altered format to get their points across. Although by doing so, one can argue that these works foreground their experimental narrative technique over other meanings. The message is more about the effect created by multiple points of view in the novels than it is about relating a particular story, an insight about humanity, a philosophical statement about life, and so forth, although these other aspects can come through as well. Some literature is meant to be self-reflexive or to make its point by reflecting on the form or genre; however, this tendency predominates in many early works of digital literature.
The author may be making a statement about human relations and life through the use of multiple perspectives, but it is the experimental narrative style that often dominates the work rather than the particular message or meaning that the author is trying to convey through it. For example, in *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner may be using multiple perspectives to comment on the human need to communicate and also on the way in which language and our forms of communication are insufficient. Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* may be using multiple perspectives and stream of consciousness for a purpose similar to Faulkner’s and also to show the alienation of the self in modern society. In short, much early born-digital literature, much of which was called literary hypertext because hypertext works were easier to make before the early 2000s with the limited bandwidth and image or video creation software, falls into the category of experimental literature by foregrounding a new technique and the point the author may be trying to convey through the new technique. This technique is highlighted more than the actual content or story itself, although the effect created by the technique also contributes to the overall point the author wishes to convey through the work. One only needs to contrast the characters in *Mrs. Dalloway* with the characters in Jane Austen’s *Emma*, which uses a more traditional narrative structure by centering around a main character’s perspective, to see this difference. The characters in non-experimental works are developed more fully.

The underdevelopment of characters is one of the disadvantages of only using the stream of consciousness technique and multiple character perspectives, along with other experimental narrative techniques that foreground the medium and format to contribute to the overall point of the text. Aspects of plot and character development may be lost by only focusing on the form and genre of the text. On the other hand, however, using experimental narrative techniques can bring out aspects of the text that more traditional narratives cannot.
Although many early hypertext works, and academic theorizing about them, focused on their formal aspects and a few works as establishing the canon, there are now some recently-published studies that move beyond this focus. Astrid Ensslin in *Canonizing Hypertext* (2007) looks at ways in which current literary canons can be updated to include texts with “receptive multilinearity” and “structural nonlinearity,” qualities that tend to be associated with literary hypertexts in particular but also digital texts in general. She also looks at ways to incorporate definitions of literature that move beyond print-based conceptions of textuality, authorship, and readers. As will be seen in the next section, focusing on the content, rather than just the form, can provide a fuller understanding of the digital short story.

### 2.1.2 The Content of Contemporary Literature

There is clearly a large amount of literary short fiction being created and published on the Web, whether born-digital or re-published after initial print publication, but there still continues to be little discussion of the virtual communities and digital paratexts surrounding short fiction. The Web and the digital medium have created a different community-based form of authorship, reading, and distribution than what was present before the Web and digital media, and social networking sites therefore play a much more prominent role in examining digital short fiction than if one were just focusing on the short story genre in general.\(^{12}\)

To understand digital literature, we must understand its place within its distribution environment (the Internet and the Web) and its postmodern context, and with them the reasons why we have had the shift to more intimate or personal fixations even in contemporary literature in general (not just in digital literature). Ann Carson’s novella *The Autobiography of Red* is one

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\(^{12}\) Many works published in print also now have an online following or community and often have fan-fiction communities as well, such as those based on J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* books.
example of this shift to the intimate as spectacle even in non-digital literature, something that may also be linked to the general marketing aspects that have taken over creative literature in both digital and non-digital publication mediums. Many works of literature have always been somewhat confessional or lyrical in the sense that they might reflect the intimate feelings or thoughts of a single speaker, but the intimate subject matter has changed. We have moved from rape and female downfall (often described from an outsider’s perspective, as in Richardson’s *Pamela* or *Clarissa*) to, in Carson’s and similar contemporary novels and short stories, molestation described from the perspective of the speaker. These narratives are more like what one might hear from the psychiatrist’s couch rather than from the once-removed, editorially omniscient perspective of a speaker in works such as Freud’s *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*. Perhaps the pre-digested, once-removed perspective was more of what 17th, 18th, and 19th-century audiences would have been accustomed to with the greater influence of religious discourses before the mid-late 20th century.

Many works of digital literature have become like confessionals, as if the distance created through constructed identities on the Internet or the embodiment of one’s pain in a fictional account is sufficiently distanced from real life. The traditional oral confessional was made to appear separate or removed from real life through the Catholic confessional wall and screen. There must be some kind of pleasure derived from creating these confessional works in a safe environment, at the least as part of the motivation for their production and distribution. The confessional box could be considered virtual in the same way that a community on the Internet is considered virtual or how an author’s incorporation of intimate details into a work of fiction is considered to be unreal or without any real-world consequences. Many participants in my study (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3), in particular those who wrote stories that involved sexuality, were adamant that they did not want their names to be associated with their stories
because their fiction was kept separate from their real-world identity and work. This understanding can change how we view and study contemporary fiction in general, but in particular how this confessional nature may be heightened in digital literature. Psychological motivations contextualize what is conveyed through the medium, so that we might understand these works within their appropriate context: not just in the context of the individual or author, but in the society in which the works are created. Whether or not these works use images to convey their message, they are still produced within a culture of the image: of the image without original, or of the identity produced as a constant mirror of other reflections. One can look at how these works are a reflection back of what the author or subject sees in the society, or in that society’s other cultural productions. By placing new media such as digital literature and its communities into its postmodern and psychological context, we can begin to establish a theoretical context through which to assess the many ways in which our current cultural productions both reflect and affect who we are.

We can turn to Foucault when thinking about these works as confessional, even if they are works of fiction. In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault discusses the confessional in the context of the repressive hypothesis. According to Foucault, we are not talking about restricted behaviour *less* but we are actually talking about it more, and by creating a discourse we therefore allow something to be turned from an activity or more abstract phenomenon into something that can be analyzed, judged, assessed, and categorized, thereby allowing it to be controlled. The religious confessional was part of this discourse that was being created about non-reproductive sexuality and other acts that were considered deviant. Although deviant acts were not to be referred to directly, there was a whole vocabulary developed to discuss the very things that were not supposed to be discussed, through an indirect vocabulary or scientific
These forbidden behaviours actually came to be discussed even more, and the current clubs, literature, and online communities for these previously forbidden behaviours are actually part of the same discourse. Entire group identities are based on one’s participation in a taboo (or once-taboo) act. In other words, creating a discourse around sexuality enabled people to be categorized into various defined groups and to attempt to control not only people’s behaviour but the things they think and talk about. Much contemporary literature therefore plays into the repressive hypothesis by having as its subject some sort of deviant act or attitude, even though, as Foucault points out, writing about or creating a discourse about the intimate aspects of one’s self is a form of confessional and is part of the process of creating a discourse around one’s private life in order to be able to categorize, control, and define it. By writing about something semi-autobiographically and identifying oneself with a certain category, the individual is in fact allowing himself or herself to be defined and categorized by that society. Many of the alternative identity affinities in contemporary Western culture are a product of definitions of what was perverse, and therefore defining one’s self as part of these groups is still being repressed: it is reflecting an imposed identity. The acceptable options available to any one individual are still imposed by one’s society. Definitions of what is appropriate versus inappropriate still exist, they have just changed over time and according to the needs of the society.

The performance of identity in this context is what serves as the basis for the fixations in current literature, and especially in digital literature, which tend to label themselves as deviant or different from the mainstream. We can compare this, as in Chapter 1, to the oral tradition in

13 One can turn to Freud’s *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* for more examples of this use of terminology.
which literature originated and the real-life communities that would have surrounded its telling. If one looks at the history of literature through the context of the gradual removal of the author either physically or as a presence capable of responding to his or her work, this history has followed a progression from the teller being a present part of the work (as in the oral tradition), or as the teller being the messenger or medium for a community’s story, to the development of the notion of the author in itself which can be seen as stemming from print media, to the further removal of one’s accountability for a work of fiction, as in some current print and digital media. Print allows the text to be removed from its originator, and yet paradoxically, through copyright, authorship is enforced and emphasized. Digital dissemination or communication has the potential to allow the text, in many ways, to become part of a dialogue again, although in a structured system that is quite different from face-to-face communication.

Luckhurst observes that many works of digital fiction have a common thematic focus that may be a subconscious response to the change in technology and the disruption that the computer has caused: “While we are promised that this material offers a radical new kind of reading and a bright, utopian future, the actual content of many of these fictions often significantly centres on narratives of trauma and loss” (801). Luckhurst’s observation is in line with the focus in much contemporary literature on deviant acts or traumatic experiences, as mentioned earlier. He uses examples of the most commonly referenced digital fiction, in particular the early hypertexts, to demonstrate the way in which the thematic concerns of digital fiction may represent the psychological impact of the changes created by the computer:

The fragmented, evasive and circling screens of Joyce’s *afternoon* ask to be read on one level as representing mimetically the shocked state of the father, who has witnessed and possibly caused the death of his own son and estranged wife. The
pivotal image of Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* is the scar (‘If you want to see me whole, you will have to sew me together yourself’), and while George Landow as always celebrates the technology of the text, he does little but cite the evocative suggestion by one of his students that the hypertext link might be understood as a ‘textual trauma’, where the disjunctive leap disorders and disaggregates as much as liberates. Death and the ephemerality of family memory drives Gibson’s ‘Agrippa’; the decisions made by the passengers in Ryman’s 253 determine whether or not they will die in the train crash. Slash fiction favours narratives of ‘angst’ or ‘hurt/comfort’, playing out scenarios that are about exposure to, and possibly resolution of, various types of traumatic sexual encounter. Even the most ardent advocates of hypertext tellingly use examples of mourning and loss: Landow suggests *In Memoriam* is a perfect text for multimedia technology, because Tennyson’s mourning already constructs ‘an antilinear poetry of fragments’, while Janet Murray develops at length a hypothetical hypertext that might explore from different angles the apparently inexplicable suicide of a young man…. Michael Joyce, contemplating the move from offline to networked digital technology, has latterly confessed: ‘The truth is that the web puts me at a loss and I do not know why’. (801-802)

The themes that many works of digital fiction tend to have in common are important because they shed light on the nature of digital fiction and why it has, to this point, not moved beyond a particular sphere of influence. If literature expresses humanity’s response to the conditions of its time, then the common sentiments expressed through digital fiction, especially in its early works, are emblematic of our collective response to the effects of the computer, Internet, and other technological changes, along with changes in the structure of our communities and societies.
The themes of the stories on the Dreaming Methods site are examples of Luckhurst’s observation that many works of digital fiction deal with themes of trauma or loss. Death, disorientation, dreams, memory, and loss are common themes found in these stories. The subtitles of many of the stories show this link.\textsuperscript{14} Other projects in development deal with dreams or nightmares, disappearances, or lost childhood moments. As Luckhurst noted, these themes can be a reflection of the trauma or disorientation experienced with a new communication medium and in the context of postmodernism: “For me, what these instances allegorise, often against the grain of confident techno-utopian statement, is the felt trauma of technological change. In this sense, it is continuous with the theorisation of shock developed for the rise of the railway, the cinema and urban modernity” (802).

Indeed, we can see the effects of the railway in both the form and content of the writings of Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, and other nineteenth-century authors. Thoreau in \textit{Walden} contemplates the loss of first-hand experience that reading affords and the effects of technology, or the railroad, on his immersion in first-hand experience of the natural world:

Far through unfrequented woods on the confines of towns, where once only the hunter penetrated by day, in the darkest night dart these bright saloons without the knowledge of their inhabitants; this moment stopping at some brilliant station-house in town or city, where a social crowd is gathered, the next in the Dismal Swamp, scaring the owl and fox. The startings and arrivals of the cars are now the epochs in the village day. They go and come with such regularity and precision, and their whistle can be heard so far, that the farmers set their clocks by them, and thus one well-conducted institution regulates a whole country. Have not men improved somewhat in punctuality since the railroad was invented? Do they not talk and think faster in the depot than they did in the stage-office?… To do things "railroad fashion" is now the byword; and it is worth the while to be warned so often and so sincerely by any power to get off its track. There is no stopping to read the riot act, no firing over the heads of the mob, in this case. We have constructed a fate, an Atropos, that never turns aside. (Let that be the name of your engine.) Men are advertised that at a certain hour and minute these bolts will be shot toward particular points of the compass; yet it interferes with no man's business, and the children go to school on the other track. We live the steadier for it. We are all educated thus to be sons of Tell. The air is full of invisible bolts. Every path but your own is the path of fate. Keep on your own track, then. (Thoreau)

Dickinson, in her poem “I like to see it lap the Miles,” also describes a similar effect on the disruption of consciousness from the introduction of the railroad, complete with metaphors of the iron horse also used by Thoreau, which liken an old system to the new. The railroad is a common fixation of poets in the nineteenth century, including Walt Whitman in “To a Locomotive in Winter.”
Rather than providing a technologically-deterministic assessment of digital fiction in terms of seeing the computer or the hyperlink itself as shaping digital fiction, Luckhurst places digital fiction in its psychological context as a response to overall changes within social structures and technology at this time. Luckhurst acknowledges that the responses to the effects of technology have not only had an impact on the form and content that digital fiction has tended to focus on, but also on the form and content of other types of fiction such as the novel:

a notable strand of recent novelistic discourse has responded to technologically saturated culture in its own inventive and appropriative ways through a mutation in the complexity and over-determination of plotting and the rapid and often bewildering shifting between real and virtual worlds. The work of Thomas Pynchon or Don DeLillo are common points of reference, since both have been long engaged in twisting the technology of print into new forms as post-war American culture became increasingly saturated in military, industrial and media technologies. (803)

In other words, it is not only digital fiction that has reflected our collective response to changing technologies, but other forms that predated computers and the Internet (and, as mentioned in Chapter 1, even print editions of newspapers such as The Globe and Mail). The changes in narrative structure, thematic concerns, and style in a number of forms of writing reflect our current moment in time rather than just the medium in which these works exist.

Luckhurst also contests the way in which discussions of digital literature—this one included—risk technological determinism by focusing almost exclusively on the formal innovations of the texts. Readers in this field have to endure lengthy, static, old-fashioned print descriptions of the
technological wizardry of anti-linear, de-hierarchising hypertext, to the exclusion of almost everything else. (801)

So many of the theoretical discussions of digital fiction have focused on the form of the text, but, in doing so, have only given a limited analysis of digital fiction because aspects such as the cultural context, thematic concerns, and other insightful areas that are reflected in the works have been left out of the discussion.

Williams and Diebert see digital media as fitting in a current environment of postmodernism rather than causing postmodernism; however, Tabbi sees digital media as offering many of the same potentials as print media, but in a way that literalizes many aspects of reader interaction that were previously only present in the reader’s mind:

While it may not be fair to describe this change in the mode of communication as a cause of social change, Ronald Diebert does note the fit between what he calls a communications environment of hypermedia and the epistemology of postmodernism. In other words, he holds that people acculturated to digital media are likely to find in the new mode of communication support for their basic assumptions about individual identity, spatial reality, and imagined community. For example, he claims that the idea of a stable, centred self with a fixed identity and universal attributes has been giving way over recent decades to ‘a notion of a ‘decentred’ self’ that is more like ‘an assemblage of its environment, a multiple self that changes in response to different social situations’ [(Diebert, Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia 181)]. (Williams 223)
Williams continues to cite Diebert on the consequences of this changed view of the self: “the autonomous individual can no longer provide the philosophical foundations from which to design or achieve human freedom” (Diebert qtd. in Williams 223). This emphasizes the effect that others have noted on the decreased ability to effect social action or social change in a postmodern environment. Williams continues by comparing the self that prefers digital media to the self that was effected by print:

The model of a fragmented, plural self also fits the new mode of communication in its general dissolution of privacy. Where silent reading of the book once authorized autonomous individuals, rational and free, to seek a private space in which to be alone with their thoughts, readers of the World Wide Web are being monitored by various forms of data collection, just as brand loyalties, consumer preferences, and commercial credit are being marked through their electronic transactions. (Williams 224)

In other words, certain types of media proliferate in certain time periods not just because a particular technology is available (such as the Internet and digital media), but because people are oriented toward it.

2.1.3 Different Generations of Hypertext

In addition to examining its content, we can also look at early digital literature through the categories of first and second-generation hypertext used by Katherine Hayles and trace its development into what Ensslin calls “third-generation” hypertexts:

Riding on the coattails of software developers, electronic literature has seen its conditions of possibility dramatically transformed since its inception. So rapid has
been the development that one can speak, as I have, of two generations of works.
Dating the watershed between the generations is a matter of critical debate, but most
people agree it falls somewhere between 1995 and 1997. First generation works, often
written in Storyspace or Hypercard, are largely or exclusively text-based with
navigation systems mostly confined to moving from one block of text to another.
Second generation works, authored in a wide variety of software including Director,
Flash, Shockwave and xml, are fully multimedia, employ a rich variety of interfaces,
and have sophisticated navigation systems. (Hayles, “Deeper into the Machine”)

Here Hayles makes a distinction between types of early literary hypertexts based on the software
and technical limitations of the time in which the works were constructed. This definition
highlights the emphasis on the medium that dominated early hypertext literature and early digital
literature in general. Whether or not a work was written as a literary hypertext per se or just
written for the digital medium in general, the nature of the digital medium and the hypertext link
as an integral aspect of the work would be the equivalent of creating footnote literature or icon
art (which have been used in experimental literature). Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*
(2000) is one example of the play with footnotes, appendices, and paratextual material, and it
also shows the connection of contemporary literature with the fragmented or dislocated identity:
“Starting with an odd assortment of marginalized youth—musicians, tattoo artists, programmers,
strippers, environmentalists, and adrenaline junkies—the book eventually made its way into the
hands of older generations, who not only found themselves in those strangely arranged pages but
also discovered a way back into the lives of their estranged children” (from the description on the
cover).
The fact that hypertext literature developed as a largely academic literary theory-fostered genre was in part due to the way it could appear to demonstrate some theories of text, but, more importantly, as part of a shift in thinking about literature that began to look more at its materiality, its potential as an artefact, and its physical qualities, beyond what had traditionally been looked at when considering either the subject matter of literature or the way in which a story was told. This extends to examinations of other qualities such as poetic techniques, plot and narrative structure, language and metaphor, and so forth. In other words, the subset of studies of electronic literature and digital fiction called “literary hypertext” developed because of a shift in focus in general onto the materiality, the medium in which a work is written, the processes of production, the physical form in which a text exists, and the readership or audience of a text. This shift began with the codex and the physical object in which the story would be circulated. If we had moved directly from oral to digital, perhaps there would still be a focus on the materiality, but it would have developed gradually. Book history—the study of the way in which the physical qualities of a text and its production or reception are integral to the text—developed with early works by Altick (1957), Eisenstein (1979), and others, but gained ground in largely around the same time that hypertext theory was gaining ground: in the 1980s and 1990s. In other words, the fact that the hypertext link became the focus of many works of first-generation hypertext in the 1980s and 1990s may just be a product of the time period in which the computer and the Internet were developing. There are many other material (or immaterial) aspects of digital composition and distribution that could have been emphasized, such as the ability to make animated text, roll-over-image text, “text art,” “balloon text,” ephemeral text (text that can be erased without any material evidence as soon as it is written, such as in a word processor), and so on. One can see, for example, the “Text Rain” project:
Text Rain is a playful interactive installation that blurs the boundary between the familiar and the magical. Participants in the Text Rain installation use the familiar instrument of their bodies, to do what seems magical - to lift and play with falling letters that do not really exist. In the *Text Rain* installation participants stand or move in front of a large projection screen. On the screen they see a mirrored video projection of themselves in black and white, combined with a color animation of falling text. Like rain or snow, the text appears to land on participants' heads and arms. The text responds to the participants' motions and can be caught, lifted, and then let fall again. The falling text will land on anything darker than a certain threshold, and ‘fall’ whenever that obstacle is removed. (Utterback and Achituv)

If the focus on the materiality of literature, both in print and digital, had developed slightly later (for example, by about ten years), perhaps the emphasis would have been on scrolling literature rather than the hyperlink, since, as many have pointed out, “hypertext” is not exactly a new concept and had been used in such “proto-hypertexts” (Ensslin, 2007) as stream-of-consciousness narratives that appear to be more modularly constructed (for example, Joyce, Faulkner, and Woolf, as mentioned earlier) and popular print texts such as Choose-Your-Own-Adventure novels.

Perhaps the hyperlink would not even have been noticed as an aspect of the materiality of digital literature if the consciousness of the materiality of texts had developed later. In the twenty-first century, the hyperlink is now quite an ubiquitous aspect of digital documents (by nature of being on the Web, all documents employ the hyperlink in some manner). If the newness of this aspect of Web documents had not been foregrounded in its early years, the
hyperlink may have just become part of what we call digital literature without having its possibilities played with and theorized.

2.1.4 More Recent Discussions of Digital Literature

Unlike many early discussions of digital literature, some recent theorists have made a promising move away from technological determinism or comparisons to literary theory. Luckhurst, mentioned earlier, is one of these theorists. In “Ending the Century: Literature and Digital Technology,” Luckhurst makes a point of keeping his approach from veering into discussions of technological determinism or prophesying about new media, and he also avoids an approach that would try to view new digital forms of fiction from a print-biased perspective: “To be dragged into the noisy declamations of the prophets of the end or new beginning of the book is to lose critical distance just when it is most needed” (787). Luckhurst demonstrates this critical distance, and he acknowledges that this “Third Industrial Revolution—the digital one—is still only just starting to unfold” (787). It can be difficult for this distance to be attained when the changes are still developing around us. He therefore prefaces his article with the assertion that “any claim to authoritative statement can often seem to be just a symptom of the technoculture it had hoped to master” (787), even though his article provides one of the more objective assessments of the changes that are currently taking place in how we read, the forms of literature that are currently developing, and the critical discourse that has been created around these forms.

Unlike Luckhurst, critics such as Mark James Morreale in “Richardson, Clarissa, Hypertext” demonstrate a focus on the formal techniques of digital fiction that have pervaded many discussions of digital literary texts. Morreale examines the potential uses of hypertext in the classroom and the ways in which hypertext, or digital versions of fictional works, can
augment the student’s experience with the text: “hypertext not only created new modes of discourse but also encourages active versus passive reading. Moreover, hypertext allows students to become self-directed reader-authors and fosters collaborative writing” (Morreale 134). Like many early discussions of hypertext and digital works of fiction, Morreale emphasizes the formal characteristics as offering something new to the reader. When this aspect of hypertext is examined further, however, it is clear that hypertext itself is not offering anything new to the reader or the literature student, it just takes many aspects of the reading process and makes these aspects more visual, such as the connections between ideas, words, and subjects. This type of reading has already been conducted, just in a form in which the mental pathways or connections were more ephemeral, as in the reader’s thought processes. Morreale also claims that hypertext “graphically illustrates how texts might be decentralized from the critical focus” (Morreale 134), which again focuses on the link as providing possibilities that already exist in texts that are not created as hypertexts per se. Morreale also focuses on the skills that are necessary for readers to create hypertext versions of a work of fiction, such as Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa, which was chosen because of its modularity:

Richardson’s Clarissa works especially well with hypertext, given its frequent use of cross-referencing, allusive character, and complex structure. If Terry Eagleton’s twenty-year-old claim in the preface to The Rape of Clarissa is true, ‘that we may now once again be able to read Samuel Richardson’ because of ‘certain new ways of reading developed in our own time’ (vii, viii), I suggest that hypertext gives us a fourth way to read Richardson’s masterpiece that Eagleton at the time could not have anticipated. (134)
This article was published in 2006, however, and since that time we have seen a proliferation of content management systems that take away the necessity for those constructing digital fictions to be skilled at creating HTML, SGML, or XML code. Even Morreale acknowledges that these WYSIWYG\textsuperscript{15} programs are available: “I encourage students, however, to use the freeware version of CoffeeCup (http://coffeecup.com) or HTML-Kit (http://www.chami.com/html-kit). Both provide the students with the HTML template and have excellent short-cut features so that students need not remember everything, such as the code for making a table” (Morreale 134). Through WYSIWYG programs and social networking sites, people can now easily add commentary, tags, and other content that was previously only possible by creating this from scratch using HTML or other code.

Morreale goes on to describe the possibilities of having a hypertextual Clarissa as part of a larger textual archive, but this is already present now in Web 2.0 itself: “Imagine further that our hypertext Clarissa belongs to a larger archive, an archive of eighteenth-century texts; or, larger still, an archive of British literature; or define the archive as you will. Hypertexted student commentary on and about Clarissa would become part of a context far beyond the confines of a given semester” (Morreale 137). Many works of digital short fiction are already now part of a larger archive through the social Web; institutional repositories, however, do offer a more stable and permanent archive. Even some scholarly digital edition projects are now having a developer provide the backend or content management system, and then those who are making the content would be free to focus on creating the annotations and other aspects normally associated with scholarly editions, without having to also be versed in code.

\textsuperscript{15} What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) content management systems allow users to add content without having to know html coding, and, as seen with social networking systems such as Facebook, people can often perform their own tagging (of photographs and other objects added to this collective, social repository).
J. Yellowlees Douglas agrees that early definitions of hypertext can be restrictive, although in a way that, like Morreale, focuses on its formal characteristics even while concurrently questioning some of the assumptions about the form, as evidenced in her article’s title: “What Interactive Narratives Do That Print Narratives Cannot.” After mentioning a few of the attributes of non-sequentiality that have been assigned to hypertext by other theorists, Yellowlees Douglas states,

these definitions are slightly misleading, since both hypertext fiction and digital narratives enable readers to experience their contents in a variety of sequences…. As definitions go, those that emphasize nonsequentiality are also rather restrictive, since they tend to set hypertext and hypermedia off from print in a kind of binary opposition: if print is both linear and relentlessly sequential, it follows, then, that hypertext and hypermedia must be non-linear and nonsequential. (Yellowlees Douglas 443)

Although Yellowlees Douglas’s analysis is still limited to comparing the form of digital or “interactive” narratives to print, she does provide some good assessments of early hypertext theory and attempts to form a canon of digital literature: “critics, blinded by the small number of early works, have mistaken the hallmarks of a single type or genre of hypertext fiction for the defining characteristics of all present and future works within the medium” (Yellowlees Douglas 444). Yellowlees Douglas states that hypertext fiction draws on the avant-garde, arcade games, and graphic novels, but her analysis does not include digital fiction’s larger psychological and cultural context, or the moment in time in which digital literature has come about. She states, “For the purposes of investigating how readers experience and interpret interactive narratives in the here and now, it is far better for us to define just what hypertext fiction and digital narratives
are, and what they can do, by examining just what they do that print does not—or cannot—do” (Yellowlees Douglas 445). Yellowlees Douglas does hint toward an indication that we should look at digital fiction in the context of literary movements in general, but still limits this by focusing on how interactive fiction compares with its print counterparts:

If the earliest examples of hypertext fiction happen to represent the sophisticated play with chronology, completeness, and closure that draws many of its precedents from avant-garde print genres, it hardly follows that all hypertext fiction will resist privileging one reading of character or one set of choices for navigation through its network of potential narratives, or even that authors will plump for the conspicuously postmodern over, say, the hallmarks of the mystery, the hard-boiled detective story, or science fiction. (Yellowlees Douglas 445)

In other words, attributing characteristics of nonsequentiality, multilinearity, and other aspects of postmodern fiction in general to all digital fiction is reductive in that it assumes that only postmodern narratives will exist in the medium, even though it has been shown that this is not the case. All types of fiction exist within the digital medium, which is in part why it becomes difficult to define just what digital literature is, or, for that matter, digital short fiction. As I argue later in this chapter, there is often a clearer distinction between born-digital short fiction and fiction that has been digitized or could be easily transmuted to print, than there is between print and non-born-digital (or digitized) fiction.

In addition to the precedents in print literature of the postmodern characteristics attributed by many theorists to digital fiction, as also noted by Luckhurst and March-Russell when discussing DeLillo, Pynchon, or Danielewski, Yellowlees Douglas acknowledges
mosaic print narratives, such as Lawrence Durrell’s *Alexandria Quartet*, Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch*, and Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text* [which] consist of narrative fragments, conflicting perspectives, interruptions, and ellipses that impel readers to painstakingly piece together a sense of the narrative, with its full meaning apparent only when viewed as an assembled mosaic, a structure embracing all its fragments. (Yellowlees Douglas 461)

Even though postmodern attributes existed in print fiction, it was the way in which the digital medium appeared to be especially amenable to the non-sequentiality and other characteristics attributed to postmodern fiction that impelled many theorists to dwell on the formal characteristics of digital fiction:

> When print narratives attempt to resist the physicality of print by increasing the number of stories, narrative strands, and potential points of closure—as is the case with the likes of ‘The Babysitter,’ Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, or Borges’s ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’—the medium inevitably resists, making the reading experience and the significance of the narrative itself a meditation on the confines of print space. (Yellowlees Douglas 466)

When these attributes are present without the confines of the print space, however, they do not take on the same function, except to demonstrate that the digital medium offers possibilities that are different than what one can find in print. It is for this reason that many of the early hypertext works focused on this lack of print limitations. Instead, narratives may be limited by what the reader can handle: according to Yellowlees-Douglas, the decision to end the story is up to the reader in digital literature, but often these interactive narratives offer readers tools to aid in the reading process, such as “the kind of overview possible in a face-to-face exchange, via functions
like the cognitive maps in Storyspace that act as schematic drawings of all possible versions of the text you might experience if you persevere long enough” (455).

These types of tools have always been available to readers, however. Cognitive maps are built in readers’ minds, whether they are reading a print or born-digital text, and to have one provided to the reader while reading the text actually takes more control (rather than less) of the reader’s experience with the text, since it makes less ephemeral the reader’s modeling of the text and replaces the work of the reader’s imagination. A similar situation occurs when a reader is provided with a picture of the main character(s) within a story. The image replaces the image that the reader would have created with his or her own imagination, which would have perhaps drawn on similar characters that the reader knew from visual mediums such as television or even from real-life experience. Yellowlees-Douglas also discusses the “database” of possible interactions available to the reader, but this is, like cognitive maps, something that the reader develops with his or her own imagination. I might, as a reader, be reminded of an experience in my own life as I am reading a narrative, and then go on a temporary thought tangent as I remember and compare my experience with the events described in the text, or imagine a different outcome from what had actually occurred, thereby creating my own story that was instigated by both the fictional text and my own real-life experiences. In other words, creating these tangents and mental pathways through “non-linear” or “multilinear” digital fictions is not anything new; it is only rendering an experience that readers have always been having. This experience is rendered in a more visual form, however (through links and pathways that the reader can actually track and trace over).

March-Russell also describes how mental maps are passed collectively to readers in a way that is similar to how canons are passed on to readers. These canons have been lauded for
being easily connectable to a work through hypertext: “Literary anthologies are inextricable from the traditions—hidden or otherwise—that they address. Their composition is necessarily linked to the so-called canons of English literature, meaning both the landmarks of prose fiction and the mental maps by which readers make sense of literary history” (56). Making these mental pathways more visual and constructed by the author would actually make the reader even more controlled by the author or designer, not the other way around.

This obvious control by the author may be one of the reasons why readers have found hypertext works “difficult”: “Constant demands for input or inputs that are frustrated… can remind readers that they are grappling with a narrative designed by others, disrupting their suspension of disbelief in the same way that difficult texts do: requiring frequent pauses, reflection, even regressing over pages already read” (Yellowlees Douglas 454). When these designed interactions are interrupted, they can feel limited or contrived (Yellowlees Douglas 451). The thematic similarities in many works of hypertext fiction also give the reader a sense of direction in a way that is similar to the purpose of these topoi in the literature of other mediums:

Most digital narratives are built around a quest, whether for the identity of a killer or artefacts collected on a grown-up version of a treasure hunt, providing a set of purposes that inform the narrative, propelling both it and the reader forward. The quest also, conveniently and not merely incidentally, enables designers to limit the characters, spaces, and scenarios populating the narrative. (Yellowlees Douglas 453)

Perhaps these common topoi also explain the tendency toward stock characters or minimal character development in hypertext that foregrounds the form rather than the characters. As mentioned previously, Luckhurst also sees these common themes as reflecting the trauma associated with the change in technology and the fracture with the past; in this sense, perhaps the
common themes found in many works of digital fiction function to guide the reader while also reflecting the psychological effect of the change in technology.

Other theorists such as Joseph Tabbi align with Yellowlees Douglas’s and others’ assessments of hypertext and digital literature. In “A Media Migration: Toward a Potential Literature,” Tabbi addresses the ways in which many works of hypertext fiction show much of the same reading strategies as with print works, but in a much more literal manifestation. Tabbi asserts that the notion of traditional linearity was largely “mythical,” and that “it would seem, then, that the celebrated nonlinearity of hypertext is in large part a literalization (at the level of tagged word groups) of mental connections that readers learn to make, one way or another, when reading fiction or poetry in print” (Tabbi 472-473). But in reality, the experience of the reader has always been non-linear, or at least non-linear insofar as there are a number of trajectories that readers take in their own minds when reading traditional texts. As Tabbi describes,

Through a kind of flickering or oscillating attention, such connections can easily take place across many pages, or within the space of a single phrase; they enable a poem or a narrative to take shape in the mind of a reader, and this mental picture—‘a network of possibilities rather than a preset sequence of events’ [(Hayles, ‘The Transformation of Narrative’)]—is rarely congruent with the progressive continuity of lines following lines and pages stacked on pages through the course of a book. (Tabbi 473)

In other words, many of the misconceptions about hypertext and digital texts are due to the way in which hypertext literalizes, or makes less ephemeral, the mental pathways and associations that were already part of the process of reading and are not unique to born-digital texts. Matthew Kirschenbaum has also commented on the way in which digital texts are actually
less ephemeral, rather than more ephemeral, even though digital and Web-based texts are often considered to be less lasting than print. Kirschenbaum demonstrates this by discussing Gibson’s *Agrippa*, which is a digital text that self-destructs and yet can still be unlocked and traced in pirated versions.

There are other examples in which the literal manifestation of aspects of the reading process can make it appear that the digital medium changes the reading process. Even when it comes to the construction of the reader’s own self as a sort of narrative, Tabbi asserts that this process has always consisted of multiple, changing narratives rather than one consistent narrative:

A part of us speaks and another part listens, as if our very sense of a stable and continuous self were nothing but a *narrative* that we tell ourselves, a world fiction that under normal circumstances seems continuous enough and linear, but which is more likely a set of multiple narratives variously linked in concatenations that the brain can search through and recall in a moment. These links are decidedly nonlinear, accompanied by analogies, puns, rhymes, and associations…. [therefore] our sense of self can be revealed as fundamentally fragmented and permeable. (Tabbi 475)

As digital fiction has developed, the fixation on the materiality of the hyperlink has given way to less fetishizing of these literal associations—or links—between texts and, with Web 2.0, between networks of people. One author’s work of short fiction may now exist within a print collection and in an online short fiction community, with comments by other members of the community appended to the bottom of the story and linked to from other social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and so forth. In this way, social networking is making more observable that which has already existed by word-of-mouth and other pre-Internet means.
2.1.5 Comparisons With the Development of the Novel

If we look at early digital literature, in particular literary hypertexts, by paralleling its development with other previously new forms such as the novel, we can get a better sense of why digital literature at first foregrounded the digital medium and new techniques that were possible with this medium. Even the novel grew from an initial incorporation of other literary forms before developing its own conventions and being accepted as a literary genre in itself. Although there were early examples of the epistolary novel in the seventeenth century in English, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747) contributed to the form’s increase in popularity in English. The epistolary novel is like a series of smaller documents: letters, diary entries, notes, and other documents that seem as though they were collected together to tell a story. Previous to developments in paper and binding techniques, constructing and distributing a work of literature the size of a novel would not have been practical. When this became possible, genres such as the epistolary novel developed. The thing that was new was the ability to make it appear that one had put a collection of documents together to form something new out of the sum of its parts. In other words, it was the volume, length, or size that was new, or the ability to put large numbers of pages together. And in some ways the epistolary novel was a fetishizing of this new possibility to put large numbers of documents together: it allowed the author (who was really fashioning himself or herself more in the role of a fictional editor) to tell a story in one collection and as a product of the parts in that collection, rather than only providing what could be told in a number of comparatively shorter documents.

Serial literature, or literature connected by a theme and chronologically-ordered events distributed in a series of non-physically-connected parts, also became more popular after the development of the novel. The novel eventually developed into the novel as it is understood today, with works such as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* serving as definitive examples of
the genre. It is ironic, then, that a form that developed, after its initiation in novellas, out of what seems like an amalgamation of smaller documents will now not function as effectively in the digital medium unless it again becomes a collection of smaller documents. Anything that would require more than one sitting to read online or using a digital reading device, or that cannot be scrolled through within a reasonable length on a web-page, generally does not work well for pleasure or aesthetic reading purposes, as discussed in Chapter 1. This is, in part, why early hypertext works tend to emphasize the modular aspects of writing for the Web: they are organized into smaller chunks or segments, sometimes containing only one word or image or an entire short story in itself.

There are also certain types of fictional (and non-fictional) works that are more practical or feasible in the digital environment. Many of the 1980s and early 1990s proclamations of the death of the book fell aside, as recounted by S. David Mash in “The Death of the Book,” as people realized that longer fictional forms such as the novel did not work as well in digital format. Many of the properties of longer fiction have developed around the conventions and physical properties of the print novel: the convention of leaving cliffhangers at the end of a chapter, which originated with the serial publication of novels; the proximity of the size of the novel compared with the human hand, and the distance between arm length and eye; images on the book’s cover that pique the reader’s interest and aid in the reader’s visualization of the setting and characters in the story; and the ability to easily pack and travel with the novel without the necessity of bringing a reading device other than a pair of eyes (and eyeglasses if necessary). These longer works of fiction, especially if their primary purpose is to be read for pleasure, are

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16 *Pride and Prejudice* may have begun as an epistolary novel and does use a large amount of letters and other documents to convey the story. It is not an “epistolary” novel, however, because these shorter documents are embedded within a larger third-person narrative perspective.
still most practical and effective when read in their physical form of the print novel. This is mainly because the computer monitor and mobile devices grew primarily from a purpose of being used for information storage, dissemination, and retrieval, as described by Vannevar Bush (Bush, 1945). The computer and the Internet were not developed for the transmission of digital book-length fiction, even though digital fiction has evolved through the digital medium.

The computer began as an extension of the human mind to perform and store simple calculations, and this eventually developed to the point that networks of computers (and people) can transmit machine messages back and forth. These messages, composed of combinations of 0s and 1s, were able to be transformed into something closer to what humans can understand: alphanumeric symbols and eventually sounds, images, and videos. This was done in a way that allowed the computer to perform a number of tasks including the storage, transmission, display, and processing of a number of human-readable messages, as well as creating a number of its own cybertexts from human-programmed instructions. The computer therefore began as a machine agent for processing short tasks or instructions, and the Internet developed as a means for communicating short messages between machines. The many devices that we have today continue this tradition of receiving information or short pieces of text instructions. The BlackBerry is primarily used for receiving phone and email messages from other people, and personal computers are now used for a variety of business and entertainment purposes, but the interfaces reflect either a TV-oriented form for entertainment (hence the same square or rectangular box monitor) or the office environment (complete with desktop metaphors, folder icons, and organizational filing systems). Although there are e-book readers, and recent developments such as the Kindle make digital reading somewhat easier, the vast majority of reading takes place without special devices. Fictional works still have to fit into the current computer desktop, Web-browser, or application framework in order to have widespread use (just
as the print novel only requires publication in the standard, expected novel unless one needs a different format due to visual or other impairment).

As Terry Harpold notes when discussing the “upgrade path” or change in storage media over time, “When these documents can be converted to a more accessible format, this almost always results in changes of attributes of the original” (3). Changes in the conditions of reading can create “salient differences between how a work signified then and how it may signify now”:

Larger or more colorful screens will change visual attributes of the text; faster microprocessors will accelerate its responses, perhaps to the point of no longer being reliable (a common problem with legacy computer games); changes in the idioms of the GUI will influence our estimation and even our comprehension of older ones. Consequently, program traits that once made perfect sense in their context and programmers’ ingenuity in working within and against limitations of hardware and software may go unnoticed or seem perverse. (3)

The digital medium not only brings additional considerations when it comes to how readers understand a work, but also brings issues with the storage of digital texts and the preservation of their conditions of reading.

The forms that tend to work in the digital environment, then, are more modular, hierarchically organized, and able to work well with the computer’s peripherals such as the keyboard, mouse, and monitor. In fact, the hyperlink itself can owe much of its existence to the Apple/Xerox Graphical User Interface (GUI) that had users click with directional arrow keys or press the “enter” button (modelled after the common office typewriter) in order to delve deeper inside a hierarchical folder system, activate an application, or close a window. This structure
continued in the early days of the Web with pages modelled after the pages in a filing system. Many of these types of organizational or office print pages have, in fact, become obsolete because of how well they function in a digital environment. The office rolodex, office tube note systems, and punch cards are some examples.

Books that have been able to be transmuted into the digital environment tend to be organized as a series of smaller bits of information, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, and indexes, first moving to the digital medium as CD-ROMs and then to the Web. These types of texts tend to work well online not only because of the way in which they are hierarchically organized but also because they are primarily search-and-retrieve publications. These books have a different purpose compared with works of fiction that would be read for pleasure. The reader or user tends to have a particular knowledge or information retrieval goal, and the ability to search within a large book in digital format for particular information can make the resource much more effective. Readers approach fictional literature with a different goal. Fiction readers may have an idea of what they will find out in the work, or an idea of what type of experience or enjoyment they will gain from reading the work, what the subject is, or who the author is, but these readers are generally going to the work for an experience rather than a particular information retrieval goal (Toms et. al., 2004). Readers of longer-length works of fiction often expect an immersion or escape from other activities, which is facilitated by the fact that the work requires a longer period of time to receive its full experience. Short fiction allows readers to achieve a certain experiential goal in a shorter amount of time and can therefore be perused on the Web. The reader approaches these fictional works with certain aesthetic or experiential goals rather than information goals; the reader may be attempting to gain knowledge, but this knowledge may not be as immediately applicable or of the functional nature that one might find when approaching a non-fiction work. To discuss digital literature, then, one has to examine
what these notions mean, as discussed earlier—what is “literature”?; how is a reader’s “horizon of expectations” different when approaching a born-digital short story versus one that is published in print, and how do the digital paratexts, online communities, and other contexts affect the reading of a work.

I will return briefly to Luckhurst here because at the end of his article, he refers back to the form of the novel and refutes the predictions of its demise:

If hypertext fictions have yet to convince that they can grasp, immanently, the implications of digital technologies for cultural production, this can only be good news for the future of the novel. Always novel, intrinsically of the new, this is not a form likely to face demise in any immediate future, whatever the apocalyptic pronouncements made in its name. (805)

The novel will continue, but the novel as we know it may not exist even if the form survives the proliferation of digital writing. The novel will have to adapt in other ways—such as by creating even smaller chunks of text (or chapters, sections, and breaks)—if this is what the contemporary reader has become accustomed to reading. The novel may also be affected by focusing on different themes that reflect the culture in which it is written and marketed, as with other contemporary literary forms.

17 “The term ‘horizon of expectation’ (Hans Robert Jauss) designates an area of ‘collective’ assumptions, genre conventions and cultural ideologies shared by texts and readers. In retracing the work’s ‘horizon of expectation,’ reading can tease out the sociocultural contexts activated by a work, and participate in their reformulation. Similarly, by identifying his/her own expectations, a reader can begin to understand the assumptions, experiences, preconceptions that he/she brings to the process of reading” (Woodlief and Pope).
2.1.6 The Shift to Social Networks and Communities

The early (and ongoing) emphasis on the materiality of digital literature continues to shape the literature that exists today, although we are also seeing a shift in focus to the social networks and community of the text. This influence applies not only to digital literature, but to almost all forms of print and non-print publication (and print or digital combinations). Whereas in the past serial fiction might have only had publication options in various print venues, such as newspapers, literary magazines, and booklets, publishers of short fiction now have the option to move completely to digital publication if this is more cost-efficient and in demand by its readership. A genre’s publication history therefore affects not only its form but also its content.

Web 2.0 is the medium into which digital literature is now connected, which focuses less on its materiality and more on the web of connections or people who are now more literally part of the text. As Tabbi states,

It is often forgotten that Ted Nelson designed his initial Xanadu™ system (with its ever-present trademark symbol) not in order to preserve an archive but rather to select documents for present uses. It is true that he sought to make permanent the products of ‘thoughts and minds’ that themselves ‘do not last’ [(Nelson, ‘Computer Lib/Dream Machines’)]. (Tabbi 476)

As discussed earlier, digital media can render as less ephemeral the “products of ‘thoughts and minds’,” such as reader feedback and associations with other texts, but Tabbi emphasizes that it is the ability to create order or unity, or its “powers of selection,” that reflects its association with cognitive activity (476). This aid to retrieval, I believe, changes the paratexts associated with the text: they are no longer only what the reader associates with a certain work of fiction based on his or her own experiences, or the scholarly apparatus included with a text, but the reviews,
rankings, and even fan fiction written about a text. Even if hyperlinks are not included with the text itself, one only has to do a search related to the text and he or she will be presented with a number of documents, web pages, and other information related to that text. This retrieval was possible pre-Internet, but involved much more time on the part of the researcher.

Now these paratexts can be available with the text as it is being read, and they no longer need to be pre-determined or pre-selected by the editor. In this way, as Tabbi asserts as well, we are not witnessing the end of the book, but rather a return to some aspects of when print was not yet the dominant medium:

even if the inscription, storage, and dissemination of information increasingly happens in electronic writing spaces (a transformation that is by now well under way), and even if reading itself is done on screens rather than on the printed page, that will not mean the end of the book so much as a return to its beginnings, when print was not yet a dominant medium and when textual authority, even the identity of authors and the stability of the bound text, was not so firmly established. (Tabbi 471)

With fan fiction, we have issues of authority and legitimacy that were, perhaps, not as present when print lent itself to a stable author, although as noted by Adrian Johns, attributing characteristics to all instances of “print culture” can be problematic because they could vary by time period and context. The shift from orality to print moved stories out of their communal context and onto the individual author. With the existence of fiction in the digital medium, we have more paratexts available to us, many of which may not have the same scholarly authority (such as with Wikipedia) as they did with the scholarly apparatus traditionally associated with a text; and in general, it becomes harder to trace the original or legitimate versions of some texts.
Returning to Roger Luckhurst for a moment, the final note in his article is that perhaps literature is not the “best place to ponder the impacts of digital technology” (804): in other words, perhaps literature is not as well suited for recording the changes in our current moment in time as it was in the past for periods such as modernism. He states,

It is striking that literary culture has not produced a significant avant-garde response to this technology in the spirit of Modernist ones that stretched from Italian Futurist celebrations of mechanical speed to William Burrough’s cut-ups in the 1950s, a technique designed to frustrate the inhuman inefficiencies of cybernetics. The lack of a digital equivalent might say something about the much-debated fate of the avant-garde; it might say something about the ‘drastic decline of literary fiction’s cultural currency’. (Tabbi and Wutz qtd. in Luckhurst 804)

Other cultural forms, such as photography, might be “more profoundly affected by, and therefore necessarily more responsive to, digitisation”; the Internet might, in other words, “energise… some discourses more than others” (804). Some of these “discourses” may include political tracts and news media: “The lack of hierarchy in a flattened network, the difficulty of determining boundaries or authorising frameworks, and the dislocation of site from place more acutely effect discourses premised on truth-claims than any kind of fiction” (805). In other words, fiction may not be as affected by the change in traditional hierarchies and boundaries as non-fictional works. I would argue, however, that this change had yet to be seen when Luckhurst’s article was published in 2004: he may not have had the chance to view the changes effected by the proliferation of social networks on the Internet. Facebook, for example, really only began to proliferate in 2006. Since then, other social networks and writing sites have also flourished. If we view Web 2.0 as a medium in itself that can have an effect on both the form
and content of fiction (and not just non-fiction) by allowing further collaboration and further evolving notions of authorship and editing, we can see how the social Web has enabled a form of writing that may go beyond the formal fetishizing of early digital fiction.

2.2 Digital Short Fiction and Born-Digital Short Fiction

*Born digital* is defined as “An informal term for a work created from scratch in electronic form, for example, a hypermedia thesis or dissertation, or an electronic journal that has no print counterpart. Preservation dilemmas are posed by the rapid obsolescence of digital equipment and formats” (Reitz, *ODLIS*, “born digital”). To this definition, however, I would add those stories that cannot easily be converted to print or other non-digital formats. The distinction between digital and born-digital short fiction is important because there are often clear differences between the two forms.

Born-digital short fiction often cannot be converted to analog or print without losing some of its characteristics. However, fiction that has become digital after being scanned or otherwise digitised, or developed using software such as Microsoft Word and then turned into an html document, can much more easily be converted to analog or print, often by simply selecting the print option in a Web browser or by downloading and then printing the short fiction document. To give an example of the difference between born-digital and digital short fiction, the stories from the Centre for Digital Storytelling (CDS) can be examined. The CDS offers a definition of the digital story, although this definition can be problematic because, as noted in Chapter 1 when discussing genre distinctions and definitions of the short story, articulating a

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18 When not referring to works produced from inception in digital form, the term is also used to describe the generation of people born after 1984 who are digital natives or have grown up in a world that has always been surrounded by digital or online technology (*netlingo*, “digital native”).
definition of the digital short story (or the short story in general) can be restrictive in that it excludes and also overemphasizes particular characteristics and examples of the form. The definition of the digital short story from the Centre for Digital Storytelling works well for the types of stories included on its site, but cannot also encompass all types of digital short fiction, especially because it does not distinguish between digital and born-digital short fiction. They define the digital short story as “A short, first person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds” (“Center for Digital Storytelling”). This definition cannot encompass all works of digital short fiction because not all works of digital short fiction use video or combinations of recorded voice, still and moving images, and sounds such as music, nor are all digital short stories written in first person. This definition works well for CDS stories, however, because they all use the same format and software—Photoshop Elements and Final Cut Express—from being based on the digital storytelling “cookbook” developed by the center.

By having all the stories follow the same format and production technology and by having a set of instructions and similar techniques for all the stories, the CDS makes the creative process easier for writers new to creating born-digital stories. Because the design is already predetermined, however, the range of works that can be created using their cookbook is also restricted, although by relating the process of creating a born-digital short story to an already familiar process such as cooking food, the CDS offers a helpful guide for writers becoming acquainted with the digital medium:

In all communities, in all cultures, stories evolve from the culinary experience. Making media, like making a meal, requires guidance, learning from our friends through the sharing of recipes and from those who spend their professional lives in
the kitchen. We have helped over 10,000 people mine stories from their lives and personal media archives. Our cookbook shares our experience, some recipes and some humour to help you get started with your own storytelling experience. (“CDS: Digital Storytelling Cookbook”)

What the CDS has created, essentially, is a WYSIWYG for digital writers or storytellers, but, as with any WYSIWYG or preordained development process, it leaves little room for variation within the form. However, this may be what is needed for writers who are comfortable with the short story form as it has existed within print, which can be seen as following its own preordained development process linked to the codex or the magazine and other print serial formats.

The stories on the CDS site are organized according to the different themes of community, education, family, youth, health, identity, and place. The story that is highlighted, or which people first encounter after clicking on “stories” on the site, is called “Memories of a Political Prisoner from Worcester,” by Cecyl Esau. The story follows the same format as all others on the site: beneath the title and author’s name, there is a video box on the left side of the page and a biographical or descriptive information box on the right side of the page. The information box gives information written in first person on the date and place where the story was created, the subject of the story, and the author. Readers know that the story is autobiographical or at least semi-autobiographical because the writer says, “I am from a working class family in Worcester, in the Western Cape, Republic of South Africa. I am a project leader at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation for the schools’ and history project” (Esau). He also states that he chose to tell this story “To explore using this new technology in sharing a story about my own life. I hope viewers will understand how the stories one grows up with can impact
in profound and sometimes unforeseen ways the lives we lead” (Esau). He also comments on the process of writing or telling stories, saying that “Stories affirm storytellers and their experiences” (Esau). In response to the question of whether he thinks he has changed as a result of making or telling this story, the author responds, “I have realized a greater sense of appreciation for the opportunities that life has afforded me” (Esau). By having writers respond to these questions as part of providing context for the reader of the story, the CDS is also asking writers to comment on the form and the process of storytelling, something that does not often occur in other collections of the short story.

Esau’s story itself uses voice and image, rather than text, in order to tell the story. The description of the story provides a good summary of what it is about: “An intimate facet of the famed Robben Island prisoner release in South Africa is the subject of Cecyl's story, in which he shares an early memory of his mother's challenge to the repressive apartheid regime, details his own history of involvement in the struggle, and describes the moment of triumphant return from prison” (Esau). After clicking on the play icon in the video box, in the background there is humming of the Tanzanian national anthem, which is sung to the tune of the song “Oh My Darling Clementine.” The author narrates, “My father was a veteran of the second world war,” while images of his father appear in the background, similar to what one might see in a slideshow. This allows the reader to hear the author’s accent and see the black and white images of his father and mother, which may help to create a more intimate connection with the speaker.

This story is born digital in that it is ingrained in the digital media used to tell it. The digital storytelling cookbook offers instructions on how to create a script for the stories before they are constructed in audio and visual formats using Photoshop Elements and Adobe Director’s Cut, which makes the process of creating these stories more similar to what one might develop
for films. If the study of the short story is revolutionized by developments in the born-digital short story, it may be because of the shift from the relevance of the archived text and the performance of the story. In the case of stories from the CDS, like films, one cannot experience or assess them unless they are viewed in their archived, recorded performance. Plays, on the other hand, are intended to be performed multiple times by different directors and actors. Unlike with plays, however, we do not read screenplays of films as works of literature as we do with the text of plays. Incorporating born-digital short fiction into the study of English literature will, therefore, require a greater incorporation of non-textual forms of storytelling.

Another story from the CDS site, created in fall 2009 in Toronto, Ontario, by Ambar Sabah, also illustrates how the born-digital short story is tied to the digital medium in a way that is similar to how films and videos are tied to the format in which they are recorded. Even though films can be adapted to plays or books adapted to films, the film itself exists independently of its play or book adaptations. The story, called “My Life in Toronto,” begins similarly to Esau’s story but with a moving image of a fish within a background image of a school of fish. This is to illustrate the author’s description of “how lost she felt when she first arrived in Canada without her supportive and loving family” in Pakistan (Sabah). As with Esau’s story, we are able to hear the author telling her own story. Because English is a second language for many of the writers on the CDS site, the use of audio and video may make it easier for the writers to tell their stories. Although there is no text or script accompanying the story, the description of the story in the text box beside the video serves as a summary of how the story progresses: “In this story, Ambar shares how lost she felt when she first arrived in Canada without her supportive and loving

19 Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), for example, has had many film adaptations, television series adaptations, graphic novel adaptations, and other literary adaptations.
family. She is isolated in her home, alone all day as her husband works and goes to school, until she finds a new extended family at the Immigrant Women's Integration Project” (Sabah). In its ability to foster storytelling without a focus on language and text, the born-digital short story has been used by the Center for Digital Storytelling as a means of allowing people to express their experiences, who might not otherwise have access to traditional publishing methods.

These marginalized voices have been different depending on the period in history. Today, one could say that the marginalized voices that the born-digital short story through the CDS site allows to tell their stories are those voices that either lack proficiency in the English language or that are not associated with the institutions that would distribute their stories to a large audience. Other stories on the site deal with aspects of personal experience that may not, through traditional publishers, be considered something that would sell to a wider audience, such as “Reunion Story” by Cherlyn Boyce, which is a dedication to teachers and written to express appreciation for a group of people that normally may have received attention outside of the particular school that it is about; “Deep Water” by Cindy Lollar, which tells of “One daughter's emotional story of wading into the rising flood of information about her mother's stage III ovarian cancer diagnosis” (Lollar); personal experiences with “gang involvement, homelessness, and parental rejection” (Eric); and personal experiences with death (Castrenze). Often, first-person autobiographical stories such as those on the CDS site are not considered marketable to a large audience unless they are told by someone who is famous, and the Center for Digital Storytelling has recognized an opportunity to create born-digital stories by people whose stories might not be considered profitable for traditional publishers.

20 Autobiographies such as Bill Clinton’s My Life (2004) are examples of the way in which personal autobiographies by famous individuals will be taken on by publishers, whereas non-famous individuals, even though they may also have stories that may be relatable to a large audience, are often not considered.
Another site that uses the “cookbook” approach to creating born-digital short fiction is Andy Campbell’s Dreamingmethods.com, as discussed earlier in this chapter when describing the themes of contemporary fiction. Source code is available for download at labs.dreamingmethods.com, and the stories follow a similar format from being produced within Macromedia Flash. The site mostly showcases Campbell’s work, but he also includes the work of other born-digital fiction authors. Unlike the stories on the CDS site, however, Campbell’s stories incorporate text with images and audio into the story itself and rely on user interaction to progress the story, such as by panning around with the mouse or clicking on different images and text within the story.

In “The Flat,” for example, subtitled “Remnants of narratives left behind in an abandoned flat,” the user enters the flat (and enters the story). The story has the tone and setting of a typical gothic tale or ghost story, with creaking doors, a closed-in or claustrophobic atmosphere, dim lighting, and a sense of mystery (Kennedy & Gioia). Eerie music is playing in the background, and the house appears empty. Text appears—“You were right about me telling the truth”—and then disappears on a stairwell; a mist appears at the top of the stairwell, which compels the reader to click on it. The reader is brought to a hallway; text appears again. If the reader does not click on anything, the screen eventually floats off to blackness. Various clips of text appear as the reader navigates through different rooms, until finally the back door is reached and the reader is left with the option of ending the story or returning back to “the flat.” Seeing narrative as a sort of house that anchors the reader is an interesting concept in this story. The text itself leaves impressions, rather than a narrative, of the people who have lived in the flat. In this way, the story is something that is experienced rather than read, and the way in which the text floats and disappears ghost-like off the screen is perhaps commenting on the way in which text seems to appear and disappear when reading on the screen. The overall effect of the story is still
imparted to the reader—or an overall commentary on narratives, reading on the screen, and the structure of narratives—through the reader’s interpretation and experience of the story, rather than through a more traditional narrative structure.

To expand on our definition of born-digital short fiction, we can draw on Nick Montfort’s basic definition of what distinguishes a work as being digital, interactive, or non-interactive:

A digital work may consist only of data or it may be better understood as a program; furthermore, programs may be interactive or non-interactive, and those that are interactive may be for single users or multiple users. Independently, a digital work may use a single channel of output or it may provide a multimedia experience.

(Montfort 173)

Nick Montfort discusses how narrative is impacted by digital media, although with a focus mostly on interactive fiction. The computer “can be used to extend or demolish traditional narrative concepts in all sorts of ways, but its ability to combine narration and simulation has been particularly significant in digital art, electronic literature, and video games” (Montfort 172). It can therefore be difficult to define works of digital fiction as being art, literature, or a video game, since the medium facilitates a blending of different types of creative expression. Montfort continues by stating that

Some digital data can be quite expressive and interesting to consider as narrative. Interesting new examples include some Short Message Service (SMS) stories (which are written to fit the 160-character limit of cell-phone text messages) and textual Flash animations by Young-Hae Change Heavy Industries, including Dakota, which plays on Pound’s first and second cantos. (Montfort 174)
Although Montfort recognizes that there are new types of fiction being created in digital media, in particular very short works of fiction that could fit on a cellphone text message, he does not see the new works as anything new:

While these works relate to the material nature of digital technologies in particular ways, and while they fit interestingly into the contexts of digital communication, it is nevertheless important to notice that they do not use the computer’s processing abilities to do anything formally new: an SMS story is a very short textual story, and *Dakota* is a motion picture with a soundtrack, albeit one that is legible and easy to distribute. Studies of the material aspects of these works would have to consider their digital nature and their digital contexts, but pre-digital narrative theory does not need to be extended to explain anything about how they actually function. (Montfort 174)

In other words, Montfort refreshingly sees that a new set of theories does not need to be developed to incorporate digital texts into already-existing literary canons and the body of theory that already exists. We see much of the same interactions with texts that existed in print, now within the digital, and it is only with truly interactive texts that Montfort believes we need to use a different theoretical approach, as Jones also describes in the context of video games. Montfort also warns against trying to apply all aspects of reading print texts or interacting with other media to digital texts: “To pretend that *Ms. Pac-Man* is a novel or a motion picture, discussing only the text this system displays or the moving images it presents, would be to overlook important, fundamental aspects of this digital work. People do not appreciate *Ms. Pac-Man* simply as a reading or viewing experience” (Montfort 175). Steven Jones also asserted this point by situating the meaning of video games in the social activity rather than an object.
Montfort believes that computers and the Internet do not bring the ability to connect across countries and distant spaces, but rather the ability to make true interactivity part of the text: “film and TV narratives, not to mention stories told face-to-face, have long exploited multiple semiotic channels. What is innovative about the computer is its ability to define a complex, formal program, governed by rules and algorithms, and to allow a user’s interactions to influence the workings of this program” (Montfort 176). Narratives have often been able to transcend distance, but the ability to have a formal program with algorithms that can be influenced by a user’s interactions is fundamentally different than what was offered in print, and, as I mention in Chapter 1, perhaps closer to the oral roots of narrative. Montfort was also writing from before the time in which social networks proliferated, however, and he ends his chapter with a discussion of the ways in which the currently non-fiction forms of blogs, newsgroups, chatspaces, and messaging systems could eventually be used for the creation of fiction:

the Internet has afforded many new modes of communication. In this category are social systems that lack the simulated virtual environments discussed previously, but which still offer interesting new twists on communication. The weblog or blog, for instance, can be formally characterized as a reverse-chronologically-ordered set of postings on the Web, but it is typically a forum for one or more people to post texts and images dealing [sic] personal matters, or to link to other pages on the Web for purposes of critique or discussion. The blog is a nonfiction form, but just as Daniel Defoe took the nonfiction form of the travelogue and the nonfiction form of the journal and used these as the basis for two early English novels, *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Journal of the Plague Year*, some bloggers, such as Rob Wittig, are fictionalizing the form of the blog for novelistic purposes. Such projects, along with the SMS stories mentioned earlier, show that recent digital communications systems will
support not only personal and conversational stories but also more self-consciously literary sorts of narratives. (Montfort 185)

Montfort turns to early works by Defoe to show that many of the early works of fiction in print developed in forms that were originally used for non-fiction, with oral stories still circulating alongside the development of the print circulation of fictional stories. Indeed, we are seeing new forms of storytelling developing on the Web that may be more akin to the roots of story in the oral tale:

Since the coming of the Web, digital narratives have been deployed in fragments not just in hypertext poems and novels but also in location-aware systems (which use the Global Positioning System [GPS] or some other means to make the user’s physical location a factor), augmented reality games (which lace the network and parts of the “real world” with clues and narrative fragments), and various other pieces involving computation and animation. (Montfort 184-185)

Penguin’s digital fiction “The 21 Steps,” assessed later in this chapter, used the Google maps feature to propel the narrative, and other works of fiction on Penguin’s site used augmented reality games to tell the story as it was being released. A number of other stories, such as those present on the Dreaming Methods site, use a combination of computation and animation to tell the story. According to Montfort, many blogs and messaging systems currently being used for the dissemination of non-fiction could be used much more prolifically for the dissemination of fiction, as also noted by critics such as Laurie McNeill in “Brave New Genre, or Generic Colonialism? Debates Over Ancestry in Internet Diaries,” in which she assesses whether blog fiction and Internet diaries show a change in the genre. Indeed, we have seen a proliferation of blogs and messaging systems for the dissemination of fan fiction, which is another type of short
fiction that has found a niche in the social networks of the Web. Although fan fiction existed prior to the Web, many of my study participants described in Chapter 3 commented that it has been much easier to connect with other writers due to the Web. The social or communal aspects of storytelling are therefore more evident when stories are published or distributed on the Web.

2.2.1 Born-Digital Long Fiction

If there is an example of born-digital long fiction (rather than born-digital short fiction), it would be the video game. In *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Strategies* (2008), Steven Jones explores the way in which concepts from textual studies and book history—“authorial intention, textual variability and performance, the paratext, publishing history, and the social text—can shed light on video games as more than formal systems” (iii). Jones sees video games as “cultural forms of expression that are received as they are played, out in the world, where their meanings get made” (iii). Although Jones studies the video game rather than digital or born-digital fiction, many of the observations he makes about attempts to study games and categorize them into genres can be helpful when it comes to studying born-digital fiction. Although works of born-digital fiction are not video games, some works, as on the Dreaming Methods site, involve interaction to an extent that incorporates a degree of play on the part of the reader. Jones asserts that video games are “meaningful less as narrative or symbolic ‘texts’ to be interpreted than as complex forms for social activity” (2). In other words, it is the action or social activity that constitutes their meaning. For this reason, “video games must be understood as parts of complex social networks, and… meanings flow through video games, and are produced at their prompting by communities of players” (2). Because the interaction in stories such as “The Flat” is limited to an extent that goes beyond the rules and boundaries of the video game, they are different than video games and perhaps more similar to the early hypertext fiction produced in the 1990s. Narrative and storytelling are present in video games, but as Jones
notes, the story is constructed by the users and part of a social activity or experience rather than as texts: “The meaning(s) of video games are constructed and they are collaborative. They are *made* by social interactions of various kinds rather than *found* in the software and hardware objects themselves” (3). Born-digital works of short fiction such as on the CDS and Dreaming Methods sites are clearly not video games, although they do incorporate some levels of interactivity and are situated within social networks that are important in understanding the meaning of the story.

These social networks and “epitexts,” as Gérard Genette calls them (and which Steven Jones applies to the study of video games), are one component of the paratexts that provide the context for the story and thereby affect its reception (Jones 7). This is in addition to the “peritext,” or “texts that actually accompany the text in the same bound volume” (Jones 7). They are texts that are “at a level further outside the book, such as publicity, interviews, author’s letters” (Jones 7). One aspect of the epitext associated with works of digital short fiction is the community. Although extending the epitext of digital short fiction to include its social network may seem as if the concept is being stretched to include all content, thereby making it seem less useful, the nature of social networks today requires them to be considered as part of what accompanies the “text” at a level outside the text. Jones is drawing on Genette’s theories of the paratext to “trace the dimensions of the massive paratextual universe extending outward from the *Halo* game(s)” (Jones 7), rather than assessing just the paratexts associated with works of digital short fiction. In the next section, I assess the marketing and communities associated with digital short fiction as part of understanding these texts, especially when they are created by large publishing houses such as Penguin or Macmillan.
2.3 Short Fiction Communities

2.3.1 What is a Community?

A February 20, 2011 article in *The New York Times* called “Book Lovers Fear Dim Future For Notes in the Margins” discusses the importance of preserving reader feedback on a text and the threat of losing this information about a reader’s response to a text when dealing with digital documents. Some might argue, however, that marginalia or reader feedback is now more accessible and preservable than when it exists in print, especially if the print documents are in magazines or other more ephemeral print forms. The article describes marginalia Mark Twain had included in a volume titled “The Pen and the Book,” in which he had penciled “among other observations, a one-way argument with the author, Walter Besant, that ‘nothing could be stupider’ than using advertising to sell books as if they were ‘essential goods’ like ‘salt’ or ‘tobacco.’ On another page, Twain made some snide remarks about the big sums being paid to another author of his era, Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science” (Johnson). In his marginalia, Twain criticizes the idea of making fiction marketable. This interaction and commentary alongside a text are now viewable by many readers with the published text as it is recorded in the social network or community. This makes the community, and its ability to document and foster these exchanges within the social network itself, essential to the text.

A community is, broadly defined, a “body of individuals” (*OED*, “community”, II.), but it is something that can take on different sub-meanings according to the group being defined and its purpose. A community is “a body of people organized into a political, municipal, or social unity” (*OED*, “community”, II.7.), a “body of men living in the same locality” (*OED*, “community”, II. 7. b.), or “those members of a civil community, who have certain circumstances of nativity, religion, or pursuit, common to them, but not shared by those among
whom they live; as the British or Chinese community in a foreign city, the mercantile community elsewhere, the Roman Catholic community in a Protestant city, etc.” (OED, “community”, II. 7. c.). The term *community* therefore refers to either individuals organized in a common locality or geographical region, or people who share a common social interest, whether this interest centres around political, religious, or ethnic similarities. A community can also be people who just happen to have a shared interest in an activity such as writing or the fiction of a specific genre or author. With the more traditional definition of *community*, common interests and beliefs would often develop from being part of a shared geographical community because communities used to be more isolated. People of a shared region would often hold similar beliefs, customs, and interests, connecting the geographical sense of *community* with its other sense of being a group of people who share similar interests or beliefs. The shift from isolated communities to our globalized world has often severed this link between geographical *community* and *community* as a group of people sharing common interests.

Benedict Anderson (2006) describes all communities as “imagined communities”: why should people within a particular geographical area, for example, consider themselves a community, and how does one create boundaries in order to designate who or what is part of a community? According to Anderson, these boundaries develop from a shared consensus and are therefore considered imaginary or existing in the minds of various people, unless referring to the smallest village: “In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (6). When describing the nation, Anderson states, “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). Within any geographical community or, in other words, the nation, the province or state, the municipality, village, and even within each household, exist a variety of
interests and beliefs, many of which can be quite different from one another (one example would be a household in which the mother and father each vote for different political parties, and in which the young adult children also hold different political beliefs).

We have seen a shift even in the non-virtual world in which many members of a common geographic community would often hold common religious, political, and social interests—or at least appear this way—to a world in which members of a geographic area are no longer defined by common, communal interests. When we speak of communities today, we are often referring to people united through common interests; if we are speaking of people united by common beliefs, it is often as a smaller subset within a larger whole made up of many different communities, such as the many ethnic communities in Toronto. Community has, therefore, taken on a meaning that is quite different from its origin because it now refers to smaller pockets that exist within a larger, more heterogeneous whole. The term community centre, for example, may not have the same applicability today as it did even thirty or forty years ago: a geographic area is no longer necessarily one community but an amalgamation of a number of different communities of interest.

When it comes to the Web, we see the same shift in the definition of community, but to a much larger extreme. A community of people no longer has to be part of any geographic base: a web community can be a group of people united according to a common interest with absolutely no geographic connection besides being on the planet Earth. The rise of English as the lingua franca of this global community or global village has also made it much easier for people from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate with each other.

When it comes to common interests as in a literary community, then, we have seen a shift away from the organization of a community according to a regional or geographic perspective, or
a religious perspective, to organization around a common type of writing, an author, or a particular type of lifestyle. Even the definition of Canadian literature, for example, has become much more global in recent years, due to the shift in national identity from uni- or bi-cultural to one that is multicultural and global, as discussed in Chapter 1. How does one, for example, define something as Canadian literature or American literature if the author has been a resident of both countries for an equal portion of his or her life? When describing something as a literary community on the Web, the community is even less connected to geographic region or origin than in non-virtual communities, especially with the shift in the past twenty to thirty years.

It is difficult even to define Web communities with interests in literature or writing as a literary community. Studies of past literary communities, such as in Heather Murray’s *Come, Bright Improvement! The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, focus on the readers within the geographical community and the function of the societies as a social and intellectual forum that brought people from within a community together to discuss books, current events, and cultural affairs (Murray, 2002). As mentioned in Chapter 1, it is sometimes difficult even to define something as literary, and defining something as literary or non-literary on the Web can be even more problematic or subjective.

A literary community in the context of the Web is thus a community organized around a certain type of literature or social movement, but without the same direct consequences for reform in the immediate geographical community as one would have with face-to-face communities or literary societies.21 The title of Murray’s book reflects the ambitions of and

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21 However, from the time this thesis was started in 2006, to the final revisions in late 2011, there has been much greater employment of social networks on the Web to attempt to organize for real-world action, from flash mobs to protestor demonstrations, and future studies of Web communities may see a change in this attribute.
purpose for the formation of the literary societies of nineteenth-century Ontario: the societies reflected a need for social exchange and were a means to bring people together. The notion of “‘Improvement’ would rule the literary societies that were a prime mechanism for self- and mutual development in the settler cultures of nineteenth-century Canada” (Murray xi). In other words, the function of books in these reading communities was as a means for individual and social “improvement,” brought over from the mother country, but also as a means to achieve a sense of community and kinship.

There are book clubs today organized along similar lines: with the aim to read for the improvement of the individual and the larger society and to feel part of a social group. These book clubs also have websites and online discussion forums. My focus is on short fiction and the communities that surround digital short fiction, however, and in these communities the text—or, as in fan-fiction communities, the author and subject matter—is foregrounded, or given more importance, than the enlightenment of the reader (although a study of online book clubs would also be an important contribution to current reading communities and literacy). I am looking at the texts created by short fiction communities and the digital short fiction that often would never make it into a university or college classroom or an anthology of short fiction because it is either too ephemeral, not easily transmuted to print, or not what is normally considered as short fiction. Until we have more academic digital publication venues that can incorporate (and welcome) born-digital fiction, and contributions to a text from readers or audience members, the possibilities of the move to a more performance-based venue through the digital medium will not be fully realized.
2.3.2 Online Communities

The dynamics of production have usually involved a central core, the headquarters from which the film, the video, the latest paperback, the scholarly monograph, and other forms have originated, because it has often been only through these stations that works would be given life and validity in their respective spheres (Hesemeier, 2006). Online communities can be a panacea for the lack of (and sometimes discouragement of) real-life collective group identification and formation and power in our postmodern society. These communities may give individuals the impression that they are part of a group when in fact their participation could be viewed more as a way to assuage feelings of being isolated and lacking in a communal or cultural identity. Individuals are given rankings and relationships in these communities, to varying degrees, but still without the same real-world consequences (especially if the member is not using his or her real identity) unless the individuals also meet in person. Much of the pleasure in participating in these communities derives from being part of something that is like a game: the interpersonal politics may be more similar to what one would have in a videogame than in a face-to-face group. Jones also asserts this when discussing the community that forms part of the Halo videogame universe (76-82). The pleasurable side of participation in these communities is therefore rooted in the control one has over these virtual worlds, or these places that have relevance in the so-called real world only through indirect means.

The difference between the real and virtual in this context is not always registered by the individual, however, and can even overlap, especially as the boundaries between constructed, individual-controlled identities in a virtual environment and those that we live out in the non-virtual world become less clearly defined. Sherry Turkle, in Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet, discusses the ability of users or players in virtual worlds such as video games and Multi-User Domains (MUDs) to construct their own selves and restraints on social activity.
People may not have this control in the real world, which can make the Web environment alluring: “the self is constructed and the rules of social interaction are built, not received” (Turkle 10). On the Web, people can, at least to some extent, “become authors not only of text but of themselves, constructing new selves through social interaction” (Turkle 11). Thus, the individual is able to resist and play with rules and orders imposed by surveillance in the non-virtual world. But it is important to note that, such as in MUDs, these “selves are constituted in interaction with the machine” (Turkle 11), and the machine therefore sets up the boundaries or walls through which people are limited in their interaction with each other. Individuals are separated and segregated by the machine, with each user communicating through the confines of the computer. The form of the machine, or “substance,” as Malcolm McCullough calls it (194), therefore restricts our interaction to individualized nodes communicating within an organized, ordered network, in which one can form communities unthinkable in the non-Internet world. This can pacify yearnings one might have for control over one’s identity, social situation, or the people in one’s environment.

The Web can therefore be seen as providing an artificial yet real world in which to work against imposed identities by constructing one’s own identity as a form of resistance in an environment where masks may be put on and removed, in a process that evokes Foucault’s discussion of the festival: “A whole literary fiction of the festival grew up around the plague: suspended laws, lifted prohibitions, the frenzy of passing time, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a quite different truth to appear” (Foucault, 1995, 197). The Web artificially produces this environment of the festival and perhaps even replaces other “festival” activities by creating the illusion of being a place in which identities and rules from the everyday world are abandoned, in which imposed masks may be removed and new masks
created. In its segregation of the individual to mediated communication through the machine, the Internet has created a space in which the dream of the festival can be contained and realized all within the confines of the ordering and structuring machines through which we interact.

Part of the pleasure we have with our reflections or cultural productions in online communities is what Baudrillard and Jameson describe as the fascination with images, or the obsession with our own cultural productions and simulacra: not the physical original, but rather the representation and the productions from that representation, and our delight with our mirror image and our subsequent exhibition of that image. Jameson would describe this obsession with reflections as a general postmodern phenomenon, an “originality of the postmodernist space” (Jameson 80) that has manifested itself in not just information architectures (such as the Internet) but also in our construction of city spaces. This is all part of a larger process that leaves the individual unable to cognitively map his or her place in relation to the whole. In some contexts, the ability to post anonymous comments or make changes to a text through one’s username or web-profile as in a wiki also allows one to judge and alter another’s work without the subject being able to judge, make comments back, or put a reviewer’s comments into the context of the reviewer’s real life. In some ways, perhaps, communication on the Web is like driving, replete with its road rage drivers or those lashing out in their communication via the Web due to their inability to express frustration or negative behaviour in face-to-face communication.

One might say that this ability to add one’s voice to a larger conversation makes Internet writing more democratic or open, but Roger Luckhurst also questions this claim:

It remains an unexamined conviction of digital literature and its advocates that participatory openness, the merging of the roles of writer and reader, is the only proper destination for literature…. I am suspicious of these appeals for different
reasons: they can risk reviving a pre-critical model of the expressivist subject, and in so doing, they dismiss a raft of other, complex modes of engagement with cultural forms as somehow ‘passive’. They also coexist uneasily with political claims about the digital revival of participatory democracy just when the electoral history of the late twentieth century demonstrates a markedly growing democratic deficit. A much more carefully situated reading of the value and purposes of participatory literature needs to be developed. (801)

In other words, claims that the digital medium allows a more “democratic” engagement by people is a somewhat exaggerated claim, or perhaps the democratic participation that people appear to be engaged in is actually a panacea—something that makes people feel that they are having an influence, when in fact they are not. This may correlate to less democratic participation in the non-virtual world (as evidenced in decreased voter turnout or overall civic engagement). If the Internet allows participation that appears to bypass the traditional control structures, it is allowing participation that has less of a direct, real-world impact than other forms of democratic participation. Although there are many ways in which activities on the Web can be seen as having a direct, real-world impact—for example, photos and other information posted on social networking sites which are subsequently viewed by an applicant’s potential employer—in situations where one can remain anonymous, the Web can be a place where people can engage in activities that they would not be able to with their real-world identities, as mentioned by some participants in my study in Chapter 3.

2.3.3 Fan Fiction Communities

Fan fiction communities are an important type of community associated with digital short fiction, and although fan fiction has fared well in the Web 2.0 social networking
environment, it still remains on the periphery of academic discussion, in particular in book
history, which studies the context of texts and the processes of their development. Ways to
incorporate fan fiction into academic discussions have been proposed, however, by critics such
as Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington. In the introduction to Fandom:
Identities and Communities in a Mediated World, they discuss the ways in which the study of fan
fiction can be incorporated into academic disciplines:

Within this tradition, which spanned from Fiske to Henry Jenkins’s (1992) canonical
Textual Poachers, fandom was automatically more than the mere act of being a fan of
something: it was a collective strategy, a communal effort to form interpretive
communities that in their subcultural cohesion evaded the preferred and intended
meanings of the ‘power bloc’ represented by popular media. Fan studies therefore
constituted a purposeful political intervention that sided with the tactics of fan
audiences in their evasion of dominant ideologies, and that set out to rigorously
defend fan communities against their ridicule in the mass media and by non fans.
(Gray et. al. 2)

In other words, fan fiction is associated with a power struggle against the centres of power and,
ence, participation in these communities can be politically motivated. To study fan fiction was
also a subversive action against the dominant canons and other more traditional works. One
might even go so far as to say that as pornography initially drove the Internet, fan fiction initially
drove the production of short fiction on the Internet. Much of the work being written on the
Internet by amateur writers is in the form of fan fiction (rather than hypertext fiction or other
experimental forms primarily driven by academics, as discussed earlier in this chapter).
Although keeping fan fiction outside of the realm of literary studies may have helped to limit the extent to which it is constructed or influenced by academics, other critics have suggested ways to further incorporate the study of fan fiction in academia. Busse and Hellekson in their introduction to *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* state,

As fan academics, we inhabit a fluid space that needs to be continuously revised and reconsidered, where new influences, both internal and external, change not only the object of study, but also our theoretical and methodological framework. Like the fantext, with its complementary and contradictory readings of the source text, the academic text seeking to describe and understand fandom also creates a work in progress as it attempts a larger understanding of fan culture. (7)

As Busse and Hellekson note, in an academic discipline in which the contexts surrounding the object of study can change very quickly, the discipline needs to remain open to fluctuations in how the object of study is perceived. Part of what studies of fan fiction attempt to do is to understand the audience, or why mostly women write fan fiction and, in particular, slash fan fiction (Busse & Hellekson 17). Fan fiction studies also try to understand the complex relationship between producers and audiences (Busse & Hellekson 22), in addition to how fans engage with the source material.

As discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of responses from writers of digital short fiction, including fan fiction, Bruns examines some of the characteristics of fan fiction communities. He describes their principles as “open participation, communal evaluation”; “fluid hierarchy, *Ad Hoc* meritocracy”; “unfinished artefacts, continuing process”; and “common property, individual rewards” (232). Bruns points out that the sense of community in itself is something that is provided to writers in fan fiction sites: “The communities sustaining fan fiction provide in the
first place simply the sense of community itself: an environment in which the individual writers
of fan fiction can share their own works and receive feedback from fellow enthusiasts” (Bruns
232). Many of these communities have begun to facilitate more collaboration:

In addition to providing such environments for the exchange, collection, and
communal evaluation of individually produced content, however, a number of fan
fiction sites and communities have also begun to move further beyond individual
authorship: they offer the means, for example, of presenting fictional works-in-
progress for communal evaluation, and even for directly collaborative authoring
projects. (Bruns 233)

Many of Bruns’s observations on fan-fiction communities were also reflected in participants’
responses to my questions about their involvement in online communities. These sites often
function as writing resource sites or online workshops that perhaps replace face-to-face groups in
which writers might have participated if they were not part of an online community.

Busse and Hellekson state that recent fan fiction studies have shifted from a focus on the
community to the psychological motivations of the individual, but many of the social networking
effects of Web 2.0 also may not have been evident when their volume was published in 2006.
Their observations, if made a few years later, may have been somewhat different:

we end with a focus on new technologies because they continually interact with and
alter the dynamic of the community itself: the software that permits the blog space is
co-opted by fandom and used to generate new texts in new ways, and this in turn
results in an expansion of fannish behavior. (31)
Just as fans connect in different ways and across greater distances with the move to digital fan fiction communities, so developments in social networking technologies can affect the types of fan fiction and level of connection among members in a community.

Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington also situate the current study of fan fiction into the larger historical context, or the changes that have occurred over a number of years:

the public recognition and evaluation of the practice of being a fan has itself profoundly changed over the past several decades. As we have moved from an era of broadcasting to one of narrowcasting, a process fuelled by the deregulation of media markets and reflected in the rise of new media technologies, the fan as a specialized yet dedicated consumer has become a centerpiece of media industries’ marketing strategies…. Rather than ridiculed, fan audiences are now wooed and championed by cultural industries, at least as long as their activities do not divert from principles of capitalist exchange and recognize industries’ legal ownership of the object of fandom.

(Gray et. al. 4)

Indeed, we have seen this championing of fans by the cultural industries, in particular by book and magazine publishers who are now attempting to reach out to potential fans of their texts by creating digital short fiction equivalents of their books or by undertaking experiments in digital fiction publishing. As emphasized by Jeremy Ettingshausen of Penguin, the move to digital fiction has in large part been impelled by the marketing division of the publishing house (Ettingshausen, “Stories and Games”).

The move of fan fiction to the Internet has also produced a change in fan fiction:
as being a fan has become an ever more common mode of cultural consumption, …
approaches based on a model of fans as tightly organized participants in fan- and
subcultures did not match the self-description and experience of many audience
members who describe themselves as fans (see Sandvoss 2005a). When Jenkins
wrote Textual Poachers (1992), fan communities were often relegated to conventions
and fanzines. Today, with many such communities’ migration to the Internet, the
thousands of fan discussion groups, web sites, and mailing lists populating the Web
are only eclipsed in presence by pornography (which, of course, has its own thriving
fan base). And far from solely occupying their own segregated realms of cyberspace
for each fan object, many fans also congregate at sites for genre fandom or at hubs
such as Television without Pity and Ain’t It Cool News. Off the web, too, magazine
stands buckle under the weight of pages dedicated to celebrities, sports, cinephilia,
music, and multiple fan objects. (Gray et. al. 7)

The development of fan fiction is related to a phenomenon that has taken place in postmodern
society in general, or at least as reflected in our culture industries, as discussed earlier in this
chapter. Perhaps fan fiction is therefore another reflection of our current postmodern cultural
moment, with a displacement of identity and association based not on traditional ties but rather
on the idealized material object, whether that object relates to a particular text, person, film, or
other object of fandom.

Fan fiction also raises questions about the fixity of texts and authors. The literary theory
tradition from which our study of texts comes is centred on the text; when this shifts to fan
studies, “the task of defining the text has been rather more complex” (Sandvoss 21). Part of this
difficulty is based in the change in format that occurs in the digital medium:
while we cannot separate content from meaning we can observe how meaning changes in different forms of communication. If we set the same utterance or textual fragment into different contexts, its meaning, or at least its possible meanings, change…. Our observation that texts change meaning through their form, in conjunction with Ricoeur’s assessment of the changing role of authorial intent in written texts, points to two important differences between fan texts and literary texts. First, in studying media audiences, we are confronted with a variety of different textual forms around which fandom evolves: alongside written texts, these include audio and sound, visual texts, audiovisual texts, and hypertexts. (Sandvoss 21-22)

Sandvoss’s assessment of digital texts acknowledges the importance of incorporating the context of a text into its study. And in order to incorporate fan fiction texts into the study of literary short fiction, we thus need to expand our definition of what qualifies as a story, as literature, and as fiction, as discussed in Chapter 1. Traditional textual boundaries are blurred because of the paratexts present as part of the “field of gravity” of the text:

The fan text is thus constituted through a multiplicity of textual elements; it is by definition intertextual and formed between and across texts as defined at the point of production. The single ‘episodes’ that fans patch together to form a fan text are usefully described by Gray, drawing on Genette, as ‘paratext’ that ‘infringes upon the text, and invades its meaning-making process’ (2006: 36).…. What follows is a radically different conceptualization of ‘texts’ than in literary theory. Individual texts at the point of production are part of a wider web of textual occurrences and the meanings derived from them. These textual elements are read in the context of other texts. (Sandvoss 23)
This change in the boundaries of texts affects how the reader constructs different meanings: “different paratexts... come into play for different fan groups” (Sandvoss 24). The text is therefore no longer limited to the original text, or the “urtext” as Sandvoss calls it, but, rather, is constituted through its paratexts. In the case of fan fiction, these paratexts are comprised of not only the knowledge and background of each fan or reader, but also the texts available in the same form of the original text (alongside the original, changing the meaning of the original, and changing any possible archived text). The term paratext, however, is not limited to discussions about the digital medium, and indeed theorists such as Genette have stated that texts are constituted by their paratexts, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The paratexts become an even more essential part of the text when in digital media, however. The community now forms part of the text, at least in a way that is less ephemeral than in the print or oral traditions of storytelling.

2.3.4 Digital Paratexts and the Community of the Text

This shift to the performance of the text in the digital medium is also connected to the social networks and communities of the Web. In this sense, one can think of digital paratexts as being part of the community of the text. Community discussion around a text occurs not just in forums for writing, but in a variety of online discussions such as blogs, online magazines or newspapers, and website feedback boxes. If one wants to find out information about an author or a text, one can find a large amount of reader feedback through any search engine: informal blog discussions are available alongside the more formally published reviews and the websites in which the text can be purchased. These sites in which the text is discussed all form part of the paratexts of the work. In other words, even for print texts, we have a digital online community that forms part of the extended network of that text. From these blog entries, responses to newspaper reviews, and responses to online articles, we can see the response of the larger reader.
community to these texts and to the reviews of these texts. The more formal or traditional methods of publishing reviews of a work, even in online academic journals, tend not to allow this type of feedback on the part of the reader simply because they do not have a text box and forum at the bottom of the review allowing comment from other viewers of the review, or they do not have blogs discussing the progress of a work. Now there is an entire network of reader feedback connected to a text and readily available, sometimes taking on its own debate in various threads and leading readers to other topics connected to the text being discussed. This can also contribute to the shape and content of the story itself.

Any text, thing, or phenomenon can have an online discussion connected with it, and works of literature are not removed from this: even a lack of discussion of a text says something about it. These discussions of a work of literature should be taken into account when studying a text; they are part of what makes a text come to fruition in the moment in which it is being read, and although some of these more informal discussions may have been lost as ephemera before the Web, we now have them documented in writing, albeit with their own set of archival limitations.

To describe these texts and their communities, then, we have to look beyond the text itself. Similar to the way in which an individual short story changes when removed from its collection, as discussed in Chapter 1, some digital literary works exist as part of the medium and the paratexts surrounding it, such as the website in which an author showcases his or her work and the works of others. In these websites, authors will often state their own philosophy and purpose for the work. Other factors also include the publisher’s site, which often contains an explanation of the experimental nature of the work and the collaborative process necessary for its creation, and the marketing or customer reviews and other aspects of the production and promotion of a work. These works of digital literature belong in the social networks in which
they are published. An examination of some contemporary fiction experiments by publishers such as Penguin will demonstrate the way in which these works are connected to the community in which they are created or published.

2.4 Contemporary Fiction Experiments and Projects

Penguin’s *We Tell Stories* project is an experiment in digital fiction and Web 2.0 by the giant print fiction publisher. Rather than approaching known digital fiction writers or academics involved in new media, the company approached Six to Start, a “leading cross-platform entertainment and ARG (alternate reality game) production company” that “create[s] unique entertainment experiences that combine great storytelling with cutting-edge gameplay and immersion” (“Six to Start”). Many of the producers of digital stories are, in fact, members of game and media design companies. *Dreaming Methods*, as mentioned earlier, is a site created by the web artist and digital literature author Andy Campbell, which also showcases works by other digital literature authors:

Dreaming Methods is the creative showcase website of One to One Productions, a media/arts organisation run by directors Andy Campbell and Judi Alston. Although One to One Productions is a limited company and is well known for producing films and websites, Dreaming Methods projects are largely created in spare time out of a passion for digital writing and without financial backing. (Campbell and Alston, “Frequently Asked Questions”)

Although many of the works on the Dreaming Methods site are created individually by author Andy Campbell, rather than as part of a collaborative project, many other digital literature works are produced through collaboration between a media design company and an author, as can be seen in some of the stories in Penguin’s *We Tell Stories* project.
The title of Penguin’s digital fiction project is itself an indication of the collaborative and interactive nature of this type of story project, and it shows a shift in focus from the author to the publisher or producer of the story. “We” refers to the publisher, but also the author and the media company with its graphic designers and other employees. “Tell” indicates the shift from the publisher as producer of text, to now relating to the process of telling or performing the story. And “Stories” highlights the narrative or the story—the purpose of producing the book or the anthology—as the book or author had often been marketed more than the story itself and the collaborative process used to produce it. The title is in many ways showing a shift from a previous time—the time of “This Company Prints Books”—to a time in which the producer is again connected to the telling of the story itself. Some of the stories within Penguin’s project highlight this collaborative aspect especially well.

2.4.1 “The Former General”

One of the producers of the story “The (Former) General,” Adrian Hon, wrote a blog entry about the collaboration that took place in its production. He states that “right at the start of development for We Tell Stories, Jeremy (from Penguin) expressed a strong interest in doing a Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA)-style story” (“Creating ‘The (Former) General’”). Hon states that “I agreed to do a CYOA, but only if we could do something different. After a few hours of brainstorming with James Wallis, we came up with the architecture that you can see in The (Former) General.” The idea for the story originally began with one of the people working on the project at Penguin, then was shaped by Hon, the “Chief Creative Officer” at Six to Start, who would do a CYOA-style story only if it could be done in a somewhat different way, and then he and the co-founder of Six to Start came up with the “story architecture,” a term that was
itself suggested by another person\textsuperscript{22}. In the case of this story, the designers or developers first came up with the “story architecture” before they selected an author and story. In this way, the genesis of the story was reversed from the usual origin of idea-product-publisher. The process appears similar to one that would be used for developing a software application:

In the space of a day or two, our front-end ace Andrew Hayward had coded up a prototype, which I was hugely impressed by, and Ben Burry was hard at work on the backend. The question now was what sort of author and story we should pick. In a remarkable coincidence, around that time Mohsin Hamid had mentioned to someone at Penguin that he wanted to write a CYOA. Clearly this was meant to be. We met up for lunch and discussed story ideas. The fact that Mohsin managed not only to understand the story architecture but also come up with some really fantastic ideas on the spot, convinced me that this one [sic] going to be one of the best stories in the project. I hope we have the chance to tell the other stories he came up with. (Hon, “Creating ‘The (Former) General’”)

Even from this brief description of the process of creating this story, we can see a shift to the production processes, “producers,” designers, and editors as being a part of the text that is created. This is a major shift in acknowledging the importance of the processes that are part of a work of fiction. It is something that is not usually part of the final product of print texts, even though printed books require a number of decisions on the part of the different people required to produce the physical book that contains the story created by the author. But these aspects of the

\textsuperscript{22} Hon describes the story architecture as “a term suggested by Nina Rastogi, who mentioned it when I was struggling to describe exactly what it was that I did for this project. The stories aren’t games, so I didn’t do \textit{game design}, but they aren’t ‘just’ stories either; they each have a unique design. Or architecture. It works for now, anyway” (Hon, “Creating ‘The (Former) General’”).
story—the cover picture for a collection of short stories, and the physical form of the book itself—are often not considered as part of the actual story or work, and can change from edition to edition, even though book cover designers have received recognition for their work through various awards and can be known for their individual styles. In the case of “The Former General,” the producers found an author after the design was already set up, not the other way around. With most print works of literature, the physical format is merely its distribution method. With some works of born-digital literature, however, as seen with “The Former General,” this process is reversed—the design is first conceived, and then a story is created that will fit within it. This perhaps makes these works more like commercial fiction than literature, although there are certainly great works of literature that have been written even when the author has a set notion of the form and structure in which it will be published. And although much collaboration does take place to get the printed work of fiction to its reader, such as through an editor and graphic designers for books and magazines, these contributors are still not considered as part of the creators of the work. In this way, the producers of some works of digital fiction are attributed in much the same way as the author of a printed work of literature.

2.4.2 “The 21 Steps”

The first story published as part of Penguin’s We Tell Stories, called “The 21 Steps,” is told by following the story as it unfolds across a map of the world using Google Maps. The author, Charles Cumming, has used the Google Map information bubbles to tell the story, which progresses along different locations on the map of London as it follows the narrator. Along the left side of the map, there are links to the different “Chapters” of the story, which the reader can click on to progress forward or back if wanting to jump chapters rather than follow the narrative within each section. Because the story is a type of detective fiction, with information revealed to the narrator (and reader) in stages, it works well in this format, with pieces of the puzzle revealed
to the reader as the story progresses. The story also follows a traditionally linear narrative structure, with the reader clicking on the next page or clicking to go to the next chapter; there are no alternate endings or different story paths that the reader can take, unlike the CYOA structure of “The (Former) General.” The map as a device to propel the narrative (or to show the narrative propelling through the physical space in which it takes place) may also work well because the story is about a trip that the narrator takes. Similar to the way in which people post comments on photos that are uploaded to social networking sites, or explain details of a trip they have taken on various trip journal blogs in which users can create a diary-like account of their trip, this story uses a travel literature narrative structure by telling the story as it progresses through time to different places on the map.23

“The 21 Steps” is inspired by John Buchan’s *The 39 Steps* (1915), by one of the first authors of the adventure thriller genre. Penguin has included links to its older, classic texts such as *The 39 Steps* alongside the stories of *We Tell Stories*, with an additional link that says “Buy ‘The 39-Steps’”. In this way, Penguin has made the digital fiction from its *We Tell Stories* project a form of advertising for its print texts. As can be seen by looking at other works of digital short fiction, this advertising has become part of what one expects on the Web (most Web pages contain some sort of advertising), and so of course digital literature is also affected by advertising. The marketing and promotion of a work of digital short fiction, and its link to social networks, are in many ways as much a part of the story as its design and structure. In the case of the stories on Penguin’s *We Tell Stories* project, their very existence may be from Penguin’s motivation to harness the advertising potential of the Web for the longer-length works of print

23 The journey as narrative framing device has also worked well for transitional media texts from oral to print, as in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales.*
fiction that they already publish. Even though larger texts have not often been preferred in the
digital medium, publishers have realised that shorter digital stories can be used to market their
larger, print texts such as novels. The digital short fiction published in their *We Tell Stories*
project is shorter and more suitable for the digital medium; rather than posting excerpts of their
print texts, the digital short fiction that is “inspired by” (or advertising for) the longer printed
texts is much more likely to catch the Web surfer’s interest. This changed purpose of the story
affects its content and style. Although these stories can be analyzed for their uniqueness and
their own storylines, it is important to study them within the publisher’s site and with their
purpose as advertising for Penguin’s print texts, since each story is meant to be inspired by one
of the print texts that Penguin publishes. Like “The 21 Steps,” “The (Former) General” digital
short story links to *Tales from the 1001 Nights* and provides information about how the print text
can be purchased through Penguin’s site.

One can also see the shift to the story as performance in “The 21 Steps” in the way in
which the credits appear at the end of the story, which is similar to the way in which credits
appear at the end of a film. Charles Cumming had already published spy thrillers with Penguin
and therefore already had a name for himself as a print author; he is listed first in the credits at
the end of “The 21 Steps”:

Written by *Charles Cumming*

Designed by *Six to Start*

With thanks to Jeremy Ettinghausen at Penguin, and apologies to John Buchan.

(Cumming)
According to an interview of Charles Cumming, Penguin approached Cumming about using *The 39 Steps* to create a work of digital literature inspired by it, or “to explore new ways of telling stories online, using a variety of different platforms” (Black, “Charles Cumming: The 21 Steps”).

The process through which “The 21 Steps” was created was similar to the collaborative process used to create “The (Former) General”:

It was written very much in conjunction with the game designers, Six To Start. The process was collaborative from the word go. I would write a few short chapters and they would say: ‘Can you move the action outside?’ or ‘Is it possible to build a visual clue into this section which will pay off later?’ They also came up with the idea of having Rick run over the roof of Waverley Station because they knew that it would look good on the map. I've likened it to writing a screenplay, where producers and script editors and directors all have a say in the structure of a script. With novel writing you're more or less left to your own devices. (Black, “Charles Cumming: The 21 Steps”)

The author, who has previously written novels for print publication, relates the process of writing “The 21 Steps” to writing a screenplay, which again highlights not only the collaborative aspect of these stories, but also the way in which they are a production and performance.

One of the producers of “The 21 Steps,” Adrian Hon, also described the collaborative process that created it, and how the game design company began simply by asking the author to “bake movement in” to the story, again using a cooking reference like the creators of digital short stories on the Center for Digital Storytelling site (Hon, qtd. in Carless). The producers eventually realised that the story had to be changed to incorporate even more action into the plot:
“it wasn't enough to have the protagonist walking and driving and flying around the place, they had to do it all the time” (Hon, qtd. in Carless). This is sometimes part of the difficulty in creating born-digital short fiction: because it may require more interactivity or audio and visual elements to hold the reader’s interest, it can be difficult to stick to creating a work of digital literature rather than a game in which action or the social activity would take over the narrative. Parts of the story in which the protagonist was staying in the same room had to be changed to hold the reader’s interest by working in the Google Maps framework: “Early drafts of the story saw the protagonist having a very tense discussion for a couple of chapters - riveting stuff - but it was all in one room. Luckily we had a great relationship with Charles and we worked together to incorporate more movement, or references to other locations, in every chapter” (Hon, qtd. in Carless). The fact that the story was being written for the digital medium therefore affected both the content of the story and the setting in which the story takes place.

Hon also commented that the collaborative process was necessary—none of the authors was “particularly tech-savvy”—but he states that in any case the technical abilities of the authors only help them up to a certain point: “From my point of view, I can teach an author about technology and interaction, but I can't teach someone how to write” (Hon, qtd. in Carless). With born-digital short fiction, there is no longer a need for an author to be in charge of all aspects of the pre-production of a work, or all the aspects before the work is submitted for publication. With many works of digital short fiction, the producer or publisher is involved in its initial production, as also seen with the CDS stories, and the producer can bring expertise about the medium that can help the author to create a story that will be more successful on the Web. And as Adrian Hon comments, the production of the story also causes the producers, authors, and readers, to think about the reading experience and form of the text rather than just the story itself:
What the Google Maps story does is force us to think about the reader experience. While they might not realize it, authors simply don't have to think about this when it comes to books, since they already implicitly know the 'design' of books - it's words on page, divided up into chapters, and you can flick back and forth pages to look at the 'story history', and bookmark pages to keep your place. The design of books is so great that it hasn't changed for hundreds of years, and so we just don't think about it any more. (Hon, qtd. in Carless)

Although Hon makes some assumptions about the unchanging design of the codex over hundreds of years, he notes that it is the unique distribution medium of the Web that requires authors and producers to be aware of its form, from when the story is first conceived to when it is delivered to the reader. We are being brought back to an awareness of the production of the story.

Cumming also reflects on how the digital stories were, in large part, meant to be advertising for Penguin’s print texts: on *The 39 Steps*, Cumming says, “It's one of their most popular 'classic' titles and I think they were keen to introduce it, albeit indirectly, to a new audience” (Black). Penguin was hoping to reach out to a younger, Web generation audience by creating a digital story based on one of its well-known print titles. Advertising, one of the backbones of the Web, is in this way also driving the creation of these new works of born-digital fiction. Dan Hon of Six-to-Start does note, however, that advertising was not the only aspect driving the project: “‘We weren’t interested in this as only a marketing project,’ explains Six to Start CEO Dan Hon. ‘We wanted to experiment and see if we could genuinely break new ground online’” (Willis). Although marketing may have been one of Penguin’s main interests in the project, the ARG company was also interested in seeing what kinds of productions could be
made and what would work, although one might wonder if this is only a statement made to make the project sound as if it has a higher purpose than to market Penguin’s print texts.

2.4.3 “Slice”: The Story Built on Social Networks

“Slice,” the third story on Penguin’s *We Tell Stories* project, is a story of a girl who moves from the U.S. to London with her parents, told through the perspective of the girl and her parents in social networking and blog sites like LiveJournal, Wordpress, Twitter, and Flickr. The story was told or performed over four days (March 25-28, 2008), and readers can read the story by going to archived blog entries. When the story was being performed, readers could email the characters and follow them through text messages on Twitter. Although the story has lost some of its effect when being read in its archived form, it is an interesting experiment by its author Toby Litt. Similar to Cumming’s “The 21 Steps,” its character has to be moving around quite a bit in order to have the real-time events (or the updates from the character and her parents) hold the reader’s interest. This does, however, serve to reflect on our own use of social networking sites such as Facebook and the constant status updates that are compiled on one’s profile. Through this story, Toby Litt pointed out that one could come up with the story of an event in one’s life through these types of social networking tools, especially as more people connect to social networking sites through Blackberrys, iPhones, and other mobile devices. As with many other experiments with storytelling in the digital medium, however, such as the hypertext works discussed earlier in this chapter, this story may be more valuable for its pointing out of the potential of the medium rather than for the story itself. It is metafictional by highlighting how we create stories out of our daily lives through our posts on social networking sites that, when pieced together, create a narrative.
2.4.4 “Your Place and Mine”: Performed Blog Fiction

“Your Place and Mine” is a story that was written or performed live during the week of April 7-11, 2008 at 6:30 pm each evening, and it is currently available in its archived form, which appears much like a blog entry. To receive the full effect of the story, one would have had to read it as it was being released during the week of April 7-11, 2008. The way in which the story appears archived, however, shows how we have become accustomed to the non-performed text. Readers feel that their experience is missing something when they access this story in its archived form, because they are no longer able to read the story as it is being performed (unless the authors chose to write it again, live, but if it was the same story then it would not have the same effect). Perhaps, like a play, the story could be rewritten but changed slightly, but the authors have not chosen to do this. Readers of a short story that is not born digital may not feel that they are missing the performance of the text, but stories such as “Your Place and Mine” show what is lost when the text becomes archived rather than performed live.

2.4.5 “Fairy Tales” and “Hard Times”: Early Digital Short Fiction Created after Web 2.0

“Fairy Tales,” another story in the Penguin digital fiction experiment, shows the potential for digital storytelling for children, but the story does not go far beyond early hypertext works of the 1990s. The story is “created” by the reader, within the pre-determined input allowed by the creators, because the reader can input the names of a couple of the characters and write an alternate epilogue for the story. This interactivity and user or reader-inputted information applies only to certain pre-defined parts of the story, and although the user input changes some of the names, it does not largely alter the story itself.
The sixth story on the Penguin *We Tell Stories* site is “Hard Times,” written by Matt Mason and designed by Nicholas Felton, but this story is composed of pages that could just as easily have been composed in a print graphic novel. The story uses statistics represented with graphics and text on the right side of the page to illustrate statements on the left side of the page, which comment on the way in which people are affected by digital culture: “Some physical things don’t matter the way they once did” (Mason and Felton). As some reviewers have noted, however, of all the stories on the Penguin project site, “Hard Times” is “perhaps the least reliant on its web-based delivery—in fact, it would be beautiful as a printed object—but reflects new modes of writing and design that are definitely inflected by our immersion in a networked milieu” (Willis). This story is a good example of a story that exists as digital short fiction but that does not exhibit the properties of born-digital short fiction. It can easily be turned into print and even seems to be designed for printing, like an image file created for a print brochure within digital software. One can actually choose to download and print a PDF of the “presentation,” as it is called, under the images of the story on the site. “Hard Times” could have been printed as a pamphlet, but has more potential for a wider and more economical distribution through the Web, through the creation of buzz and the ability to link directly to it. Because this story incorporates more visual elements in the digital medium, like some stories discussed earlier, “Hard Times” shows how it becomes difficult to classify digital literature with distinctions such as “art,” “literature,” “multimedia,” “videogames,” “film,” and “audiobook.”

2.4.6 “Alice in Storyland”: Alternate Reality Game

The seventh, hidden story from Penguin’s *We Tell Stories* site was a reworking of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which “took place in real time during the weeks of We Tell Stories and was written across blogs, phone messages, fake corporate websites, emails, classified ads and a live-blog finale” (“We Tell Stories – Authors: Naomi Alderman”). To begin
reading the story, one had to click on the white rabbit in the bottom left-hand corner of the *We Tell Stories* home page, or essentially follow the white rabbit. In this way, Alderman brings some of the action involved in the plot of Carroll’s original text into her story “Alice in Storyland,” which is told as an alternate reality game (ARG). Parts of this story, or “clues,” were present within the other six stories on the *We Tell Stories* site. The purpose of the seventh story was in part “to unite the six stories in an integrated way, as well as to bring in an ARG audience” (Willis). The other stories were created so that Penguin could tap in to the “FaceTube” generation, as Ettingshausen calls them, but this ARG story moves one step further to tap into a specific type of Web audience. Because the story can be classified as a game, it is difficult to access the story after it has been performed: what remains is mostly the blog entries that describe the events of the story. Similar to a performance of a play or the action of a video game, all we are left with after the performance is a transcript, of sorts, which describes the actions and from which we can put the performance back together. Because the performance has ended, we unfortunately cannot share in its interactive element. In addition, if the seventh “hidden” story is more like a game, we cannot, as Jones notes, really experience it apart from its social activity (it is perhaps, on some levels, the equivalent of reading the code rather than playing a game).

### 2.4.7 Penguin’s Collaborative Writing Project *amillionpenguins.com*

Penguin’s other digital literature projects also depended on collaboration and interactivity, both of which fit in well with the Web and its recent social networking shift, and they were meant to market Penguin’s imprint in these social networks. Penguin’s wikinovel project, *amillionpenguins.com*, is essentially a collaboration of shorter texts, rather than one large text as in a traditional “novel,” because it is comprised of a number of smaller (and not necessarily related) sections written by different authors, as one might find in a short story collection or an anthology. This project developed such a sense of community that one
participant commented, after the project ended, that “It feels like a community center has closed down. It was an interesting ride” (qtd. in Ettingshausen, “A Million Thanks”). Others commented that they “feel sorry to be losing this odd community and hope that there will be some clusters who stay together and write together” (qtd. in Ettingshausen, “A Million Thanks”). Ettingshausen, the digital publisher at Penguin, said that what began as a “literary experiment” ended up turning into a “social experiment” as well (Ettingshausen, “A Million Thanks”). The community that formed around the wiki novel and the directions that the text took were just as interesting (if not more) than the text itself, and in this way the wiki novel can also be seen as a performance. In other words, like some of the digital stories on Penguin’s We Tell Stories site, the wiki novel cannot be appreciated fully without having participated in the process of writing the stories or seeing them develop.

Inside this wiki “novel” are a number of smaller stories; some are more like novellas written in shorter sections with the different parts labelled as “chapters,” and some are just one-page thoughts or references to other websites. The structure of Penguin’s wiki novel resembles the postmodern novel, which is often composed of shorter narrative chunks compounded to create a meaning out of the whole, or a number of different stories told with multiple narrative threads. Some parts of the main wiki novel can form their own alternative novels. One of the authors or editors of “The Alternative Novel,” a sub-section in the main wiki novel, states on its index page that “This is the original version of the story, or at least one of the ones I contributed to before everything got a little splintered and crazy!” (“The Alternative Novel”). Other versions of the novella exist as “The Alternative Novel 1”; “Novel A”; “Novel B”; “Banana Version of Novel”; “Real Life Fantasy” (which is only a few paragraphs long); “Choose Your Own Adventure” (which is a collection of choose-your-own-adventure type stories created within the wiki novel); “Choose Your Own Banana” (which is another choose-your-own-adventure story
within the wiki novel; “Ideas” (a one-page paragraph, which links to a second page that refers to a YouTube video); the “Subplot” version of the novel (which involved the characters Gina, Mark, Carlo, Sahra, Helena, Sean, James, George, Mikhael, Chad, and Big Tony); and the “Ecological/Corruption/Command/literary process” version of the novel (“The Alternative Novel”).

Some of these alternate versions were reorganizations of various narrative threads within the overall wiki novel. Even though the project is called a wiki “novel,” it is still a compendium containing a number of smaller works. Links can bring readers to other pages that explain words or even develop their own threads, similar to a hypertext work, as in “The Alternative Novel” and “The Alternative Novel 1”. Some of these links lead to comments on the writing of the novella itself and responses to feedback:

In the late 70’s people still experimented with the famous 60’s drug LSD, that was sometimes cut, or mixed, with strychnine, creating a creeping tingling sensation up the spine. This urban legend that acid was sometimes cut, or mixed, with strychnine has been debunked. [2]

Unfortunately, this introduction led to further discussion of drugs in the novel, a situation not everyone approves. (“Strange Evolution of the Strychnine Thread”)

Similar to a Wikipedia entry, the text has many hyperlinks that lead to other pages within the novella and also to other sites and media, such as YouTube videos (and even to Wikipedia itself). From the above quotation, for example, the text “drug” leads to the following entry in the wiki novel:

3. Drug
see Richard Branson - Talks about music and drugs [1]

see also Richard Ashcroft Drugs Don't Work [2]

see also Terra Naomi's The Vicodin Song[3] (“Strange Evolution of the Strychnine Thread”)

The links on the end that appear as footnotes lead the reader away from the novella and the Penguin wikinovel to YouTube videos outside the site. These videos do not open in new windows and allow an easy movement back to the page from the novella by clicking on the browser’s “back” button. The other links lead to similar pages about Richard Branson and Richard Ashcroft (with more links to YouTube videos, a mySpace page, movie trailers, other websites, and other pages within the novella). Following these links is not confusing for the average Web-user reader because they follow the same style as Web pages and are not part of the main story. In other words, the reader does not need to follow these links; they are similar to footnotes that one would find in an article. But if one were to think of what medium this “wikinovel” was created in, one would have to say that it uses social networking and media sites as part of the way in which its stories are expressed.

There are also a number of ways in which the overall wiki novel or collection is organized in order to give readers various access points. The main entry to the novel is through the home page, which lists all of the sections of the novel and opens with Section 1. However, each of the chapters in the section is not within the same narrative strand: in other words, they do not necessarily connect with each other. The ability to reorganize these sections into the alternative versions or subplots allows the various narrative strands to be read in a more coherent manner, which is something that could not be done with a print novel unless a separate novel was printed, or unless references to different pages were given in a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure style of organization. This reorganization allows for a more postmodern reading of the text.
through the disconnected narrative strands by starting with the main entry point of the “novel,” or a more traditional narrative structure, by being able to read only one narrative strand. One page also lists all of the pages within the wiki novel, from which readers could start on any page or jump to any page based on its topic or title (“All Articles”).

Many of these recent projects by Penguin are similar to experiments with the format created by academics and early digital literature writers more than a decade ago. A key difference is that Penguin deliberately sought to have “the world” (as Jeremy Ettingshausen calls the creators of Penguin’s wiki novel) bring the story to life and to allow the story to evolve within the social networks of the Web, rather than have a uni-authored concept and text. Early hypertext works and academic-produced digital literature were still creating single-authored works following the notion of the sequestered artist, but within a postmodern environment. In other words, the work did not make use of its medium by connecting to the social networks and communities on the Web. The born-digital story is more connected to its contemporary audience and is not created in isolation from the society (and medium) in which it is performed and distributed.

Similar to publishers’ experiments in digital literature, authors’ sites such as dreamingmethods.com allow their works to tap into the social networking potential of the Web. Penguin’s intent was to promote its brand and its books, and this is also in part the motivation behind Dreaming Methods: the media design company, run by the artist, showcases his work. But the site is also concerned with promoting digital literature in general: there are links to essays on the subject written by Andy Campbell, along with various other authors’ collections and digital literature sites. In addition, the “dreaming” theme of the site is itself a comment on the genre of digital literature:
Dreaming Methods is inspired largely by abstract concepts that would perhaps be difficult to capture using writing alone. The multi-layered complexity of dreams/nightmares and real/imagined memories that feature in many of the narratives are represented by a heavy mix of media that is designed to be compulsive and immersive. Projects are inspired by music, film and web design as much as literature, and attempt to take strands of each and weave them into something entirely new. (Campbell, “New writing – new media”)

The site is itself something that “evolved from obscure, floppy disk-based collections of short stories that were available for free in the Amiga Public Domain during mid 1990s” (Campbell, “New writing – new media”). Unlike Penguin’s We Tell Stories, most of the stories on the site have been created solely by Andy Campbell, although there are a few that were created collaboratively. Campbell states that “none of the work is created by a team of developers, writers or artists. Yet anyway” (Campbell, “Frequently Asked Questions). The stories on this site therefore do not reflect the same collaborative production processes as Penguin’s site, because the author is himself able to use the tools required for creating digital literature. These tools range from Adobe Photoshop to Macromedia Flash (which is the format in which most of Campbell’s works are created). Many writers are not familiar with the tools required for creating digital literature, however, and would either need to collaborate with those who know how to use them, as in productions of films or plays, or wait for the development of more WYSIWYG tools for digital story authoring. This is something that can be both enabling and confining, as discussed in Chapter 1 in the context of the Center for Digital Storytelling.

Like Penguin’s projects, Dreaming Methods taps into the social Web by including feedback from its readers and making readers part of the community of the site. It includes a
“Subscribe to the mailing list” option, through which people can give feedback on new digital fiction projects. One can also contact the developers to be added to the “playtesters” list to “experience” new projects (Campbell, “Subscribe”). After doing so, readers can link to a blog that discusses the progress of a project called “The Red Case,” which was set to be released in 2009. In this way, the writers get readers interested in advance and can test the effectiveness of the piece before it is released, similar to the way in which authors such as Dickens used to publish sections of their novels as serial literature in periodic publications before the collected work would be published as a novel. In the blog, the author can comment on the writing process and difficulties presented by the medium, and ask readers for suggestions:

Well, progress on the piece has been slow this week. However I have had some good ideas - basically at the moment the first working environment (inside a grotty bedsit with the red case on the bed as shown in the screenshot in the previous entry) operates within an interface that requires all of the narratives available in that ‘scene’ to have been ‘read’ (or at least skipped through) before the final part of that ‘scene’ can be unlocked. At the moment I’m worried that this sounds overly game-like, but in actual fact it's proving to be relatively unobtrusive and gives what could have otherwise been a free-floating pseudo-3D environment some kind of much-needed structure where the user/reader starts to figure out what s/he's supposed to be doing. (Campbell, “The Red Case”)

This consideration of the progress of the work, and of decisions to make in regards to its structure, is something that may not have been as documented or open to contribution from the reader in stories that are not born-digital. In this way, the author has formed a community around the text and incorporated feedback as Samuel Richardson did when revising Pamela and
Clarissa which, as discussed earlier, was based on feedback from his largely female readers.24 After experiencing one of the projects on the site, the reader is also asked to fill out a feedback form on the story in order to add further input. Perhaps our print-based genres have become so settled that it takes a revolution in format—as with the move to digital—to bring this discussion back into the life of a work. Even though the works on the Dreaming Methods site are the creations of a sole author, designer, or producer, Campbell still invites collaboration and forms a community through the site’s main blog and other blogs about the progress of individual projects.

2.4.8 Profitability of Print and Digital Literature

One of the impediments to developing non-born-digital literature on the Web, and to creating digital versions of books and short stories previously published in print, has been the lack of profitability for publishers and authors by making their works available digitally. People are often accustomed to receiving content for free on the Web, and it can be difficult to get people to pay for content unless it appears in a tangible form such as a print or audio book. This same difficulty has been seen with other artistic creations, such as music. What Penguin and sites such as dreamingmethods.com have done is to find a way for digital literature to be profitable by having it serve as advertising for a brand (such as Penguin), a game production company (such as Six to Start), or a graphic design company (such as One to One Productions with dreamingmethods.com).

Just as many Web-based companies such as Google make the majority of their profits through advertising rather than charging for a product or service, producers of digital literature have realised that the way to make digital creative works profitable is through their ability to

form a community around their product, imprint, company, or name, and to use their stories as advertising. Magazines that publish short stories often now offer the digital edition of their magazine for free, especially if they are new, whereas the print version would still be sold at a cost. A new magazine that primarily publishes short stories and other works of literature, called *Eighteen Bridges*, offers its digital edition for free, even though it is identical in layout and content to its print edition, for which they charge $7.95; the digital edition also offers a link to easily download or print the magazine. Many readers still prefer to read literature within the print format that it is designed for if it is not born-digital, yet it would likely cost readers more to print the magazine from their home printers and they would lose the colour and quality of the graphics. The digital edition is also published within Scribd, which allows readers to easily zoom in or flip pages when reading the digital edition. To analyse the stories in *Eighteen Bridges* as born-digital literature would be flawed because the magazine has essentially just used the digital medium and the Web to distribute and promote their magazine: in other words, the stories are not any different than those that are published in their print edition. As mentioned in Chapter 1 when describing the changes to both the print and digital editions of *The Globe and Mail*, however, as readers become accustomed to reading a variety of texts online—emails, Web pages, and other content—both print and born-digital fiction and non-fiction change to accommodate readers’ wants. Indeed, many individual authors have also noticed this marketing potential of digital short fiction, which is elaborated in the next sections.
Web 2.0 Literary Communities and Their Participants, and the Fiction Created Within

3.1 Responses from Digital Short Fiction Writers

Some of the characteristics of online communities can make researching them, and the types of fiction created within them, more difficult (or at least different) than researching in a more face-to-face context. It is also a field of study that changes with each day: the types of communities and the fiction created within them can change from year to year, and most of this research was conducted from 2008-2010. In this section, I will describe some of the methods and questions I used to gain insight from members of these online communities, or from people who had published short fiction digitally, and some of the limitations that also shed light on the nature of individual membership in these communities.

I wanted to try to recruit people from within these online writing communities, but without being a member in them, which was more difficult than I had anticipated. These writing communities consisted of people who were primarily writing short stories, although some participants also wrote other genres such as poetry and novels. I began by posting a recruitment message to online literature and short fiction communities but did not have much success with receiving a serious response from people (Appendix A). I learned about Internet research from the process, including the fact that trying to make contact with people in a non-virtual way can be more difficult than just communicating online because many people shy away from activities that might connect their online and real-world behaviour. Conversely, I had difficulties getting people to believe that I was a real person and that I was actually who I said I was. Some people responded by saying that they would be interested in seeing the results of the study when it is
published, or hearing more about my current research and previous publications, but then did not respond after I asked if they would be interested in participating in the study. I really had no idea how many responses I would receive by posting recruitment messages in discussion forums within these online communities, so I started by only using this first approach of posting the messages in online forums, rather than concurrently using a more active approach of contacting individual users at the same time.

I did not foresee some difficulties such as having my account removed after posting the recruitment message in my profile within one community, or being unable to post to online forums in some communities because I had not posted my own fiction, edited others’ works within the community, or was not a paying member. I wanted to remain an observer of the community rather than a participant who posted my own works or comments on the stories written by others, but some communities are set up so that some level of commitment has to be made on the part of the participant before being able to observe the full characteristics of the community (such as paying a monthly subscription, contributing to edits or comments on others’ published works or works-in-progress, or posting one’s own stories).

I learned about the communities from the experience of trying to recruit people within them for my study, such as the level of inclusiveness versus exclusiveness in the community, ways in which outsiders can gain entry or contact people within the community, and the extent to which people view their participation as something serious or connected to their real-life occupations versus something that is a pastime. But it was not until a colleague in my department, who was studying fan fiction writers, posted my recruitment message to communities she was involved in as a writer that I was able to receive a number of responses not only from fan fiction writers but from writers of more traditional print-published short fiction
and those who had published in online magazines. This proved to be more successful at recruiting participants, and says much about the differences between conducting this type of research online instead of in face-to-face communities. I did not have the ability to approach people in a face-to-face method for my thesis study, a method in which we are all trained from the day we first communicate with other people, and something that we learn to exercise based on the responses we receive from people. These techniques are as simple as smiling as opposed to making a serious face when approaching people, speaking in a light and friendly tone, making eye contact, and so forth. None of these tried-and-tested techniques for approaching or connecting to people works the same way in the online environment, although some techniques can be translated for a different situation. For example, in online dating, many sites list some of the factors that will help to receive favourable responses from people. According to Plentyoffish.com, a popular online dating website, “Uploading a Photo increases the number of emails you get by a factor of 10” (although the source of this information is not specified). One of the most emphasized features is to put on a good profile picture, which is part of what allows people to connect or to feel like the interaction may be more like the face-to-face environment in which they have already developed competency (and, in the context of online dating, to assess physical attraction).

For my thesis study, I did not have the ability to connect face-to-face as one would in the non-virtual world, and I therefore needed an “in,” or someone who could vouch for me in the community, in order to receive responses to my request for participants. I was surprised at the number of responses from potential participants that started coming in after my colleague posted to the lists for communities in which she was already a member. I am including here the precise wording of her request, as it includes a few points that may have helped with recruiting in these communities:
I have already messaged several people individually; but, with McLisa's permission, I am also asking here.

You may or may not know that I am finishing up my Ph.D. thesis. Well, my supervisor has another candidate whom he is advising; and he gave her my name in the hope that I could provide her with some help. Her name is Susan Hesemeier; and she is doing her thesis about the on-line publishing of short fiction-- both professional and fan writing. As part of the thesis, she wants to interview some authors. However, when we met, she confided that she has been having a lot of trouble getting people to help her. Apparently they tend to say that they would love to read the results...but don't want to take the time and trouble to participate themselves.

Well, I offered to do the questionnaire myself, of course. So I can assure you that it's pretty innocuous. Also you can remain anonymous if you want, or use a LiveJournal name or the like.

Obviously, you may not fancy the idea of helping her, or you may not have the time. And, of course, you may want to chat with her a bit before deciding. Her e-mail addy is s.hesemeier@utoronto.ca

From the above excerpt, one can see that my colleague had provided information that is normally lacking in online communication but would be present when recruiting face to face. She mentioned who she was, that she was already known as a member within the community, and that she came to know about my study through our supervisor. This shows that she is not an outsider and adds legitimacy to her request. She also adds legitimacy to her post by stating that she has permission from the forum administrator to post a message about the study within the forum. She then appeals to people to help by stating that I had mentioned some trouble I encountered while trying to recruit from communities as an outsider. She also includes a
statement to assuage possible fears about what the questions might be about by stating that she has already completed the questions and that they were quite “innocuous,” and she uses an informal, friendly tone. I had not asked her to state anything specifically when posting my recruitment message, but her own experience with trying to find participants for her study gave her the insight to include some additional information that might confirm that I was a real person conducting a valid study, and that participating in the study would be an enormous help to me without compromising their privacy or using up a large amount of their time.

Within the first week after my colleague posted her message with my recruitment advertisement (Appendix A), I received a number of responses, but many of these potential participants did not respond after learning that they would have to send in a signed consent form. This was a second obstacle when it came to recruiting participants online: I made it past the first obstacle of gaining participants’ interest and trust by having my request forwarded by someone who was already an active member of some communities, but many potential participants may have felt that it would be too much trouble to have to fax, mail, or scan a signed copy of the consent form. They also may not have wanted to identify themselves, even though they had the option of remaining anonymous in the thesis and any other reports on the research. Perhaps, as well, having to sign the consent form made the process more official and therefore out of their comfort zone (Appendix B). In this way, standard ethics guidelines can sometimes be an obstacle when it comes to researching in an online environment, since the same protocols that might be appropriate for face-to-face research may be too limiting for research in social networking environments.

I ended up with thirteen people who sent back the signed consent forms, most of whom were able to send the form because they had access to a scanner. Overall, I had participants from
a variety of writing backgrounds respond to the questions I sent them. Some participants were graduate students, some were professional writers, some were editors, and some were writers of fan fiction who had other non-writing-related careers. All but one of the participants were female. Participants were from England, Sweden, Australia, the United States, Canada, and Asia. I only had one participant who was much younger than the rest—in her late teens—and the others were between 30-60, although they did not specifically state their ages. I did not use a formal questionnaire, but rather sent each participant a set of questions, composed a summary of their responses with additional questions, and waited for additional feedback from the participants. All of my question sets were sent via email.

The questions I sent participants were originally meant to be catered toward the type of writing that participants were doing, but since I only knew a minimal amount of information about each participant before sending the questions, I ended up sending the same question set to most of the participants (Appendix D). The first question set (Appendix C) was only sent to two participants because it was catered toward participants who were not heavily involved in online writing communities. Many of my participants came from fan fiction and other types of online communities, so I used the second set of questions for the rest of my participants. These questions proved to be broad enough that even if the respondents were not involved in many online short-fiction communities, they could comment on their short-story writing and publishing in other publication media or answer questions about why they prefer one publication medium over another.

The questions were meant to gather a certain type of information from participants without limiting additional information that they might provide. The first question asked of most participants was whether they had published stories in more than one publication medium: in
print, online, multimedia formats, and any other possible publication media. Because this was not a quantitative study, but rather an investigation into the types of short fiction that people are writing today and the communities that form around this avocation, I was not focusing on how many people answered that they had published both in print and online or only online or only in print. Rather, I was interested in what might have influenced a writer to publish in one medium instead of another, whether writers see advantages to publishing in print or online, whether they are creating born-digital short fiction, or if they write differently for one publication venue or medium than they do in another.

3.1.1 Publication Preferences for Different Media

Responses from participants as to whether they preferred one medium to another were largely varied and depended on the type of short fiction written by the participant; participants who wrote fan fiction preferred online publication for the direct connection to other fans or readers. One participant, who had published a short story in a literary journal that appeared both in print and online, when asked about whether she preferred to publish a story in a publication that was available online, in print, or both, said,

My views on this have changed. Almost two years ago, when I first started sending work out, I only considered print publications, because they appeared more established, substantial, and prestigious than online journals. A journal that was exclusively online seemed a bit too much like a Myspace page(!) – too easily assembled and therefore not necessarily reflective of a longstanding commitment on the editors’ part; not necessarily something that would be maintained from one year to the next. Almost all of the journals that I’d heard about (from other writers, from
anthology credits) were print journals. Whether or not a print journal also appeared online was not something I took into consideration.

But now that I’ve gotten to know the world of literary journals a bit better, I’ve seen that many journals that were formerly print-only have expanded to include Internet content…. I’ve also learned about some online journals that have been in operation for years, and feature excellent content. So while I still favour print journals, I’m now more open to the possibility of online journals: I sent my most recent story out mostly to print journals, but also to a few online journals that looked good.

(Participant N)

There are many ways in which this participant’s comments are reflective of the current change in attitudes among writers and among people in general when it comes to online literary content. Perhaps the proliferation of online counterparts for academic journals and the creation of reputable, peer-reviewed online content in many other types of publications have helped to change some attitudes toward online publication even for short fiction. In other words, even though many of the developments in online publishing have appeared in publications that are very different from those that would publish short fiction, such as PubMed or other online article databases, the acceptance of online publishing in these other types of publications has an effect on the acceptance of online publishing of short fiction as well. As mentioned in Chapter 2, new short fiction magazines, such as *Eighteen Bridges*, publish in both formats in order to reach a larger readership, with the online edition available for free even if the print and online editions are identical. By having both formats available concurrently for publication, writers might not have to make a choice between one medium or the other. If writers would reach a larger audience with both print and online publication of a magazine, perhaps they would begin to
expect a publication venue to be available in both formats. There were some other participants who responded that they actually preferred to publish online and, ideally, to have the publication available in print as well:

As an amateur writer trying to break into the business, I am open to both online and print venues. At this point in my career, fledgling though it may be, I believe exposure is the key. The more places my name appears, the better. While I’m aware some of the online sites may not necessarily impress agents or editors, I believe they have value….

Another key factor in my decision to keep submitting to both online and print publications is the trend I’m finding in writers experimenting with “new media”. Podcasts are huge. I have several subscriptions that are regularly updated on my iPod. Those that feature poetry, short stories, or novels include Indiefeed…. Listening to these podcasts and following the careers of the artists has opened my eyes to the power of the Internet. Exposure, exposure, exposure. (Participant D)²⁵

Similar to publishers, some authors may be interested in online publication as a way to market their short stories, or to get as much exposure as possible, by connecting to the social networks of the Web. Although online publication was initially considered to be less prestigious, and is still considered as such by many literary authors and readers, perhaps the ubiquity of online journals, magazines, and other sources of information—even to the extent that some newspapers and magazines have moved to completely online publication—has changed how some authors

²⁵ For an example of spoken word or performance poetry through IndieFeed, see http://www.indiefeedpp.libsyn.com/
and readers feel about publishing their works online. Another participant demonstrated a similar view to Participant D: “I would prefer a publication that is available both in print and online. That should mean that as many people as possible are exposed to my story, which sounds good to me” (Participant J, Stefan Ingstrand). It will be interesting to see whether more authors begin to request that publishers also make their publications available online, if they are publications that are usually only available in print, or that the publisher allow the author the rights to also post the story in the author’s own online publication venues (such as the author’s personal website). This would make the work more widely accessible to a larger audience, especially if writers begin to see the benefits of creating born-digital publications that can attract a new generation of readers.

Although we already have a number of comparisons that have been used to describe the development of digital publication, perhaps the shift from one publication medium to another, or from print-based to born-digital sources distributed through the Web, can be compared to the shift from paper bags to plastic bags in grocery stores during the 1980s. Originally, there was resistance among consumers to the shift to plastic (CBC, The Battle of the Bag, 2009). Paper bags were still preferable once plastic became available, so the companies producing plastic bags eventually found a way to make their bags used more widely: they offered consumers the choice of paper or plastic. Eventually, because plastic bags had certain affordances that paper bags did not—such as the ease of carrying multiple bags at a time, the ability to hold their items even when they were wet, and their durability—many consumers came to accept the plastic bags and chose to use them instead of paper. Eventually, grocery stores were able to switch completely to plastic bags without much upset on the part of their customers, and the producers of plastic bags were able to sell their product. This transition was so successful that once the environmental impacts of the plastic bag were realised, it became difficult to prevent the public from using
plastic bags, and measures such as charging consumers for each plastic bag have had to be introduced in order to encourage people to go back to paper bags (or to bring their own cloth bags). A similar situation is occurring with online and print publication, although it could still be some time before we could see a large-scale transition happen, and, as with the projections about the paperless office that circulated with the more prolific use of computers, one cannot predict how the introduction of a new communication or publication medium will change the future. Perhaps we will have a third alternative exist alongside print and digital publication, which will link back to an older form such as oral or audio performance and distribution. One can only observe the changes occurring at that moment; the introduction of the computer into the office, for example, had the opposite effect of creating more use of paper within offices, rather than less.

Indeed, when responding to the question of whether to publish their stories in print or in an online publication venue, many participants commented that they would prefer to have their stories published in print: “If I could have short stories published I would prefer them to be available in print because having a publisher wanting to spend the money to publish it in print lends credence to the work” (Participant E, “Susan B.”). Part of the motivation behind this preference was the fact that print publications will often pay for a work. One participant commented that the choice between print and online publication “would depend greatly on the publication. I have considered writing tie-in short fiction for my novel as a means of generating a reader audience. If I do so, I would probably explore both mediums. Online publication is so much easier to break into, but the monetary compensation is very low compared to print publication” (Participant H, Kristen M. Fife). Some participants stated that they did not care about whether they were publishing online or in print, but what was important was whether it was a paying publication: “If I were to move to writing original short fiction, I’d prefer to publish in a PAID forum, but am not particular about whether that should be electronic or paper
printing” (Participant K, Amy L. Fritsch). In other words, the choice of whether to publish in print or online often depended on what each writer was trying to accomplish, whether this was to get his or her name more well known, to publish in a prestigious publication, to make a living as a writer, or just to create and circulate short stories as an activity conducted for its own sake.

Whether a writer preferred print, online, or both also depended somewhat on the type of short fiction the writer was creating. A number of participants commented that they published online because that was the format in which most fan fiction communities now publish their fiction, even though these communities started by publishing in print fanzines that moved completely to online publication. It also becomes more difficult to distinguish between publishing and posting or distributing when one contributes stories to an online fan fiction community, as noted by one participant:

Well, when I post on-line, it’s not in a ‘publication’ generally speaking, although there is one e-zine (electronic fanzine) that I contribute to occasionally. So I’m not sure how to answer. Generally, I prefer to post on-line. It’s nice to see my stories in print, but I get more feedback and input when I publish on-line. Occasionally, contributing to a published fanzine is nice because I generally can’t afford to buy them, and when I contribute to an anthology ‘zine, I get a free copy. However, I then cannot post the story on-line for a full year, so I still prefer to post directly on-line.

( Participant C)

It is interesting to note that this participant has a strong preference for publishing online and considers it a disadvantage of print publication that the publisher usually places restrictions against posting the story online. This writer is primarily a writer of fan fiction, however: a type of short fiction writing around which strong communities have formed and which has moved
almost entirely to online publication. It is also a type of short-fiction writing that encourages participation from writers who are not necessarily writing so that they can become professional writers: some of these writers are writing as part of the community because they like the experience of being able to feel that they are contributing to the storyline of something they enjoyed, whether it was a television series, a book, or even a music group. Whether short-fiction writing in general will move in a similar direction has yet to be seen. Fan-fiction communities already cohere through a common subject matter and genre. Perhaps we may see a proliferation of amateur short fiction in general, alongside more online counterparts for fiction publications that have traditionally published only in print.

When it comes to fan fiction writing, many participants stated that because fan fiction has largely moved online, the communities they are part of on the Web have become the preferred publication venue. Participant B writes, “Although fan fiction used at one time to be available only through print-zines, today it is largely on line. My short fiction writing is fan fiction; therefore on line is the logical way to publish.” The short fiction that this participant wrote was not what would typically be classified as a short story, but rather “a virtual season continuing a defunct television series” (Participant B). Here the Web has facilitated the convergence of media: a television script available through a website in order to continue the storyline of a television series. This writer also writes fan fiction for the Sime~Gen universe, the publications for which have moved online even if they are still available in print:

My next fan fiction was written in the Sime~Gen universe. There are only two places Sime~Gen stories can be published: in the officially authorized fanzine, and on one specific unauthorized (but unofficially recognized) website. I submitted the story to the fanzine. This used to be a print-zine; and it still theoretically exists in both
formats, in as much as it is supposed to be possible to purchase a print copy if one wants. However, I get the impression that they haven’t actually printed a copy in years.

The Mary Renault fan fiction [the other fan fiction written by this writer] was all written in the context of the maryrenaultfics LJ community. (Participant B)

Perhaps fan fiction publications have taken a similar direction to many online journals: the advantages of digital publication, such as cost-efficiency, availability, and marketability, have made it worthwhile to move completely (or almost completely) to online publication, even if some writers still view the print counterpart as being more prestigious.

Some participants also commented that they did not think of the medium at all, but this also depended on the extent to which the writer was publishing for pleasure versus publishing as a profession. Participant I, when asked whether she preferred to publish short fiction online, in print, or both, stated: “Don’t care as long as people whose opinions I value enjoy the stories and characters. Notwithstanding my sister’s suggestion I seek mainstream publication, I don’t actually think the stories I have written would be terribly saleable to the average audience. The community I write within, however, is interested.” Most fan-fiction writers said that they published on the Internet because it was best suited for the type of fiction they were writing. Some, however, also noted that the potential anonymity of the medium was appealing:

I can’t write original fiction, I don’t have enough time or creativity to imagine the characters and to create a world of my own. And I write fanfiction because I love the stories and am curious about them, and then start to invent more things to fill in the
gaps. I publish on the internet because it’s free, immediate and no one there knows
who I am. Anonymity is important. (Participant L)

Anonymity may be afforded more easily when publishing online, and there are some writers who
still want their works to be read and appreciated by others but not with any connection to their
real-world identities. This same writer also commented that if publishing fiction other than fan
fiction, a print journal would be preferred because it is more prestigious, but because this person
writes only fan fiction, print journals are not considered to be an option: “I’d like the prestige of
publishing original; [sic] fiction in an [sic] printed journal, it was a dream of mine to become a
writer but that’s never going to be possible” (Participant L). Perhaps the ability to self-publish
all types of creative fiction online—not just fan fiction—will also help to encourage those to
write who may feel discouraged by the difficulty of getting into print publications, although the
same writer also states that she only writes short fiction and did not find the ability to self-
publish online to be particularly inspiring: “I wrote poetry for just a little while a few months
back and posted it on my personal livejournal, hoping to get my creative juices flowing, but it
didn’t work so I stopped” (Participant L).

Responses from other participants as to whether they preferred to publish in one medium
or another were relatively similar to the responses above. Participant F stated,

I have only published online because it is the quickest and easiest way to find an
audience. I am considering self-publishing for a novel I am working on because my
previous experience of approaching publishers is dispiriting. I don’t have the skills,
self-confidence or dynamism to sell my work to a publisher, so I am inclined to
believe the only way of getting into print is online self-publishing and publicity,
perhaps using the audience I have gained online as a starting point. This was the
route used by authors such as Andrew Chugg (Alexander’s Lovers, The Last Tomb of Alexander the Great) who has published through lulu.com, sells through amazon.com, has his own website to promote the books, and uses livejournal communities to announce them.

This response was especially interesting because it showed a similar attention to the marketing aspects of publishing short fiction online that large publishers such as Penguin have attempted to tap into by linking digital short fiction to their published print works. Rather than going through the traditional print publishing route, which this writer found dispiriting, online publication of short fiction was seen as a means to gain an audience based on what has worked for other writers who have created an audience through online self-publishing and advertising one’s name through social networks. Another writer, Ellen Ashton-Haiste, stated that she did not publish in print because “there is little time (or creative energy) left over for writing the short stories or novels that would [sic] love to work on (hopefully someday),” since the participant’s “career as a journalist is writing (non-fiction) on a daily basis” (Participant G, Ellen Ashton-Haiste). Ashton-Haiste had published one fictional story while working as a reporter, “a fun, kind of fiction, piece when I was working as a reporter for the St. Thomas Times Journal during the city’s centennial year. It was a story of settlers coming to the new Talbot Settlement in the 19th century, a fictionalized description of what that would have been like at the time” (Participant G, Ellen Ashton-Haiste). The creative short fiction written by this participant is fan fiction for the Forever Knight TV series, and the writer stated that the inspiration for the pieces was often from a song.

The process of publication and revision described by Ashton-Haiste is interesting because it shows the different means of immediate feedback possible within the community and also the
way in which the medium affords a more immediate response and engagement from the audience that links back to the performance of the work:

When I started to watch Forever Knight, I was captivated by the story and when I got Internet access, delved into the whole area of email list serves and, of course, fan fiction. I loved the really good stuff (tho there is certainly a wide range of quality in fan fiction). In the case of my writings, I was listening to the song during the Christmas season and the story just took shape in my mind. December is always chaotic in terms of real life work, with early deadlines and Christmas preparations so it just germinated there for several weeks. After Christmas, when things quieted down, I sat at the computer on [sic] evening and wrote it (posted in three parts/chapters) in one sitting. Then of course I edited it and tweaked it before submitting.

I got a fair amount of response to it and all was [sic] asking for a conclusion, since there was quite a bit left up in the air at the end. Problem was I did not know what the ending was. I didn’t even know the background details of my story. So it sat for quite awhile in my mind as I waited for my characters to ‘tell’ me the ending. Eventually they did and Tale’s End was written and posted in two parts. (Participant G, Ellen Ashton-Haiste)

This participant shows a clear separation between the writing done for “real life work” and the writing done for fan fiction: one type of writing is associated with work, while the other is associated with pleasure. Other writers, such as Participant F, saw online publication as a means to promote the writer’s work or name in general, rather than seeing a separation between writing fiction for pleasure versus writing non-fiction as an occupation.
Writers who were primarily novelists or writers of larger works also published online in order to reach a larger audience. In responding to whether the participant had published stories both in print and online, Participant P commented,

Yes, although all stories bar one appeared in print first. Print publication is preferred by novel editors when thinking about accepting novels for publication and I am primarily a novelist. I actively sought second publication for some stories using the web because (publishers notwithstanding) there are readers who actively seek stories on the net and a writer without readers is never a good thing.

This participant also responded that she did not prefer to publish in one medium over another, but still found print to be better for longer works of fiction, in addition to still being considered a more prestigious medium:

I have no personal preference, but I don’t write many short stories and print publication is still more prestigious so I continue to prefer print above online publication when all else is equal. What matters to me is reader access to stories and not all publications are equal in this respect, whether online or in print. (Participant L)

As this participant indicates, reader access is important and both print and digital or online publications have limitations in reader access, but, depending on the genre and length of fiction that one is writing, one distribution medium can be preferable over another.

The ability to receive a quick response directly from a work’s audience (rather than editors or reviewers) might also add to the pleasure aspect of publishing in an online community versus publishing in print: the work functions as a means of immediate social engagement, a process that is removed when a work is published using the traditional print publication method.
Some participants also commented that feedback within writing communities tended to be encouraging rather than critical or discouraging, as opposed to when they would submit to magazines, journals, or other publication venues.

Publishing one’s work in print might also add an element of serious avocation to it, thereby blurring the lines between writing as one’s occupation versus writing for pleasure. Participant F commented that if a story was to be published, it would be preferable for the story to appear in print if it is not fan fiction:

I guess because I still see that format as more lasting. I may have to change that opinion eventually—with all the ‘new media’ hype—but I hope not. I like hard copy books and magazines. I have literally hundreds of books (not all read yet) and much prefer to sit down and read them. I don’t really relish reading my books on a computer screen (or cell phone, blackberry or what have you).

Fan fiction is virtually all online but even there, with the stories I really like, I print out hard copies, even though that usually means going through and formatting, fixing the type glitches that occur, etc. (Participant G, Ellen Ashton-Haiste)

As this writer has noted, one’s own reading preference can affect the decisions on which medium to publish in, and at this point in time, even with developments such as the Kindle, many people still prefer to read longer fiction in print, perhaps because screen reading is more associated with work, whereas people tend to associate fiction with pleasure reading (something they would prefer to take a break from the screen in order to do).
3.1.2 Publication of Short Fiction in Online Communities

In addition to finding out information about writers’ publishing preferences, I was also looking for information about whether the writer had published short fiction as part of an online community and the extent to which the participant was involved with writing communities in general, such as a writer’s group where individual writers serve as editors or mentors. The responses to these types of questions were variable, depending on factors such as personal preference, geographical location, and the medium or venue in which the writer most often published his or her fiction. Many writers, especially those who wrote fan fiction, commented that they used “beta-readers” as a sort of editor or reviewer before posting their work to a community. Participant K, for example, stated,

> Everything I write (fiction or non-fiction) I share with usually two to eight beta-readers/editors/friends/choose-your-title (I use ‘betas’ as my primary term for ‘editor’). I send the file as a Word document via email and then the friends (I have a group of ten or so whose input I solicit) who have time respond by turning on Track Changes in Word and typing in their comments, suggestions, changes, thoughts, reactions, etc.

This participant also did not tend to use online resources to assist with writing short fiction, such as tips on how to publish or writing resource sites. In response to whether the participant used online resources, she stated,

> Not particularly. I have several friends who’ve written essays on ‘how to’ with regard to writing fanfiction, and I’ve READ these (and sometimes been the editor/beta for them), and I’ve thought about them. Sometimes ideas have stuck, but mostly I KNOW this stuff, though I’ll discuss things like POV or person or tense in
storytelling with friends as a way to think about other ways to tell stories. (Participant K, Amy L. Fritsch, emphasis in original)

Many participants were similar to Participant K in that they preferred to use feedback directly from friends or “beta-readers” rather than the less interactive advice from writing resource sites.

Other participants preferred to wait until the story was finished and posted before receiving feedback from other writers, calling attention to the way in which posting on the Internet can in many ways incorporate the reviewing or commenting process that is usually part of the pre-publishing process in print publications. Another participant stated, “I generally don’t share my writing until I’m finished, although occasionally I will share with a close friend (generally through email), especially if I get stuck and need some brainstorming to get the story going again” (Participant C). Other participants stated that they sometimes use “writers’ blogs, and have read a few books (such as Stephen King’s ‘On Writing’)” in order to help with their writing (Participant H, Kristen M. Fife), and that they share their in-progress writing “via email or by loaning my laptop if it is someone local” (Participant H, Kristen M. Fife). Some participants commented that they usually do not share their in-progress writing or use online resources or communities devoted to writing, but stated, “I have collaborated on a couple of stories with another person via email” in which “a draft would be posted to our faction list for comment, embellishment, etc. by anyone” (Participant E, “Susan B.”). This participant also stated that “after posting my first story I got helpful advice from a fellow writer on how to properly handle character dialogue in my paragraphs, i.e., when to start a new paragraph, etc.” (Participant E, “Susan B.”). Some participants, in contrast, stated that they did use many online resources, especially when first starting to write:
I vacuumed the web for advice when I began to get serious about writing, focusing mostly on tips from pros and collections of writing resources. These days I belong to a few e-mail lists for writers, and also use Google, Wikipedia, Online Etymology Dictionary and other sites for research. (Participant J, Stefan Ingstrand)

I was interested in finding out how often participants used online resources because this aspect might have connected to the extent to which that person participated in online communities and preferred to receive assistance from other writers by publishing in online communities. However, this factor seemed to vary based on individual preference rather than whether one was involved in many online communities or primarily wrote fan fiction.

3.1.3 Participation in Writing Communities

Only a few participants responded that they met with a face-to-face group when sharing in-progress writing. The following participant also noted the contrast between sharing one’s writing with face-to-face groups and online communities:

In my face-to-face group we each jot down notes as the other person reads. Once the reader has finished speaking, we take turns giving verbal feedback. The notes are eventually handed in to the reader.

In the online communities drafts are exchanged through discussion boards and e-mails. Instant messaging and chat rooms have also been used to facilitate feedback.

Personally, I prefer the electronic exchange. I appreciate it when someone takes the time to use the comments in Microsoft Word to point out potential problems or outright mistakes. Chatrooms and instant messengers allow you to record a transcript of brainstorming or critiquing sessions.
I also use my blog to post snippets. Readers leave feedback in the comments section.

(Participant D)

In this writer’s experience, the online publication medium, which can also function as a writer’s group, has advantages over the face-to-face exchange of more traditional writers’ groups. Being able to log comments and changes through Microsoft Word or chatrooms and instant messengers offers a better record of other writers’ suggestions than notes of writers’ suggestions given after the reading of one’s work in a writer’s group. This participant also stated that she uses several blogs by “published professionals, semi-professionals, aspiring writers, agents, and editors” as online resources to help with her writing, and states, “I believe I have learned more about the business of writing from reading their thoughts and experiences than I ever would have by visiting a local library” (Participant D). This participant had also participated in online workshops, had taken part in face-to-face writing workshops at conferences, is a member of social networking sites devoted to writing (one called Forward Motion), and is in the process of creating a fanpage on Facebook. She had therefore been able to compare the extent to which writing can be shared both in face-to-face groups and in online communities.

One can see from these responses the range in which writers would consider themselves connected to social networks or online communities as part of their avocation. In the case of fan-fiction writers, the medium in which they post or publish stories is already a community, in which the editorial comments, feedback, and relationship with other writers are part of the medium in which the story is distributed. Other writers who did not write fan fiction, but who had published short stories in online literary magazines, often stated that they had some sort of group with whom they met in person, or that they used other online writing resources:
Over the past year, I met up in person from time to time with a group of three other writers whom I met through a creative writing class. The invitation to start the writer’s group was sent out by one of the writers via email: we all emailed back and expressed great enthusiasm. We didn’t have a regular meeting time—we’d have a tentative date, and then email back and forth until we found a time that worked for everybody. We would email each other copies of our stories a few days beforehand, and then when we met we’d discuss the stories and hand over the copies on which we’d made comments. (As I understand it, this is similar to how MFA craft classes will work: classmates email each other copies of stories, which are to be printed off, annotated, and later discussed in class).

My first reader for all my stories’ drafts, however, is my husband, who is an accomplished poet and gifted creative writing teacher. So of course I share my writing in person with him. He prefers reading hard copies of stories, and making notes on the pages, which we then discuss. (Participant N)

This participant shares in-progress writing through a community that is separate from the medium in which the story is published: in this case, it is a group of writers connected through a creative writing class, and also the writer’s husband. In this sense, the “community” surrounding the text or the finished story is more ephemeral than what one might find when encountering a short story published in a fan fiction community or in an online publication that allows reader feedback and commentary to be directly attached to the text. Similar to the study of marginalia and the effect that reader annotation can have on a text (Jackson, 2001), this incorporation of the editorial and reader input in a text can have a profound effect on its interpretation. Even as
writers write, there is often a community that surrounds the text, even if this community is not as evident when the text is presented in print format.

Many other writers also noted that they had close family members who either initially served as the person who interested them in a writing or fan-fiction community, or who served as “beta-readers” for their stories. On whether she had a group of people or an individual with whom she shared her writing, Participant L stated, “Not really. I only have a sister who shares the exact same interests, she reads my yet to be completed stories and gives feedback on how to continue” (Participant L). Participant I also commented that she sometimes used a close family member as a beta-reader before posting to an online community:

The first story I wrote, revised as best I could, and posted without any beta-reading. The second (which was actually the first ‘Alec’ story), I wrote a draft and didn’t feel satisfied with it. I knew something was wrong but couldn’t see what. I sent it to my sister who critiqued it and helped me polish it. Thereafter I’ve sent almost all my stories to her for editing (by email); they always improve as a result. She never changes them but sends back lengthy comments and suggestions, most of which I accept. Even when I don’t accept her suggestions, they usually lead to me making changes as she’s pointed out some discrepancy. I used one other community member as beta for one story because I wanted her advice about Quaker faith as the central character was a Quaker. That is a knowledge base [my sister] doesn’t have.

(Participant I)

Creative writing is often considered to be quite personal, or writers can sometimes be sensitive to criticism of their works, and perhaps initial feedback from someone close to the writer, such as a family member, can help to alleviate concerns that the writer may have before releasing the story
to a larger audience. Without a close family member, however, the online community or writer’s group can sometimes function as a sort of beta-reader before releasing the story to an even larger audience. Participant B states,

Some of the maryrenaultfics ‘5Y’ invitations were edited by my sister, who is also a member of the community. In particular, we worked together on the Cake Sequence. Her input was considerable; and one story was credited as co-written with her, since she made extensive alterations to it. In addition, I have beta-ed most of her stories. This was all done by e-mail (stories sent as attachments).

The novel-in-progress has been shared with a friend, whose work I have read. This is informal, though: not part of a writer’s group. Her comments have led to revisions. This is done in person.

I have not otherwise worked with a beta-reader. (Participant B)

When this writer did use a beta-reader, it would usually be her sister or a friend.

Most writers stated that they shared their writing with a beta-reader at least to some extent: “I have shared my writing with an individual via email” (Participant F, Carole Harris); “I have a friend in the States, who I met via the FK listserve and have shared stuff with her. But I must admit I have done more editing of her stuff than vice versa but that’s a function of how much I have done versus how much she has done” (Participant G, Ellen Ashton-Haiste).

Another participant, who has primarily published in print but who also advocates for publishing online copies of already-published print stories, said that she does not always share her writing, but sometimes uses a beta-reader:
I am a member of a writers’ group (Canberra Speculative Fiction Guild) and I have beta readers for my novel. I don’t always share my writing, however—it depends very much on my specific needs at the time.

The writers’ group meets once a month and beta readers look at my work when I am up to editing stage. The beta readers mainly communicate through email, although we also use telephone and live meetings. (Participant P, Gillian Polack)

This use of a beta reader was common throughout all participants, although the extent to which participants used a beta reader would vary from person to person. Only a couple of participants commented that they went to a writer’s group, although some said that they still kept in touch with members of former writers’ groups as a sort of beta-reader; in general, however, most members preferred close family members for this purpose.

3.1.4 Participants in Online Writing Communities in General

I was also looking for information about a writer’s involvement with online communities in general and whether this might influence the medium in which a writer posted or published his or her stories. In addition to asking whether writers participated in online communities or social networking sites devoted to writing, I also asked if they participated in online communities or social networking sites in general, such as Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook. Most participants commented that they used Facebook, even if they did not use it specifically for their writing, in addition to some other sites such as LinkedIn and Livejournal:

I do quite a bit on Facebook, in terms of keeping in touch with friends and family, and have reconnected through that site with a number of friends from university and previous jobs that I had either lost touch with or almost.
I have a LinkedIn account and find that more beneficial from a professional standpoint (I usually describe it as Facebook for professionals). I have accounts with some other similar sites (Plaxo, Naymetz) but don’t really go there much. For this I like LinkedIn the best.

I have signed up for Twitter but don’t do much with that either. Kind of don’t see the point. But the ‘experts’ in writing (for a living) in the ‘new media’ world advise familiarizing oneself with these. (Participant G, Ellen Ashton-Haiste)

Other participants commented that they only participated in Livejournal and only as it related to discussions about the text on which they were writing fan-fiction: Participant F stated, “I have used Livejournal.com, but only as a vehicle for my stories or for discussions on Alexander the Great.” Others commented that they were involved in online communities or social networking sites that related to their other interests:

I am an historian as well as a writer. I blog as a food historian and am a member of many academic email lists. I also participate in feminist and Jewish groups online, though more passively than I used to. These mainly reflect social and scholarly interests, rather than being linked to my writing. (Participant P, Gillian Polack)

This participant had published stories in print and actively sought second publication for some stories on the web “because there are readers who actively seek stories on the net and a writer without readers is never a good thing” (Participant P, Gillian Polack). This writer’s participation in different online communities apart from her writing interests may have promoted her push for publication of her stories online in addition to print, since she was aware of the impact of being
able to circulate and market one’s name and stories online through her active involvement in other types of communities.

Other writers gave similar responses about participation in online communities in general: “I have a livejournal account to use as a blog; I post in mine rarely but I do read friends’ blogs (and quite a few of them write short stories and use their blog to publish them” (Participant I). Participant L responded, “Yes. Livejournal.com. I’m currently a Dong Bang Shin Ki fan and I’m writing my first fanfiction, I intend to join one of the larger fanfic communities to get an audience…. I read and comment on omonatheydidn’t, a Korean gossip community and some other kpop related communities, sometimes I talk about my fellow netizens’ views, or just comment on the gossip.” Most participants were like the aforementioned in that they participated to some extent in online communities on Facebook, Livejournal, Twitter, and other common social networking sites, and, since I used a form of word of mouth to advertise my study through social networking sites and in order to reach writers who were publishing short fiction online, it was expected that most participants would have had some connection to social networking sites, although some were more heavily involved than others, which may have been influenced by their involvement with fan fiction communities.

Some participants commented that they primarily used fan-fiction communities as the way in which they participated in online communities or social networking sites (Participant B). Originally, this participant was not a member of the fan-fiction community as a writer, but rather through an interest in the subject matter, and the participant’s involvement in the community evolved after becoming a member of the site:

It is important to note that, although there are some on-line writing groups devoted to fan fiction, the fan communities that I belong to are multi-focused (which is, indeed,
quite common among fan communities). Support of writers is certainly part of what they involve: they help people find beta-readers, offer a place to post, and may provide a permanent archive for fan fiction. However, they also involve discussion of the original material, whether it be published books or a television series. Depending on the rules of the individual community, some also allow posts by members about their personal lives, discussions of recent fan fiction, or ‘off topic’ subject material such as current events.

One’s interest and participation in such a community can alter with time. I found the maryrenaultfics LJ community through a multi-fandom site, which led me to realize that there were people writing fan fiction based on her books. I googled, and found the maryrenaultfics community; and then read several of the stories in the community’s fan fiction archive. However, I finally joined because they were about to start a long, chapter by chapter discussion of the differences between the original and American editions of *The Charioteer*, and I wished to participate. Writing my own fan fiction for the community came quite a bit later. (Participant B)

The community for which this participant writes and contributes short fiction (in this case, it is fan-fiction) was also in many ways a community where people shared general interests in the subject matter, a writing resource, and also a place in which the writer eventually contributed her own fiction related to the subject matter (in this case, the community is based around Mary Renault’s novel *The Charioteer*). Fan fiction communities, in this respect, are not very different from sites such as *Dreamingmethods.com* in which contributors are connected through a shared interest in the possibilities from writing in new media. The shared interest in writing for new media is the connecting thread in the case of *Dreamingmethods.com*, and readers interested in
the works produced on this site can also sign up for monthly newsletters and follow or contribute to the blog. With the emergence of sites devoted to certain types of fiction or to the writings of a specific author or genre (such as science fiction), a common connecting thread can be created between readers or participants, writers, and site creators or administrators.

3.1.5 Editing and Reviewing Processes

A third aspect I was interested in was the difference in the editing or reviewing process and how it related to the participants’ writing: whether the final product was affected, how the reviewing process was different if writers had also published in another medium or venue, and so forth. Generally, when it came to fan-fiction sites or fanzines, participants responded that their work was accepted as-is or read by a beta reader who provided suggestions. Often these sites function as a forum for comment and feedback as well, which may be another example of how comment or feedback becomes part of the text when it is published or distributed online.

One writer, who had published short stories both in print and online, noticed some differences in the changes editors might ask for in a print publication compared to changes requested for an online publication:

Each time that I’ve been accepted for publication, I’ve been contacted by one person (the editor) via email. The editor sent a review draft for my perusal – I wasn’t asked to make any changes, just to scan for typos and make sure that I was happy with how it would appear on the journal’s pages. With [name of magazine], I hadn’t been sent a review copy of the story as it would appear online, but since I’d already had a look at how it would appear in print, this didn’t seem necessary.
Recently, I had a conditional acceptance of a story with an online magazine: the editor emailed me and said that he liked the piece, but wondered if I’d be willing to cut it by one third. The story in question is already under consideration with another (print) journal, so I sent my regrets – but I wouldn’t have been willing to so substantially shorten the piece anyway. (Participant N)

One of the most remarkable differences between publishing in the two mediums, which the participant notes in the passage above, is the fact that the editor of the online magazine asked if she would be willing to shorten the same story by one third that had already been under consideration in its full length by a print publication. Unlike some of the other participants, this participant did not write fan fiction, but rather has published (or had accepted for publication) short stories in online magazines, print publications, and publications that are available both in print and online.

A limitation of publishing a short story online is that it is more difficult to read longer texts online, due to the different reading behaviour people tend to exhibit when browsing online versus when reading a story in a print anthology, collection, or magazine. Perhaps the editor of the online magazine was basing his request on experience, knowing that people usually prefer to read shorter texts online, when asking Participant N to shorten the story, rather than requesting that the story be shortened because it would have tightened up the content or made a more effective short story as a print publisher might do (or to reduce the space that the story would take up because of printing costs or publication page lengths, which is also not a concern with online publications). Although the ability to publish any length of text had originally been lauded as one of the benefits of publishing online, other factors than just the capabilities of the medium, such as online reading habits and user preferences, affect the form (and, by extension,
the content) of the short story. Just because one may be able to publish any length of text for almost the same cost as a shorter text in an online publication does not mean that it would be beneficial to publish the longer text.

Other participants noted some differences even in how publishers for print formats review a short story under consideration, compared to how publishers previously worked with authors. Participant P states,

The editors who have published me have worked online, even if they published in print form. There are two main types of processes. The first is exchange of comments by email including edited versions of the text. The second (which I prefer) is for a live exchange by telephone or meeting or using ICQ or a chat room until agreement is reached on all major issues. Minor edits are then handled using more traditional methods. Of 13 short story writers I am currently editing, only one actively prefers everything to be done using exchange of text ie with less active dialogue. (Participant P, Gillian Polack)

The above response, from an editor and author who mainly writes novels but has also published a short story online, shows some of the ways in which writers exchange comments with editors or publishers, a process which has become similar to how writers share tips or suggestions with other writers. Often, the process used depends on the personal preference of the author. Interestingly, this author also states that she made some changes when publishing online.

When asked if she had written stories with the specific intention to publish them online, and if she noticed any differences in writing for an online publication instead of one that was published in print, this participant replied, “Just the one, which was a short short story. I
intentionally played with form and sentence structure in a way I would not for something longer. Paragraphing and the overall look of the piece was also doctored to fit the screen” (Participant P, Gillian Polack). Here the author has also noticed a difference in the length of stories written for online publication, in addition to paragraphing and other aspects of formatting for the story.

Most of these participants commented that they did not write specifically to publish online, however, and that any changes to the story would come after it was written, in the revising or editing process: “I haven’t written stories with the specific intention to publish them online. I suppose I associate that kind of internet-conscious style with journalism, rather than literary writing. I can see how it might be an effective approach, but it’s not really my style” (Participant N). Interestingly, this writer associated a consciousness of the medium with non-literary writing such as journalism. If a writer continually published stories online, however, that writer may, through a consciousness of what changes publishers would expect in the revision process, begin to write his or her stories differently by changing the length, formatting, and structure; the same changes in length, formatting, and structure might be seen in the writings of people who are used to reading stories published online instead of in other formats. I did not receive any responses from people who write experimental short fiction that intentionally plays with the differences in format, such as hypertext and new media writers or writers of avant-garde print works, or writers of born-digital short fiction, but I assume that they would have responded that the born-digital short fiction they create is different from fiction they would create for a print publication or publications that hold digital fiction that could easily be transmuted to print.

Fanfiction, which, as many participants have commented, has moved to mostly digital or online publication, shows this change in writing and a difference in the reviewing process. On the editing or reviewing process, Participant E states, “The one story I wrote for a printed fanzine
was reviewed via email by one or two individuals, but there were no changes to it in the published zine.” This minimal difference between the print and online publication of fan fiction may be attributed to the fact that specific conventions have already been developed in this genre; this was insightfully identified by another participant:

> When writing fan fiction it is much easier to write shorter pieces since the ‘canon’ is already there. I don’t have to write character descriptions or situations or do any worldbuilding. My intended audience is already familiar with characters and basic world. By the same token, I have to make sure that I am as true as possible to the characters’ voices and personality, which means that dialogue and motivation have less freedom for experimentation. (Participant H, Kristen M. Fife)

As Participant H points out, fan fiction has already developed its own conventions, or already developed its “canon,” and by already establishing a readership of modular (or shorter and serial) fiction in print fanzines, the genre easily moved to online publication. This movement occurred to such an extent that many fan-fiction writers have commented that online publications have overtaken the print zines.

> As mentioned when discussing the extent to which participants have other writers review their works, fan-fiction writers stated that they usually had a “beta” reader, who was often a close family member; other short fiction writers also had a close family member review their work,

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26 **Canon** takes on a slightly different meaning in the context of fan fiction: “All of the events which *expressly* happen in the fandom. Meaning, everything, person, event, statement, that happens in the show, movie, or book is canon. For example, Megabyte’s real name being Marmaduke is canon because it expressly says in Origin Story that it is. Everything that happens in the show is canon. This is sort of used like a law for fan fiction. alternate universes are where an author deliberately ignores, goes against, or stop [sic] paying attention to canon in order to create their own canon” (Freeman). **Fanon** is described as “Things that are not strictly canon, but do not contradict it and are widely accepted by most fans. For instance if most fans just accept that Megabyte's middle name is Archibald, even though it is not expressly canon, it becomes fanon” (Freeman).
even if they did not call this person a beta reader. Participant C goes into further detail on the process of reviewing and editing when posting fan fiction:

The finished draft of the story is sent to the ‘beta’ (a ‘beta’ being a person who reviews the story for punctuation, grammar, story flow, characterization, continuity, etc.) via email. The beta reviews the story and sends it back (via email) with corrections marked so that I can make the suggested changes or ignore them if I don’t agree. When posting directly on-line, this is generally the complete process, although I usually use two or three betas per story because everyone has different strengths and catches different mistakes. When sending a story to a ‘zine editor, it goes through my betas first, and then the editor will edit again, generally once again suggesting changes for me to make. The finished story is then either posted on-line or sent back to the ‘zine editor for printing. (Participant C)

From the participant’s description, the editing and reviewing process for fan fiction does not change much between print and online publication. However, some critics see beta readers as resulting from the move to online fan fiction:

Beta reading, the practice of releasing a story to a selected (and trusted) fellow writer or other member of the fan fiction community before making it available to a general readership through a fiction archive, a newsgroup, or additional avenues such as LiveJournal.com, is arguably a phenomenon that came about as a result of the move from paper-based to Internet-based fan fiction. (Karpovich 172)

Karpovich traces the use of the term, which was adopted from software development, to Star Trek fan writers and others in the late 1990s.
The shift in the use of the term *beta-reader* to describe a social practice in online fan fiction communities is

an early example of the medium-enabled convergence between the linguistic and social practices of seemingly entirely diverse online communities. The Internet has facilitated such instances of convergence through the combination of the easy-to-navigate nature of hypertext… and the literal overlap in the range of expertise and interests between the members of fandom and members of other subcultures.

(Karpovich 173)

Karpovich sees the practice of beta reading as building on the earlier fan practice of ‘‘talking story,’ which involved fans discussing potential story ideas and incomplete stories, either in the context of fan conventions or an even less formal gathering of fan writers, as described by Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* (1992, 161)” (177). When referring to fan fiction sites, Alex Bruns also references Henry Jenkins (2006), who has called the overall structure of some fan fiction sites a ‘‘beta-reading’ model’, or

a form of collaborative story development which is directly modeled on the beta-testing practices common especially in open source software development; here, authors are able to upload their story drafts so that other members of the community are able to provide direct and detailed critical feedback about the achievements and shortcomings of their work. In other cases, authors may directly seek out collaborators, and thus collaborate not only indirectly by improving their work based on feedback received but also by sharing the work of writing the story itself. (Bruns 233)
In other words, even though some participants may not see some online writing practices as being different from writing in print, the history of these processes shows that there are some changes.

Some other writers of non-fan fiction, such as Stefan Ingstrand, stated that they did not notice much difference between the print and online editing process:

When I sold the story to Neo-opsis (print), they e-mailed me to ask about a detail in the text. I think that they then sent me the edited version for approval. With Darwin’s Evolutions (web) I received the edited version straight away, but otherwise it was a very similar process. I didn’t have any major objections in either case.

(Participant J, Stefan Ingstrand)

This participant did notice a difference in the response time when it came to publishing in print and online, but otherwise he said he did not notice differences, unlike the writer who was asked to substantially shorten her story for online publication.

Some participants who just wrote fan fiction commented that they had received informal comments from other writers, but that their work had never been edited:

My work has never been edited. I only ever posted in communities which let all members post. Some people would give me comments, their thoughts after they read the fanfiction. I think most people don’t comment if they don’t like what they see. It’s usually just a comment like: ‘This was very nice’ etc, not much analysis or discussion of ideas goes on. And I think that people usually comment for each other because they are friends. (Participant L)
This immediate, informal feedback is, as mentioned previously, something that participants have said has served as a form of encouragement, in addition to being able to publish without having to go through an editor who would critique or reject the story. Participant I also stated that the feedback within fan fiction communities was much more encouraging than going through other editing and reviewing processes: “I’ve not published stories in paper publications but I have published academic articles in peer-reviewed journals and one book. The editing process for the fanfic stories is much more supportive.” One fan fiction writer made an interesting point that the fact that she was writing online was not what made a difference in the content, but rather the particular challenges or requested material for different communities. In this way, her writing might be different when writing for online publication or distribution instead of writing stories for print publication, because she is writing fan fiction:

None of the preceding, therefore, involves any alteration of my writing specifically related to the fact that I was writing on line; and, on the whole, I would say that I do not make such changes. However, with respect to the material written for the maryrenaultfics community, this is not entirely true. One needs to distinguish between fiction written in response to a challenge, material (whether prose or dialogue) written for the ‘In Their Own Words’ and ‘5Y’ projects, and short stories that were written independent of such community activities.

I have written one independent short story: no modification of style was introduced, and it was a full-length short story.

‘Challenge fics’ are written in response to a prompt posted to the community to elicit stories. In particular, the desire is to encourage non-writers to participate, since the expectation is that the story will be short. In some instances, there is even a time
limit. As a result, challenge fics tend to be mere vignettes. They are written quickly
if (but only if) the challenge inspires me. At this point, I have written two such
stories.…

In other words, if I do modify my writing, it is in the context of some group activity
in which other members of the community are also participating. This doesn’t affect
the length of paragraphs or sentences, nor the choice of vocabulary; but it may affect
the length of the composition and does affect the process of writing. (Participant B)

This participant emphasized at various points in her responses that it was less the difference in
form that affected the stories she wrote, but whether the story was written individually or in
collaboration with other writers. Since collaboration may be fostered in online communities,
however, through various challenges or other projects within the community, as pointed out in
the above quotation, one could say that the medium itself also affects the story that is created and
published or distributed within it:

This not only affects the way I write, but also the end product. Group activities take
place over time (typically a week or two); and, as they progress, they evolve under
the influence of other people’s activities. By contrast, the independently written fan
fiction depends only on my own creativity, and is finished and polished before
anyone else sees it. (Participant B)

This increased potential for collaboration, as noted by the above participant, has an effect on the
stories she creates.

Another aspect of the reviewing process for digital fiction was the quality, and as at least
one participant noted, some sites, as a way of making people become more involved in the site,
created poor quality reviews by making participants review others’ works before they could view reviews on their own work: “The writers’ websites such as urbis.com that I have visited use reviews to earn credits to unlock the reviews of your own work. They are not usually of very high quality and end up being repetitive” (Participant F, Carole Harris). In sites like this, an author may wonder if reviewers have only left comments in order to gain credits within the site, or if they left the comments because they genuinely liked the story.

3.1.6 Use of the Web to Advertise One’s Name or Writing

I was also looking for information about the extent to which participants might prefer or use the online medium as a way of advertising their name or their writing. The ability to advertise through social networks on the Web is an advantage that publishers such as Penguin and even university presses such as the University of Alberta Press have begun to embrace, and I wanted to see if individual writers were also publishing their short stories online as a way of advertising their name or their writing. Responses varied from a simple “No” (Participant I; L) or “Not at all” (Participant K, Amy L. Fritsch) to acknowledgements that the Web can be a great help in making a writer’s name and work more well-known. Participant D replied, “Yes, although I’d like to create an even stronger Web presence. As I’ve said before, I think networking and promoting your work on the Web can make a huge difference. It certainly has for others!” (Participant D). This participant had also commented that she published online, created blogs, and joined social networking sites specifically to market her work. In response to why the participant chose to publish in one medium or another, she replied,

I have several ‘freebie’ short stories up on Scribd (http://www.scribd.com). I have made these short stories available to everyone who happens across them in hopes of
acquiring readers. If they like my writing enough, I can only hope they’ll Google my name and find other stories, or, even better, my blog.

Oh, yes, I have a blog.

I post writing updates, snippets of current WIPS, sample chapters, and my thoughts on craft and process, as well as real life ramblings. I believe my blog is perhaps my best marketing tool. It’s certainly another means of connecting with a larger audience. Has it worked? On a small scale, I believe it has. Do I wish I were more popular? Absolutely! (Participant D)

This participant acknowledges that the medium in which she publishes her stories has also served as a marketing tool. Shorter works of fiction are more suited for this purpose: they can give readers a glimpse or, as Participant D states, a “snippet” of works in progress without having to read the entire work.

Other participants also commented that they created blogs or joined social networking sites specifically to market their name or their work: “One of the main reasons I established my personal blogs was for marketing purposes; to establish myself as a SME [Subject Matter Expert] in my profession and to garner referrals for my businesses” (Participant H, Kristen M. Fife). Although this participant’s blogs are related to her occupation, which is separate from her creative writing, they are still connected with making the writer’s name better known. Others commented that they had different blogs or pages devoted to their personal interests and others devoted to their writing: “I have a Facebook celebrity page (or whatever it’s called, I can’t exactly claim to be a celebrity…). Anyone who has Facebook can post there, and everyone else can use it to find my e-mail address. It is completely devoted to my writing; I have another page
for personal facebooking” (Participant J, Stefan Ingstrand). This writer does not write fan fiction, and has published some short stories on his personal website:

I did publish short stories on my own website, but there was no community involved (I did have some contact with other writers with similar web pages, though). The closest I came was publishing a story on a site called Private Galaxy, but that was more of an experimental webzine than a community. I also sold a piece to Darwin’s Evolutions, but that was definitely a webzine. (Participant J, Stefan Ingstrand)

This writer also commented that he primarily used social networking sites to market his name and writing: “I do have Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, and I use it mainly to try to market myself and my writing” (Participant J, Stefan Ingstrand).

Some participants said that they did not use the Web to advertise their name or their writing, but added that there still may be some ways in which they do use the Web in this way: “No. Only in direct connection with my posted stories” (Participant F, Carole Harris). On whether this participant preferred to publish online or in print, however, she mentioned that the ability to market one’s name or works in the online medium was something that she thought of:

Getting published is my ambition, ie writing something that someone would consider of sufficient quality to pay to read and, by extension, that someone would be willing to invest in to promote and distribute and thus increase their return. Part of me is old-fashioned and perhaps prejudiced in thinking that a physical object has more permanence, and therefore more literary quality, than something that only exists in cyber space. Realistically, I think online self-publishing and promotion is a way to attract a real publisher and/or agent by proving that your work has viability and an
audience. I am not aware that online publishers act in the same way that real publishers do, ie pay for the costs of publishing, promoting and distribution of your work. (Participant F, Carole Harris)

Although this participant still sees the print medium as more prestigious or viable and lasting (and calls print publishers “real publishers”), she does recognize publication online as a way to promote one’s work and perhaps increase the chances of being published in print.

Participants who wrote mostly fan fiction often commented that they did not use the Web to advertise their name or their writing, but that they might use the Web to announce new episodes or to let people within the community know about any additions or changes, which would still be a form of advertising one’s writing (even if it is not advertising one’s name):

I would not say that I particularly advertise my fan fiction, on or off the web. However, when I started my website, the episodes of FK4 (my virtual fourth season of Forever Knight) were posted weekly to simulate the schedule of an actual television series. Each week, I announced the new episode on FORKNI-L so that people in the community would know it was up. Only after the entire season was posted did I happen across the website for Phoenix Virtual Television (http://www.pvtonline.tv/). I promptly sent them a notice about it. (They now list it).

The Forever Knight Wiki includes information on fan fiction. Ideally, ultimately, it will have a page for every story, poem, and script that fans have written, including an archive location for each. As such, my FK4 is listed there—collectively as a virtual season, and individually by episode. This isn’t precisely advertisement: substantially the same material would be written by whoever was working on the site (and pages
have been done for hundreds of other stories). However, in practice, I am one of the major contributors to the wiki; and I am the one who wrote that set of pages.

(Participant B)

In the above excerpt, the participant states that she uses the Web to advertise new fan-fiction episodes written for the series, but not that the Web is used specifically to advertise her name or her writing. Because fan fiction is centred on the storyline or the work of a famous author, such as J. K. Rowling, individual writers might not be advertising their own works, although the above writer does have a page in which she displays the sections she has written.

Some writers who wrote non-fiction professionally as their career stated that they used the Web to advertise their professional writing:

Well, for sure, for my real life writing, via the website, LinkedIn and those other areas (even Twitter I suppose). It’s all about finding paying sources for my writing and editing work. Also joining PWAC and the Canadian Editors’ Association are on the agenda, primarily for being listed in their online resources. I should say that this (online advertising/searching for work) has become more of a priority this year due to the economy and writing assignments becoming much more scarce. And the demise of newspapers etc. (Participant G, Ellen Ashton-Haiste)

It is interesting that this writer referred to her non-fictional writing as “real-life” in contrast to the writing that she does for fan fiction communities. She does not see fan fiction as associated with her name or her writing, and instead uses the Web to advertise her non-fiction writing she does as her occupation. In fact, some writers who only wrote fan fiction, and wanted to maintain a clear separation between their fan fiction writing and their “real-life” work, took pains to keep
their writing or name from being advertised on the Web: in response to whether Participant C used the Web to advertise this writer’s name or writing, the participant responded, “Only in that I might announce a newly posted story to a Yahoo Group mailing list. Otherwise, no, I don’t advertise. I have even put meta tags on my pages to keep the search engine spiders from archiving my pages. I prefer to remain anonymous, except within the fandom in which I write” (Participant C). The extent to which a participant used the Web to self-advertise varied according to the subject matter of the stories.

Anonymity is therefore an additional quality that may attract writers to the Web. The medium can be used to advertise one’s name or create an audience, but writers can also do the opposite by circulating fiction without having to connect it to their non-virtual life or occupation. Participant C’s choice to remain anonymous was also a result of the type of fiction this participant wrote: “I do tend to write a lot of erotic fiction, and therefore write under a pseudonym. My family is not aware of the nature of my writing. Not everything I write is erotic, but since a majority of it is, I prefer to try and remain anonymous” (Participant C). This writer did comment that it is “easier to reach a larger audience on-line, and feedback is available, which can help improve my writing and ‘fan the muse’, ” but because of the nature of the writing, the Web was not being used to advertise the participant’s name or writing. Other fan fiction writers made similar comments about not using the Web to advertise their name or writing, unless they were also interested in creating other non-fan-fiction stories: “No, online fanfic isn’t for sale, but free for anyone to read. There is no advertising” (Participant E, “Susan B.”). Participants such as Gillian Polack, who did not write fan fiction, usually had blogs or personal websites in which they would post their stories as a means of self-publishing and circulating their stories online in order to advertise their name and distribute their stories to a larger readership:
My LJ operates a bit like [an online writing community](http://gillpolack.livejournal.com): if you examine my friends’ list you will see that it has many writers. We all read each others’ blogs and comment where it’s appropriate. I also belong to several Facebook groups, but am not very active there. I am active in other groups at various times eg email groups (my favourite is goodbooks@triviumpublishing.com, run by one of my publishers) and Absolute Write Water Cooler…. I also have a website (http://www.gillianpolack.com) which is mainly for my writing. All blogs have contact details and yes, people do use them to contact me. (Participant P, Gillian Polack)

Another writer who had published short stories both in print and online commented that she did not have her own website for her writing, but had “toyed with the idea,” and admired the websites of other writers:

> I think the key to a good website is a unifying theme. I’m a fan of *Pound* (www.poundy.com), which is a website created by the writer Wendy McClure. She used it to chronicle her struggles with weight loss and body image: eventually she produced a book based on her website writings called *I’m Not the New Me*. I admire that. (Participant N)

In sum, most writers who were either already publishing short stories on the Web other than fan fiction, or writing fan fiction but also hoping to publish other works of fiction, used the Web to advertise their name or their writing at least to some extent, and those who only wrote fan fiction and wanted to keep their writing separate from their day-to-day lives were able to find anonymity by publishing or circulating their stories on the Web. In the quotation above, the participant also mentions a writer who created a book based on writings from her blog. In this
way, the digital, online medium is allowing authors to pre-publish and gather feedback from readers before publishing in print.

3.1.7 The Effect of the Internet on What People Choose to Write

I also asked about the type of writing these participants wrote: whether they also created other types of fiction or non-fiction, and whether they thought that the type of writing they do would be different if the Internet did not exist. The responses to this question varied as well. Participant B responded that she wrote in the form of a modified script for *Forever Knight* fanfiction, that for the maryrenaultfics community she has written some material “as dialogue, with no text,” and that she is also currently writing a novel. As to whether or not the type of writing she does would be different if the Internet did not exist, she states that the Internet has influenced some of her writing, but not all:

I wrote the *Forever Knight* virtual season long before I got a new computer that enabled me to go on line, simply because I was inspired by watching the television series. Obviously, therefore, as far as that is concerned, the answer has to be no. The Internet had no effect on it.

However, I would probably never have written any of my other fan fiction without the inspiration of the fan communities. I loved the Sime~Gen series of books; but I had read them years ago, and only wrote the single short story after reading fan fiction (and re-reading the books). Equally, it was reading *Alias Smith and Jones* fan fiction that inspired me to start my novel—and then quickly alter the characters’ names when I realized that I did not want to be bound by the details of the series.
As for the Mary Renault fan fiction: that is all very tightly bound up with being a member of the maryrenaultfics LJ [LiveJournal] community. When I joined, largely to participate in the book discussion, I had no intention of writing fan fiction based on her books. However, a fic challenge tweaked an idea; I responded, and wrote my first Charioteer story, which inspired me to write a longer story. Similarly, I have responded to the ‘In Their Own Words’ and ‘5Y’ projects—partly from real interest, but also because they are group activities, and I consider myself part of that community and take part in that spirit. (Participant B)

The participant mentions that some of her fan-fiction was inspired by being a member of certain online communities, some of which she joined because she was interested in the subject matter rather than intending to contribute to fan fiction. She was already writing fan-fiction before the Internet, and would not consider the Internet as having an effect on that particular type of fan-fiction.

Some other participants who were also fan-fiction writers stated that they wrote novels or poetry in addition to fan fiction short stories (Participant F, Carole Harris), and that the type of writing they do would be different if the Internet did not exist: “I wouldn’t have the confidence to produce short stories. An immediate and readily available audience, together with a favourable response, together with a long-term interest in the subject matter, have given me the confidence and enthusiasms to write far more than I would have without the internet” (Participant F, Carole Harris). Others, who stated that they normally wrote novels and that their short stories were usually “prompted by challenges posed to the larger writing community I am associated with or in an attempt to meet a submission call” (Participant D), said that their writing probably would not be very different if the Internet did not exist: “No. Although without it,
perhaps inspiration would have to come from somewhere else. I love browsing sites like DeviantArt (http://www.deviantart.com) and finding artwork that whispers a story in my ear” (Participant D). Participant J, who has published short stories in print magazines and newsletters, posted some of these stories on his website, has written short film scripts, plays, and web comics, and is working on a novel. He stated that he also would have had to find inspiration from different sources if the Web did not exist, but that he would probably still be writing the same type of fiction: “I probably would have had a different inspirational input if there were only printed sources, and that would have led to a different output. I would probably write within the same genres, though, and still try to sell to genre publishers” (Participant J, Stefan Ingstrand).

Participant H, who started writing fan fiction as “‘practice’ for original fiction for a book” and states that she “used the fan fiction as a litmus test for my style and to see how well received my writing would be,” responded by stating “Absolutely. I probably wouldn’t even write fiction” if the Web did not exist (Participant H, Kristen M. Fife). Some participants responded that they would be writing more traditional short stories instead of fanfiction if the Web did not exist: “Without the internet, I would have had no venue for publishing the Forever Knight stories, nor would I have likely written them. So then I guess my focus regarding fiction writing would be short story anthologies, novels etc.” (Participant G, Ellen Ashton-Haiste).

Other participants responded that because they primarily write fan fiction through an online community, if the Internet did not exist they probably would not be writing at all (Participant I; C; K; E). Participant E stated, “I’m not certain that I would have written any stories at all without the internet as reading fanfic encouraged me to try. I might have still scribbled the odd poem as I’ve been doing that since I was a teenager.” Participant C stated, “If the Internet did not exist, I probably wouldn’t be writing at all. I was telling myself these fandom stories in my head ever since my childhood, but never wrote a single one down until I
got established on the World Wide Web.” As noted by Participant N when describing Wendy McClure’s website writings that were eventually published as a book, perhaps the Internet encourages writers to pre-publish their fiction before attempting print publication. Participant I also stated, “I probably wouldn’t be writing as the writing grew out of my involvement with ‘maryrenaultfics’ which is online—with approx 200 members worldwide. This means it is a small community. Apart from my sister I don’t know any people in person who like Renault’s books.” The online community allowed this participant to connect with writers with similar interests in a way that may not have been possible in a face-to-face context. Participant K stated that the amount of writing and type of fiction she read would be different if she could not access fan fiction through the Internet: “I don’t think I would be writing nearly as much, nor would I read as much fanfiction. I think I am only currently writing at ALL because I have fanfiction as an option and have been able to meet so many more fans.”

In sum, most participants stated that the Web had some effect on their writing: either that they would not be writing at all if the Web did not exist, or that they would be writing more traditional short stories instead of fan fiction, or that they would be writing within the same type of genre but publishing in a different format. What I wanted to find out by asking writers this question was whether being able to publish or distribute short fiction digitally over the Web changed the type of writing they were creating, or if they would be writing at all. Most participants stated that the Web did have some effect. In essence, the Web has had some effect on writers by being able to encourage those to write who may not otherwise have written short fiction at all, or by having writers produce different types of fiction (shorter works, poetry, and other forms) than they would have produced if they only had access to print or oral distribution methods.
As mentioned earlier, this was not a quantitative study in which I had a formal questionnaire and evaluated the number of participants who selected one response over another, but rather an open-ended set of questions that hopefully allowed participants to share their insights into the type of short fiction being written in some Web communities and by some short fiction authors. However, I have been able to learn from these participants’ descriptions of their experiences. The type of writing they create, why they might publish or distribute their short fiction in one medium or another, and the extent to which they use advice from editors, reviewers, or members of a community are all factors that show how the short story, as a form, is written differently than it was before the proliferation of social networks on the Web, even if most writers are still not producing born-digital works. If we consider a social network as being a medium in itself—whether it is a fanfiction community or the whole connected Web 2.0 of the Internet—then this social network has an effect not only on the format of a short story but also its content, characters, structure, and many other aspects, as described by the participants above. Perhaps most important, however, is the merging of roles—of reader as editor or reviewer, author as designer, and, in any case, a more active involvement in a number of roles on the part of readers, authors, editors, and publishers. In addition to the responses to the questions that I have asked participants, there were also a number of additional comments by participants that shared insight on their experiences, which is what I was also hoping to receive by leaving some room for additional comments or open-ended answers. These are described in the following sections.

3.1.8 The Effect of Location and Geography on Whether Writers Create Short Fiction

Participant P offered additional information about the effect of location on reading and writing preferences:
One thing you might need to note is the effect of location on reading and writing habits. I rather suspect that it’s easier for Australians to get short stories into print than novels and it’s certainly more convenient for us to work online and live a generous part of our writing life online. We are very far from the accepted centres of writing life and it’s a considerable sacrifice to get to US conventions and etc.

Established writers can get funding for travel or have sufficient income, would-be writers with daytime jobs can travel, but for the rest of us our main opportunities to grow as writers and to make connections as writers are all through the web.

…. I live in Canberra, Australia’s national capital. It’s a highly literate city and highly computerised. Many writers have several degrees, but seldom in writing or editing (mine are in history and education). There are no big publishers here and most of the small publishers have close links to writers ie were established because there was a local dearth of development opportunities. Canberra writers tend to operate online a lot more than other writers and also to produce more short stories per capita (because they are easier for a community such as ours). Our strong community cohesion is commented on regularly by overseas visitors. (Participant P, Gillian Polack)

This writer points out that because of geographic location and the fact that it is easier to get short stories into print than novels, many writers within her region in Australia would end up writing short stories or working online by connecting through social networks or publishing fiction online. The community in which this writer lives has a strong sense of cohesion in itself, but if wanting to break into a larger market, writers must connect through the Web to promote their works if it is too expensive or time-consuming to physically travel to networking venues. A
proliferation of writers of short fiction, because it is easier to publish, does impact the form by increasing its availability, popularity, and the possibility of experimentation.

Participant L had also commented that she read people’s in-progress or recently published stories online: “At people’s personal fic journals. Those are the good ones. Or at online fic communities for my fandom. I never tell people I know in real life about this except my sister.” It is interesting to note that, as mentioned before, many writers considered their online reading and writing to be separate from their “real-life” and sometimes actively sought to keep a separation between online behaviour and what they called “real-world” behaviour. This concern for anonymity and separation from one’s everyday activities might also depend on the type of literature, as noted earlier: Participant L states, “The fandom is pretty misogynistic, in many stories women characters have no place or are without personal depth. Most of the writers are teenage girls.” The pleasure of reading and writing in this context may be that it is so different from the content encountered in mainstream media, but this is also why many people feel that they have to keep this activity a secret.

3.1.9 Publishing and Posting

Some writers, in fact, did not think of their fiction as being published, but rather as “posting,” or writing for entertainment or a connection to a community rather than as a serious vocation:

Incidentally, I think there is a difference between online publishing and posting. I would classify publishing as used for professional or semi-professional work ie work that the writer hopes to earn money for (such as online magazines) or to launch themselves on a literary career. Posting I would classify as principally for entertainment. For example, although I would like a literary career, I would classify
my work as posting because it is too romantically centred, too homosexual, to be considered by a proper publisher. In my opinion it is too self-indulgent to be published and I think this is one of the characteristics of online fiction. (Participant F, Carole Harris)

This participant has made a strong distinction between posting stories for entertainment and writing of a more serious nature. Many would argue, however, that much of what this participant considers as self-indulgent has made its way into mainstream publication, and many new writers, as mentioned in Chapter 1 and 2, are writing works of this nature, something I and others have linked to our current postmodern moment in time. Many writers perhaps would not want to write the same fiction as a serious vocation, although they may write it as entertainment by posting within online communities. This same participant also commented that because she was taking the characteristics of her online audience into consideration, she changed some aspects of the content of her stories:

When I first started writing these stories [for the Alexander community], I was aware that 1/ English was not the first language of many of the readers, 2/ many of the readers were teenagers, 3/ most of the readers were female, 4/ most of the stories were concerned with sex, romance and angst, and 5/ many of the readers would be less interested in the historical Alexander than the fictional one. Consequently I deliberately tried to keep my style simple, not indulge in abstract concepts and keep historical details as background information. The focus of my stories tended to be on Alexander’s personal and sexual relationships rather than on his military conquests as I believed these would appeal more to the target audience. (Participant F, Carole Harris)
Although many writers had been adjusting their writing style and content for different publications before the Web, if Web readers tend to be of a different age and background than general readers, perhaps stories published on the Web will be distinct in style and content in order to appeal to a different type of reader.

3.1.10 Copyright and the Quality of Digital Short Fiction: Original Versus Fan Fiction Works

Participant F had also commented that she has not been reading as much lately in the online communities of which she is a part because of diminished quality: “I used to read a lot of other people’s work through watching communities when I first discovered fan fiction about 5 years ago, but my interest has waned due to the repetition of subject matter and poor writing skills of some writers, together with lack of time” (Participant F, Carole Harris). This participant had also volunteered her own fan fiction web page statistics, from which she had found that the M (mature) stories were far more popular than the K (suitable for children) stories, that American readers predominated in the sites, and that there was a wide range of countries accessing the site (more than 70). She stated that “the results of the poll would seem to indicate that romance is the principal reason for reading these stories” (Participant F, Carole Harris).

Perhaps, then, in addition to the Web being suitable for shorter or more modular forms of literature, one should also take into consideration the particular genres, such as romance, that may have largely moved to the Web from their Harlequin roots (Radway, 2002), or perhaps romance has proliferated on the Web alongside in its print texts.

Slash fiction communities centre around fiction which is about romantic and sexual encounters between established characters. These works therefore contribute to the “existing textual universes of popular print, television, and movie culture by adding their own stories that are internally consistent with the fictional universe within which they operate” (Bruns 232). A
couple of participants, who preferred to remain anonymous, stated that they wrote slash fiction in addition to other types of fan fiction and short fiction. Although there are now many sites dedicated to the production of original works by participants in the community (rather than slash or fan fiction that seeks to contribute to or alter the creative worlds already produced by others), many issues such as ownership and copyright within fan or slash-fiction communities can also apply to communities in which original works have been posted by their authors. A work that is posted by one author within a community, and then contributed to through comments, edits, reviews, and suggested additions written by another reader or user, may then be considered as the work of more than one author. Or, since the work was edited by the members of a specific community, perhaps the community might be considered to have some sort of ownership of the work in the way that a publisher applies its imprint to a work after editing and honing it according to its standards. Most fiction communities will indicate that the copyright remains with the author who is posting a submission to the website, and he or she is free to publish in other venues without attributing the site as the original publication venue. The writers of digital short fiction from my study also acknowledged that these potential issues with ownership, copyright, and attribution should be considered when discussing a particular work of short fiction or when referring to the works produced by a particular community.

Another aspect to note is that tellers of oral tales also did not hold copyright in the same sense that we think of this term today, and, as previously discussed in the context of the music industry, distinctions such as authorship, ownership, and copyright become problematic when the creative work, whether musical or text, becomes transmutable or detached from a fixed object such as a printed book or a compact disc. Interestingly, this aspect of digital publication was not commented upon by the participants in my study, although many of these participants wrote fan fiction or slash fiction, which is already often considered to be going against the owner of the
original content. Those writers who published non-fan-fiction short stories, however, would comment on the prestige of print publications, perhaps as also being associated with the emphasis on the author within the printed text and a greater stability of copyright. Circulating drafts of one’s work online can be risky, since someone can possibly take aspects of a story and publish it as his or her own. With oral stories, however, and even early print texts such as Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, stories usually consisted of familiar motifs, plots, and stock characters with a slight twist in the story’s retelling, as if the teller of the story was a designer rather than author. As seen with the inclusion of the “designers” in the credits alongside the authors of the stories in Penguin’s *We Tell Stories* project, this designer role is sometimes now attributed as a notable co-teller of the story.

3.1.11 Writing and Community

Other writers took the opportunity to expand on the sense of community created within the social networks and writing communities they were a part of. Participant E said,

> Working with other people (writers and non-writers) in creating stories from the idea stage to the finished product provided many opportunities for lasting friendships with people from Canada, the U.S., and even abroad….

The ability to post Fanfic on the internet allows everyone, regardless of their writing skills, to create stories and share them with others.

Three of our fanfic-writing faction members have passed away in the last few years, and the fanfic they have left behind helps us to remember them. (Participant E, “Susan B.”)
Even though the members of the community had never met in person, they formed strong connections among others in the community, even to the point that they felt the loss of members who had passed away.

Many writers also pointed out that they tended to access new writing from people they knew within various communities directing them to podcasts: “The friend mentioned above sometimes directs me to new podcasted stories on the web” (Participant J, Stefan Ingstrand). This circulation of the performed story, as mentioned earlier, brings back an element of oral circulation of the story. Other writers had commented that “Podcasts are huge” (Participant D). Book readings were present before the Web, but they were not necessarily accessible to a large audience or archived unless broadcast through television, and also would not have had the same viral or friend-of-a-friend and serendipitous distribution\textsuperscript{27} as podcasts have.

One of my participants is also studying fan fiction communities in addition to writing fan fiction of her own, and she provided some important questions on how one might define a community or consider oneself as publishing as part of a community. She states,

One needs to distinguish between publishing \textit{in} and [sic] on-line community and publishing \textit{as part of} that community…. One also needs to define what is meant by ‘on-line community’.

Taking the latter first: there is on-line fan-fiction publishing that is not really \textit{community} based. Many of the people who post stories to large multi-fandom sites such as \url{http://www.fanfiction.net} and MakeBelieve Archive (\textsuperscript{27}Elaine Toms has written about the importance of serendipitous search online or being able to come across works that one might not otherwise have noticed (2009).
do not do so in any strictly-defined sense of ‘community’, but simply because it is a place where they can post their stories and have others locate them. If this is ‘community’, it is only in the sense that all media fans have much in common. (This is not personally relevant, since I have never posted to one of these large sites.)

Second: are you counting mailing lists as online communities?... For those older fandoms that still communicate largely through an e-mail list, there may also be LJ communities, Yahoo groups, personal websites, blogs, and the like; but the nexus of the fandom may remain the mailing list, and stories may be sent out first (or only) to people on that list, and may or may not later be archived on a website. (Participant B)

In addition to pointing out the complexity of defining a community in the online environment, this participant also noted the complexity in determining whether one was writing in a way that was changed by the community, or if the community was only being used as a distribution medium and the story was therefore not being published “as part of” that community.

What I was looking for was the extent to which one’s publication of a story in the digital medium and through the social networks of the Web would change aspects of the short story, such as its style, format, length, content, and other conventions. As pointed out by other participants, generally they did change the story somewhat for online publication at least by taking the audience into consideration. Participant B continued by saying, “There is therefore no direct connection between my writing and the community. (There is, on the other hand, a direct connection between my publishing and the community.)” (emphasis in original). Many other writers stated that they did not keep this separation between their writing within a community and publishing within a community, or that they catered their stories to match the medium or the
particular community or publication. Mailing lists, as part of the communication for an overall community, count within the overall definition of what would constitute distribution of one’s work via the Web.

In his book *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage*, Alex Bruns coins a new term for the increase in the extent to which a writer’s work is written as part of a publication or community, or the shift from passive usage to its concurrent production. He calls this “produsage,” a combination of the terms *production* and *usage*. Although we do not really need to add to the number of neologisms already present within the study of new media or Web 2.0 communities, Bruns’s term does highlight the more active role that readers or users can have when reading and writing digital short fiction:

What emerges is that in the online, networked, information economy, participants are not simply passive consumers, but active users, with some of them participating more strongly with a focus on their own personal use, some of them participating more strongly in ways which are inherently constructive and productive of social networks and communal content. These latter users occupy a hybrid position of being both users and what in traditional terms would have to be described loosely as producers: they are productive users, or produsers, engaged in the act of produsage. (Bruns 23)

Bruns explains how this shift to productive users is illustrated in a variety of formats, many of which were not initially considered to be social media but, as the medium of Web 2.0 developed, developed attributes that enabled the reader/user to be more actively involved as a producer/creator:
we also see an increasing trend to make productive (overtly or covertly) even those forms of participation which we may traditionally have considered to be strictly private ‘consumptive’ uses: the very acts of using Google to search for information, of traversing the Amazon online catalog, or indeed of browsing the Web itself, now create data trails which when analyzed and fed back into the algorithm of search engines and content directories contribute to subtly alter the browsing experience of the next user. Not only are we all users, then—the more such tools for all of us to affect one another’s experience of the shared online knowledge space become commonplace, the more do we all become produsers of that knowledge space itself (whether we know it or not). (Bruns 23-24)

Bruns indicates that there is an oscillating influence between the reader/user and the medium: the more people become accustomed to reading in certain contexts, the more they will expect to see texts that fit their expectations, which will produce “that knowledge space itself.” Indeed, the digital natives now coming into high school and post-secondary courses have had access to different media, texts, and experiences than older generations, and this will perhaps have an effect on the texts that this audience will read.

It is interesting to note that short-fiction communities have not really taken off in the world’s most prominent social-networking medium—Facebook—at least not at the time of writing in 2009. A search for “short story” on Facebook produced over 500 results but most groups had only a few members, with some having only the original group creator as a member. Many groups also just served to refer people to short-fiction community sites outside of Facebook and cannot be considered as an active community in itself within Facebook. The group called “short story lovers,” for example, was one of the groups with a larger number of
members (607 as of May 20, 2009), and was created by Readwide Media. This is “a company dedicated to the promotion of literature worldwide,” which offers its books for sale on its site and “classic short stories… for free reading” (“Readwide Media”). On this site, the short story is actually being used as a way to attract readers to the company’s books, and the Facebook community is a way to advertise the company’s name and website. Under “Recent News” in the “short story lovers” Facebook community, the administrators state, “You can read classic short stories for free at http://www.readwidemedia.com/” (“Facebook | short story lovers”). This site does not contain works-in-progress by various authors; instead, it is selling what it calls its “classic stories” such as F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. In sum, rather than tapping into Web 2.0 through the site itself, Readwide Media created a group within a separate social networking site and used the form of the short story to attract readers or users to its site. Readwide Media is able to use short stories in this way because the stories are older works and therefore do not have the same copyright restrictions as newer works.

As seen within short-fiction communities that make short stories available by amateur or up-and-coming authors, and even by established authors, authors and publishers are realising that offering short fictional works for free can be a way to promote an author and the publisher’s imprint (as discussed earlier with Penguin). This sort of advertising can be an effective way to attract readers to an author. Shorter short stories, or ones that can function more easily as smaller snippets, may work better in this context.

The wall within the “short story lovers” Facebook group is also used by authors, other publishers, and other short fiction communities to promote their books or sites. For example, Bec Zugor wrote on May 11, 2009, “If you like reading or writing science-fiction short stories, you might like to try Escape Velocity: [http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?FAcctID=1727255](http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?FAcctID=1727255) In
Escape Velocity #4 there are around ten stories, including a story by Sonny Whitelaw (of Stargate novels fame) and also a story by me (of no fame whatsoever). Hope you enjoy the mag!” (“Facebook | short story lovers”). Under the “Links” section of the group, authors such as Bhuvan Mathur post links to their sites and stories. There is not much discussion or exchange between members, at least not within the group itself (it is not apparent from the site whether individual users contact each other): under the “Discussion” section, there are only three topics. With the privacy settings on Facebook, it may be more difficult for members to contact each other unless they are also on each other’s “Friends” lists in their individual profiles. This may be why writing communities on Facebook have been used mostly as a bulletin board for posting information, rather than as a collaborative workspace.

A group has also been created on Facebook called “Creative Writing Sites on Facebook—an Index”, which just lists non-scholarly creative writing sites that are on the Facebook site and does not list sites that are outside of Facebook. Even within this group, however, many members post links to their non-Facebook sites on the group’s wall. As acknowledged by the administrators, “Creative Writing sites on Facebook proliferate daily,” and the purpose of the group is “to help people locate these sites: presses, magazines, workshop communities, writing programs, book sites, authors’ business pages, writers’ groups, writers’ retreats and residencies, writers’ salons, writers’ fan clubs, etc.” (“Facebook | Creative Writing Sites on Facebook”). The group had 6,737 members as of May 20, 2009, but, again, members of a group in a Facebook context often have a different level of participation than in non-Facebook sites. People may become members of a Facebook group just so that they can post information about their fiction or about their sites on the group’s wall, and in this way the group acts more as an advertising board than a place for interaction among its members. The nature of groups on Facebook is also somewhat different than in the non-Facebook context in that sometimes people
will join a group to make a statement by having its title listed on their profile, or they will just
join a group for fun. Some of the groups on Facebook can also serve to augment or connect
people who are part of a non-Internet writer’s group. An example is the “Writopia Lab” group,
which had 42 members as of May 20, 2009 and is described as being for “anyone who has taken
(or plans to take) a creative writing workshop at Writopia Lab, or who loves Writopia Lab
writers!” (“Facebook | Writopia Lab”). These groups can help to connect the members by
allowing events to be announced, but the group page itself only has a few wall posts and only
one discussion topic.

One of the reasons for this characteristic of short fiction communities in Facebook may
be the limitations imposed by the medium: Facebook users are limited in the type of content they
can create both within groups and within their own profiles, depending on the types of
applications they use within their profiles. Groups, for example, are limited to various content
sections such as “Basic Information” and “Recent News”; in the “Creative Writing Sites on
Facebook” group page, for example, the links to various sites are listed under the “Recent News”
section, even if some of the listed sites are not newly added. This is because there is really no
other place to put them, and this structure causes the reader to have to scroll down a long list on
the page before getting to the other content sections: “Members”, “The Wall”, and “Links”.
There is also another index to similar groups on Facebook, called “Creative Writing Blogs on
Facebook,” which lists sites that are being added on a daily basis through the application called
“Blog Networks.” This again links to sites outside of Facebook: “In that app writers with blogs
outside of Facebook can create a blog page that allows their facebook friends to keep up with
those blogs” (“Facebook | Creative Writing Blogs on Facebook”). As mentioned earlier, in this
context Facebook seems to be limited in the amount of community-formation its group members
can develop, and many groups do function as directories or marketing resources rather than as a
place where the main purpose is interaction between individual members. This interaction could be toward a particular goal (writing, editing, and publishing one’s work) or for the sense of community itself. It is difficult to say what will develop on Facebook in the future, and whether this particular aspect of Facebook’s communities might change. For example, if someone created an application for writers to post their works-in-progress and have them reviewed by other writers, and somehow avoid some of the issues that writers might have with copyright, we could see more Facebook groups used as writing communities. But at this point in time, the short fiction communities on Facebook appear to be limited by the type of content and the interaction people can have with each other within a group. Just because someone is a member of a group does not necessarily mean that other members of that group can view his or her profile or postings on a particular Facebook profile; this may be one of the main reasons why community formation is limited in Facebook compared to other non-Facebook sites. Members of most short fiction communities outside of Facebook can contact other members in the site and see works of fiction they have posted (examples are Booksie, FanStory, and EditRed). After gaining entry by becoming a paid subscriber or by posting their own works, people can comment on the works of other members, even if they only know that other member because they are both members of the same short fiction community.

Social networking, or Web 2.0, is bringing digital literature to life. The participants in my study, although many were amateur writers or did not consider themselves to be writing literature per se because they were writing fan fiction, commented that the Web affected whether they were even writing fiction at all. They also stated that it enabled a different type of

28 By 2011, the EditRed website had been turned into a search listing or ad website that lists various writing contests and other writing communities, rather than functioning as a writing community in itself.
collaboration and community with other writers than they could have offline. Writers who chose to market their writing or who were interested in getting their names more well known found that the Web was far more amenable to this purpose. Indeed, even some print-based magazines now have an online counterpart in order to make their content more widely available and thereby advertise their authors and the magazine itself. In Chapter 4, I draw on these observations to conclude what we can say about the short story at this time in light of these communities and the shift to using digital short fiction for marketing purposes.

4 Conclusion

4.1.1 The Effects of Social Networks and Marketing on Digital Short Fiction

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Jeremy Ettingshausen of Penguin was interested in using the Web to market not only the company’s established texts but also its contemporary authors, by having six authors write digital fiction based on Penguin’s classics. We have seen works similar to those found on Penguin’s We Tell Stories site in academic productions of literary hypertext—which were used by some academics to demonstrate or promote their own research or theories—and in some individual authors’ sites. It took major print publishers, however, or a strong publisher’s imprint, to bring these innovations to the attention of the general public and independent writers. Aside from “The 21 Steps,” which uses Google maps to tell the story, there is not much difference between the stories present on Penguin’s We Tell Stories site and the work by various digital literature authors and academics over the past decades. What is significant about Penguin’s project, however, is that it has tapped into the social Web or Web 2.0 for the format in which the stories are told and as its own marketing and dissemination tool. Macmillan has also experimented in digital fiction, with audio books available as audio CDs and digital downloads from www.panmacmillan.com/, blogs, podcasts, and other resources to tap into social
networks. And as noted by some of my participants, their born-digital stories are also connected to the social Web or community, and the medium and community can serve as both a marketing and dissemination tool.

4.1.2 The Novelty of Fiction in Typically Non-Fiction Platforms

Referring back to Penguin’s digital stories again for a moment, part of what made them interesting to readers was readers’ expectations based on the format being used. There is novelty in having fiction being told through interfaces and social networking platforms that are typically used for non-fiction. As a way of continuing the “six” theme that ran throughout the We Tell Stories project, six different Web 2.0 platforms were used to tell the stories over the six weeks in which they were released. These platforms included Google Maps, LiveJournal, WordPress, Twitter, Flickr, a live appearance of the story on a website as it was typed by its authors, and an alternate reality game in a seventh “hidden” story. When reading Nicci French’s “Your Place and Mine,” the reader is already familiar with browsing entries organized by date & time, which is the way in which the story unfolds when read in archive (the story was only “performed” or written live once, during the week of April 7-11, 2008 at 6:30 p.m. each evening). In other words, just as readers have developed certain expectations for genres of print such as the magazine, the short story, and the novel in terms of how the narrative will be structured, people who are familiar with these social networking platforms will be better able to follow these digital stories and to find enjoyment in them. These expectations are a potential for digital fiction that could only have come about after people had become used to digital formats and social networking platforms: the younger reader today is accustomed to experiencing narratives in the form of short, sometimes reverse-chronological entries with some required user input, even if the user input is just clicking to the next section of text or scrolling entries on a page. Although Penguin’s main purpose in the project was to market its imprint, the fact that these formats can
work to catch a reader’s interest suggests that digital storytelling or the production of digital fiction may be an effective means of engaging the contemporary reader: “the basic problem books face when it comes to engaging what we might call the FaceTube generation—is that the product just isn’t zingy enough, it’s too linear, you can’t have dialogue or a conversation with a book. They take too long to read” (Ettinshausen qtd. in Fawkes, 2007). Penguin also tested the potential of the blogosphere—and in particular the literary blogosphere—when it released its re-mix project in 2005, in which users could “re-mix” audio excerpts of Penguin’s books and enter a contest for the best entries.

Later in 2005, Penguin launched the Penguin podcast, which was the first from a publishing company, after witnessing “the effect of digital campaigns and blog marketing, social marketing using podcasts” (Ettinshausen qtd. in Fawkes, 2007). Penguin now blogs regularly and is active in Second Life, the “3D virtual world where users can socialize, connect and create using voice and text chat” (Linden). More recent social networking developments at Penguin include its completely user-generated and user-edited Wikinovel (2007), as discussed earlier, and the “My Penguin” series with the slogan “books by the greats, covers by you,” published with art-quality blank white covers so that readers can design their own front covers and give them as a personalized gift (Ettinshausen qtd. in Fawkes, 2007). Penguin then invited people to scan in the My Penguin covers they had created and email them to Penguin, who then put the pictures up on Flickr and on the Penguin website in order to create further buzz for the whole series (Ettinshausen qtd. in Fawkes, 2007). The “My Penguin” series was so successful that they are doing another line of them. Penguin tapped into social networks again with the publication of the book *Dream Eaters* in installment form on the Web before the book was released, in order to create a buzz about it. By infusing the marketing of a book directly into social networking sites, blogs, and online virtual communities such as Second Life (Linden), Penguin has shown that the
contemporary text, and even the way in which its classics (or older texts) are marketed, has to create its own community and get on the radar of other communities. This social engagement cannot be accomplished through “the old methods of communication and promotion, relying on mass media and eyeballs rather than innovation and engagement,” since they “just don’t work anymore and simply do not compute” (Ettinshausen qtd. in Fawkes, 2007). Although these older methods of communication are still used, digital literature has become, for some publishers such as Penguin, a way to tap into the social networking of the Web and to create a community around its brand or imprint.

4.1.3 Digital Short Fiction and Temporality

The type of fiction that is produced in the digital medium is often connected to its temporality, or the time in which it was written (as a text would appear in a blog entry, in updates on social networking sites, and so forth). But some of the other large factors affecting what is effective, or what gets produced versus what stays as only an idea, are whether a work is marketable and can connect to a Web audience. A book’s marketability was usually a factor with mainstream publishers, which in part helped drive the development of small presses and the university press because they would publish less popular but scholastically-valuable texts. However, this marketability in terms of catching one’s interest is pushed to the extreme on the Web. In light of this, the marketing and promotion of a work of digital short fiction can now be incorporated into the study of the text at a particular moment in time. Because many book sales occur online, reviews of a book can have a much greater impact on its sale. Sites such as Amazon.com list a number of user-supplied reviews under the description of a book and even allow other users to rate the helpfulness of the review. Users will often comment on other users’ reviews, and sometimes a debate over the book will ensue beside the description of the book on display. Some of these debates are also present in groups on social networking sites such as
Facebook and MySpace that are devoted to a specific literary work or type of literature. In the case of digital literature, these reviews are present in the same distribution medium and can be seen as forming the extended network of a text. Because digital literature has yet to become something that can be sold effectively through the digital medium, it faces different limitations from the social networking aspects of the Web than the print book. The success of a work of digital fiction might not depend on its sales but rather its “hits”. Similar to a non-digital work of fiction, however, its success as a work of literature depends in part on critical evaluation: in the digital environment, the critics are the informal reviewers or readers and the literary blogosphere, and in more formal venues such as reviews in literary magazines and academic journals, this critical evaluation is still included, however, along with word of mouth.

In spite of these developments in Web short fiction and even podcasts of people telling short stories, as on the CBC Radio site discussed in Chapter 1, the demise of the short story is put forward by various authors and critics, although sometimes with differing intentions. Some of this attention to the short story form, and prophesying about its demise, is evident in the *Save the Short Story* site, and it seems that the alleged short story demise is being used in this case to market the stories on this site. The site creator, Pei-Ling Lue, states, “Some of you may know me as the Managing Editor of One Story magazine. This is the site that One Story started in September 2007 so we can do our part to save the short story. In January of 2008 I decided to take this site to another level so that it can be more interactive to better serve writers and readers” (“Save the Short Story”). Since *One Story* is “a non-profit literary magazine that features one great short story mailed to subscribers every three weeks” (“One Story”), one might wonder whether the “Save the Short Story” site is a way to catch the attention of potential readers for the *One Story* magazine, thereby continuing the trend of having the short story on the Web because it is advertising something else, as discussed in Chapter 2. Under “About Us” on the *One Story*
site, the editors acknowledge that “what keeps us going is the community we have created” (“One Story”). Tapping into the social networking aspects of the Web by allowing readers to subscribe to tri-weekly stories, join blog discussions, and attend events such as author readings, allows the community to form around their texts, with the magazine itself serving as a sort of centre around which its subscribers radiate. Although one story is mailed to subscribers every three weeks, the stories are also available as individual issues for $2.50 U.S. from the One Story website. The extent of the community that surrounds One Story is limited, however, because issues can only be sent within the U.S. One Story is also a non-profit organization that the site creators claim is “supported by readers like you” and the New York State Council on the Arts (“One Story”). There is also a page through which readers can donate, in which they include a quotation from the New York Times in support of their “cause”: “‘At a time when literary writing seems like a dying art, when little magazines are folding left and right, when publishers bemoan the sinking bottom line, here lies a spot of hope. It is called One Story magazine.’ — The New York Times” (“One Story”—emphasis in original). The site creators also continue by appealing to the reader’s appreciation of art and the need to “protect” the form of the short story, along with appealing to the reader’s patriotism and sense of community:

One Story is a nonprofit 501(3)(c) publisher, dedicated to promoting the art form of the short story. After five years of publishing out of our apartments, volunteering our time, and scrambling for resources, we are asking for help to ensure that One Story becomes a permanent part of the literary landscape, a top magazine that protects this unique form of American literature.

Please join us today in publishing One Story. (“One Story”)
One might wonder if the demise of the short story as a form due to the folding of print magazines and lack of readership is really quite as looming as it is made out to be by the creators of the One Story site (or of literary writing in general, according to the quotation from the New York Times that is used as support), or if this is just another way of tapping into support from readers and using Web 2.0 as a means of survival. March-Russell sees the short story as having “a special role in depicting communities left behind by the movement towards urbanization and industrialization” (134), or the marginalized identity, in the short story’s “predisposition towards outsiders” (122). The One Story site seems to be exploiting this potential of the short story.

Many music recording artists and groups, such as Radiohead, have discarded traditional models of music dissemination (and middle-man profiteering) by making their music freely available and using a subscription or donation model to generate revenue. This model of selling music would not have been possible without the Web, or at least not on the same scale, just as music piracy was not possible on the same scale without the Web. Just as music is not a dying art because of the Web, so literary writing and the short story will not become a dying art; but the old systems of production, dissemination, and profit will have to be replaced to accommodate new expectations for content availability, and there may be some ways in which the form of the short story will adjust in order to fit new forms of dissemination and archiving.

Similar to short story groups on Facebook discussed in Chapter 3, many of the posts on blogs within the “Save the Short Story” site are devoted to advertising one’s name or one’s writing. One post states,

My name is Wayne C. Long.

I want to invite you and your readership to visit my short story Web site and blog at www.LongShortStories.com.
There, you will find free short story samples, 1 and 2-year short story subscriptions via e-mail, and a convenient Pay-Per-View store.

I am doing my part to restore the short story form to its rightful place in the world.

Regards,

Wayne C. Long. (“Save the Short Story”)

One can see in this post a use of alternative methods of distribution and profit similar to what has been experimented with in the music industry, along with some assumptions. According to Reid (1977), the short story has always been somewhat marginalized, and rather than restoring it to its rightful place, one might argue that it has not yet been given a rightful place, whatever that might be. The writer mentions a “pay-per-view” system, a term with which many readers would already be familiar through the cable and television industry, a way to subscribe to short stories via email, and also a website and blog to promote the writer’s name and work. Whether the “pay-per-view” system would be effective for short stories has yet to be proven, however. There are many instances of people who would be willing to check out a text from a library for free through library loan but who would not pay to own the text, and we may find that an open access model would work better for the circulation or distribution of short stories. Readers may also be less likely to pay for a digital copy of a story rather than a physical, tangible print copy, even if the purchaser has the ability to print out the story. Wanting to own a copy of a short story and wanting to own a song may also be two very different things. Often with a short story, the reader

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29 The new literary magazine called Eighteen Bridges, mentioned in Chapter 2, is one example of a magazine whose digital edition is available for free whereas its print counterpart is available for a fee of $7.95. In this way, the magazine is able to advertise its material and gain a larger audience while also covering the cost of creating the print edition.
would read it and then move on. If the story is kept as memorabilia or a note of the reader’s achievement, it is usually preferred to have the physical object (or book) on one’s shelf to show guests or remind the reader of the experience of reading the text when he or she passes it, in particular with a collection by a favourite author. With music, however, the listener may want to own a copy of a song so that he or she can listen to it over and over. Some short story sites use user donation as a source of revenue, and this is also apparent in the music industry, although the two forms are used in different ways.

Interestingly, through the One Story site one can also see an adoption of the social cause, or pseudo social cause, as part of the means through which the writer promotes his or her art, as the creators of the site have used a method to promote their names, stories, or magazines that is similar to the causes on social networking sites such as Facebook. By 2010, creating or supporting a cause on Facebook had become essentially meaningless due to the range of causes that had become available for support. These causes ranged from a cause which members could join to support the creation of dogs in Farmville, a popular game on the social networking website, to causes in support of those battling various diseases. Causes have been created to such an extent that supporting one may have lost the same value that it had before the advent of social networking sites and the flourishing of causes advertised on television and in other media. Cynics might even argue that many of the causes presently gaining attention in mainstream media, such as CIBC’s Walk for the Cure or RBC’s Walk for Autism, have become more about advertising and distraction from the causes of various diseases and social or environmental factors, even if they ultimately raise money in support of the cause. It makes sense that publishers might try to tap into the same early-twenty-first-century popularity of the cause as social unifier and advertiser as a way to generate interest in and an audience for their stories, even if this is sometimes conducted in an exaggerated way that calls attention to the cause as a
mockery. For example, there are parts of the “Save the Short Story” site that play with the notion of the demise of the short story, such as the gallery section in which people can post images of “stories in peril” (“Save the Short Story”). One of these images is of a story hanging on a barbed wire fence. There are also “stories in their natural habitat” (with people reading stories in chairs or libraries), which would appear to be a self-mockery of the social cause aspect of the site (“Save the Short Story”).

This use of social networks as the framework into which a story is published is what is causing short fiction forms to evolve. Due to the evolution of the Web, all digital texts now exist in an extended social network, or a network of links and connections built not just by computers but by people, even if only from changed search results caused by the number of hits a particular work or site receives. Just as certain poetic conventions linked to various time periods had an impact on the poetry and worked to concurrently inspire and limit what a writer could accomplish in his or her poem, changes within the genre conventions and purpose of short fiction cause an evolution of the form. At this moment in time, we can say that the short story is often used on the Web as an aid to market one’s name, imprint, or other works.

To return for a moment to other forms discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, the effect of changing conventions was also commented on by writers of poetry who reflected on the form. John Keats in “On the Sonnet” (1848), for example, questions the possibilities of lifting the “dull rhymes” by which “our English must be chained” (Keats 506). He says, “Let us find out, if we must be constrained” by investigating the formal conventions of the sonnet, and “see what may be gained/ By ear industrious, and attention meet,” instead of just following these conventions without weighing them or testing their purpose (Keats 506). Questioning the form, as Keats did in his sonnet about the sonnet, is linked to the historical context. Literary forms, whether short
fiction, poetry, or the novel, are affected by the media available for publication and
dissemination, such as oral, print, and now digital methods. Literary forms are also affected by
historical events and the general change in the collective consciousness, as discussed in the
context of postmodernism in Chapter 1. As will be discussed in the next section, some see
questioning the form and the notion of genres in itself as a natural progression opened up by the
availability of non-predigested, primary sources available through the extended archive or
database of the Web.

4.1.4 Revising Print-Based Conceptions of the Short Story and Short Fiction

It has been difficult to settle on an updated definition of short fiction and the short story,
and perhaps even the urge to define and categorize is a remnant from a different, print-based
point in communication history that no longer fits our present-day media. Many discussions of
digital media, including discussions of fan fiction and the short story, have attempted either to
prophesy the downfall of older, more traditional media, or to come up with a number of
neologisms that attempt to define digital media in the context of older media, as discussed in
Chapter 1 and 2. Indeed, even in my set of questions for participants, I asked them many
questions that directly compared the writing and publishing of stories in two different media—
print and digital publication on the Web—but in a way that looked at how writers perceived both
media at this point in time. What I have concluded is that in considerations of how to understand
what a short story is, we should instead examine the form at present, which would include an
intermingling of print, digital, audio, live performance readings, commercial and open source,
and other versions of the short story, since each form influences the other by contributing to the
overall expectations of audiences reading fiction. The production of “communal content” (Bruns
23) and the initial fixation on form caused by the introduction of digital media also have an
effect on the short story as a whole and not just on short fiction published on the Web.
There are four main aspects affecting the form of the short story at this time, if we are considering both print and born-digital short stories in the purview of short fiction. The first is the digital medium and the attention span of the reader in an online reading environment. Readers of digital literature suffer from a medium-induced distraction not suffered by print-text readers, although these readers carry these changed habits from one medium to another. To refer to my own reading habits for a moment, at the risk of using anecdotal evidence, as soon as I turn on my computer I check my three different email accounts and leave the windows open, regardless of what my original purpose was in turning on the computer. Then I visit Facebook and may respond to some posts or use applications there before turning to my first purpose, such as searching with Google or looking for a text at a library website. As I am reading that text, and scrolling down the page, I can see in the minimized browser windows at the bottom of my screen whether I have received a new email, and sometimes I will then move away from the text I am reading to check who the email was from and read, delete, or save it for later, before returning to the text. If my attention starts to wander, which it usually will when I am reading a text online on the computer instead of sitting down with a print text in a coffee shop, I will open another browser window and check my bank accounts, harvest some crops in Farmville, or engage in some other online activity, before returning back to the text. If I really need to finish reading something, I will close my Facebook newsfeed and browser window but keep my email windows open, and I also usually have to have some other background noise such as a non-distracting TV show or a coffee-shop environment with casual, background conversation, in order to keep reading. I did not always read like this, but the distractions have now become part of the reading.

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30 Farmville is a popular game on Facebook by Zynga played by most of my relatives, on which I have “neighbours” who are overseas cousins whom I have never met and whose first language I do not speak, being introduced to and interacting with them for the first time only through Farmville.
and writing process for me and for many people who have spent their educational years typing essays on computers and reading texts available via the Web. This change in reading context has also affected my writing, as I have found it more difficult than it was in the past to sit down and write chunks of text longer than a few pages.

Some participants who had published both in print and online responded that they had not changed the way that they wrote for one medium or another, but they had been asked by editors to change the content. Some participants stated that they had not had to change their writing at all for digital publication. But the evolution of the short story, just as my reading and writing habits have changed over the past ten or so years, is a gradual process that cannot be immediately perceived by writers. On the other hand, perhaps writers who have been accustomed to reading in print still write stories using standard conventions of the genre and we have yet to see what a digital native generation will produce. It is possible that the move to born-digital short fiction, which still lags behind digital short fiction that could easily be transmuted to print, will see a growth once more people from the born-digital generation have become adults. If we draw, for a moment, on W. B. Yeats’s metaphorical conception of history as a system of interlocking gyres, with a new era integrating into another while the old era is still unfolding, we can see the same process in the development of literary forms. Literature, whether short fiction or the novel and whether in print or digital format, will continue to reflect the time in which it is written, and it is not necessarily the opposite that will occur (although as noted by Carr, there is some oscillation of influence, with digital literature affecting our psyche and social organization).

If Boyd (2006) believes that we have not seen an evolution of the short story since it sprang to life fully formed in the mid-nineteenth century, I believe that we are now seeing this evolution, but with the new gyre only in its first rounds and with the Chekhov story still as the
model for a little while longer, or at least until digital natives begin to supplant the baby-boomer
generation. At the risk of applying a stereotype, and returning to my own experience for a
moment, I have noticed a marked difference in the abilities of my digital-native generation
students to read a text of longer than a few pages—or to read anything from their print
anthology, for that matter—compared with my students who are twenty to thirty years older.
The former are more likely to come to class not having read the text and being unable to pay
attention in class discussions, either surfing the web on their laptops or socializing during class
discussions, although this may be, in part, due to a difference in maturity rather than solely the
product of immersion in different media and their effect on attention span.

The second aspect affecting the short story at this time is the social networks of the Web
and the turn towards marketing as the purpose of the short story itself. Although Flora (1985)
noted that the short story was often used by novel writers to sustain themselves while working on
their larger texts and also to become more well-known as writers, this marketing is increased in
the digital, social networking environment. Many participants in my study commented that they
used the Web to market their name or their stories, depending on the type of fiction they were
writing. As mentioned in Chapter 3, those writers who wished to keep their writing secret from
family because of its subject matter sometimes deliberately chose to keep their stories from being
advertised or associated with their actual name. But on the whole, the Web and social networks
as publication mediums have been used to market authors’ and publishers’ works to the point
that some stories are being constructed with the specific intent of being marketing pieces. And
since the purpose of digital short stories seems to have shifted to marketing or promotion, the
themes of the self, trauma, loss, or angst, as discussed in Chapter 2, may be preferred because
they have shock value or the ability to pull the reader’s attention away from other content on the
Web.
One cannot see this change in purpose without also noticing its effect on the form and content of the story. As discussed in Chapter 2, “The 21 Steps” by Charles Cumming was altered due to suggestions by the producers who thought more movement should be incorporated into the plot of the story so that the character could move along the map on the screen, thereby holding the reader’s attention. Having each story be released as an installment over a series of weeks was also a deliberate marketing decision in order to gather reader interest. In archive form, we access the stories differently than we would have when reading or viewing them during the weeks of the event and, as in the case of the stories “Your Place and Mine” and “Slice,” during their live performances. Some editors and publishers go beyond traditional marketing of books and consciously reshape them as if they were collaborating authors.

Participants in my study, who had different objectives than large publishers, showed this same shift to marketing and collaboration as influencing the form and content of their work. Indeed, some participants commented that they chose to publish online because it allowed them to connect to a larger audience but also to network with other writers, especially those participants who were isolated geographically from North American markets and networking events. Others commented on the influence of other writers who served as beta-readers or commented on the story within the community. In general, most participants said that their stories would be different if not for the Web and the community in which they published fiction, or that they either would not be writing at all or they would be creating different types of fiction altogether. This distinction is significant when considering the contemporary short story because it shows a change in writer output, just as poets are no longer (or rarely) creating sonnets. The online collaboration links to the performance of the text as well, or the return to what I see as connecting to the oral performance of the story that changed with the print form. In the nineteenth century, stories were still being read aloud by their authors, and still are today at
special events, but the shift to silent reading from the printed page allowed authors to also incorporate the characteristics of the medium into the story itself. As seen with experimental stories such as “Slice,” the social network and the Web become part of the story, as the social networks of the Web are the medium in which it is performed. In a live telling of a story, the audience forms part of and can influence the direction and content of the story: the story is not a monologue but can drift on tangents from its otherwise linear plot through interaction with and interruptions from the audience.

A third aspect to consider is that conceiving of the short story, and of genre in general, and considering its contexts, also brings about new critical possibilities: “What would literary studies look like if it were organized by genres in this unfinished sense, with spillovers at front and center? What dividing lines could still be maintained? And what kinds of knowledge would be generated as a result, answering to what conception of the humanities?” (Dimock 1378). In referring to Ed Folsom’s article “Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of Archives,” Dimock states, “The links and pathways that open up suggest that knowledge is generative rather than singular, with many outlets, ripples, and cascades, randomized by cross-references rather than locked into any one-to-one correspondence. The World Wide Web is not only its medium but also its template” (Dimock 1378). In other words, the freeing of not just information but creative content in genres creates different possibilities for both researchers and writers. Some might see genres as encouraging creativity by forcing writers to work within the genre’s confines or to deliberately break borders of genre. The work of OuLiPo poets is one example of extreme restriction within a genre.31 Others, however, might see the dissolving of generic borders as

31 Oulipian texts are written with extreme restrictions, such as not using the letter e or, as in May Quai de Conti by Michèle Audin, restricting relationships between characters by the positions of points in a geometric figure taken from Pascal’s theorem (“OuLiPo”).
allowing more creativity as well. In reference to the Walt Whitman poetry archive, for example, Dimock states,

What kind of ‘text’ is this, with a morphology born of global access, and what genre does it belong to? For these online readers, the poetry is inseparable from the electronic medium that disseminates it. It is liquefied by that medium, taking more courses than one, a user-generated forking structure that Espen Aarseth calls ‘cybertext,’ raising ‘the stakes of interpretation to those of intervention’ ([Aarseth] 4). This cybertext has much in common with its paper ancestor, but it has mutated significantly, its protocol governed by the electronic medium rather than by print culture. *Leaves of Grass*, mutating in this way, is as much a product of the twenty-first century as of the nineteenth. *The Walt Whitman Archive* is not just chronicling literary history of the past; it is making literary history at this very moment—a history of variants, each speaking to its particular locale. (Dimock 1378-9)

The possibilities of the archive of texts available not just in a particular database but in the Web as a large, extended database change the function of texts and position the reader, in many ways, as a compiler or editor. The shift from pre-literate to literate societies, the restructuring of consciousness afforded by writing and print by enabling our memory to allow us to move beyond short-term memory of speech (Ong, 2002), the subsequent evolution of literary forms, and now the Web as an extended database, affect both our knowledge and creativity. In many ways, the distractions on the Web may be forcing us to move back to short-term memory and attention spans as in pre-literate societies, with our stories adjusting accordingly.

There is a fourth aspect that I see as impacting short fiction and its study: the open source movement and collaborative infrastructure projects that are attempting to change the way literary scholars conduct and share research by creating Web infrastructures in which people can share
and collaborate. Literature scholars and writers are often known to work in a solitary way, and so far, for writers of short fiction, fan fiction and other online writing communities are the closest equivalent to these types of communities that would foster collaboration and sharing of one’s work. Scholars in fields such as Humanities Computing have become more amenable to cross-disciplinary collaboration due to its necessity, however, because the individual scholar may not have all of the expertise or skills necessary to take on a particular research project. The same might be said of the future of born-digital fiction, which, because of its inception on the Web, requires a particular skill set that not all writers may have, as demonstrated by the combined author and creator teams of Six to Start and Penguin, and also the Center for Digital Storytelling. Individual authors or designers create “cookbook” or WYSIWYG resources for others to use their creative skills to write digital fiction without having to be experienced in the technical aspects.

Future research in this field will require collaboration among not only academic disciplines but between academics, business professionals, and writers. Because the contemporary short story is evolving, rather than something that can be studied in its historical context in the past, the field of contemporary literature, and especially studies of the contemporary short story, requires skills that even ten years ago were only necessary for creating and studying experimental forms in early digital literature, as described in Chapter 2. Some literary scholars are familiar with digital media and social networks, but many are not. Those who are familiar with digital media and social networks may not be required to keep up with new developments to the same extent as scholars who are working in other fields, such as Information Studies, Computer Science, Business, and the social sciences. This is an elusive field that requires skills and knowledge not covered in the historical periods of English literature nor through a survey of its authors, and the publishing history of the past can also only be applicable
in part to the publishing of the present. An emphasis on a greater understanding of the processes and motivations behind current literature would also augment our understanding of its past.

When studying the processes of anything contemporary, however, further research will always remain. As Alexandra Gillespie notes in the introduction to her article “The History of the Book,”

It is customary to start an essay such as this by noting that what follows will be incomplete. Here the point seems a little redundant. No survey of work done lately in the field of book history can hope to be comprehensive, for, as Howard observes, the term book history describes a great proportion of all the recent work in the field of literary studies. Moreover, her observation comes hot on the heels of Robert Darnton’s that the history of books is ‘interdisciplinarity run riot’ [(Darnton 5)]. Just as book history accommodates all sorts of material forms for texts — bound codices; scrolls; scores; epigraphic inscriptions; sound recordings; and e-texts — so does the history of the book accommodate all kinds of academic activity: literary studies but also social history, sociology, cultural studies, communications theory, the history of technology including digital technologies, antiquarian book collecting, library and archival science, publishing history and book trade economics, theories of text, and practices of textual editing. (247)

Even if it has not been acknowledged as such, much of the work conducted in literary studies has been interdisciplinary and book-history oriented. However, this greater focus on the context of texts does necessarily create the dilemma that one cannot feel that the research is complete, with ever more facets or angles from which to study one’s subject.
Cross-disciplinary research projects are developing that show that research in this area is beginning to expand. Some projects are examining reading interfaces by researching “what components of existing textual artifacts are essential to represent in new digital objects and reading devices,” identifying characteristics of user engagement with print and digital environments, and building “prototypical digital reading interfaces that promote active reading patterns and draw on dynamically integrated collections of supporting materials” (Siemens et. al.). Some of these projects also attempt to move away from applying print models to digital texts:

[the main reasons] for the limitations currently found in electronic books and documents is the fact that they are still predominantly modeled on print-based textual forms. Research and development of such digital materials has chiefly focused on mimicking the look and feel of print—an approach founded on critical and textual models imported from print without understanding them fully. Hence, such work fails to capitalize fully on the technical possibilities of computational simulations. It also fails to take full advantage of computational possibilities for the use of text in dynamic reading environments where the reader is capable of controlling and modifying the format and content of the text as part of standard interaction with it (following McGann, 2001). (Siemens et. al.)

The Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) research mentioned above is attempting to create a reconception of our “core critical and textual models” by examining the evolution of reading and writing technologies along with strategies of reading and organization. In other words, INKE is examining the form and its users or readers and developing experimental reading interfaces to fit the form and its users, instead of applying top-town models
of what one might perceive to be an interface employing all the functionalities of digital forms, a practice which Siemens and others argue is still largely rooted in print-based perceptions.

The INKE study is also related to another area for further research in this field: whether a build-it-and-they-will-come approach is more effective than an approach that studies a community or group and then creates resources for its needs. Cross-disciplinary collaborations with fields such as Anthropology and Information Studies could be helpful for this type of research. Some researchers have bemoaned the funding that has been given to different projects in order to create a resource for a community when these resources atrophy after their funded period due to not being used by the community for which they were developed. Indeed, INKE’s project reports on the importance of user needs analysis and prototyping as a research activity in order to gain feedback from its user community. The Sustaining Digital Scholarship for Sustainable Culture Group (Bretz et. al.), a Knowledge Synthesis on the Digital Economy funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, is studying how to make these resources more lasting and effective. Some questions for this area of research could involve whether academic, government-funded projects are appropriate for creating resources for larger, non-academic communities (or for academic communities, for that matter), or if the private sector should develop these resources instead. Or is it necessary for universities to create resources for writers and literature scholars in order to facilitate collaboration and sharing, and to allow our writing and research methods to evolve? This mission may not be seen as profitable for the private sector to become involved in, and would therefore make these infrastructure projects similar to the mission behind the university press publication of academic monographs that might not otherwise be profitable. In a time when public funds remain in short supply, these questions remain to be studied. If we do not invest in resources such as the Center for Digital Storytelling, would we only have fan fiction sites available for writers in the digital medium,
marketing experiments by large publishers, and online writing communities that rely on advertising and a reviewing system that accumulates points, as described in Chapter 2 and 3, or do sites such as Joyland show hope for the short story without its having to be nurtured by large academic research projects? The answer may be to create a hybrid, which in turn would require more collaboration on the part of academics, business professionals, and the greater public. In other words, a hybrid would create the infrastructure through academia based on feedback from its user community, and allow the public and user community to sustain and develop it. These infrastructure projects already have a close collaborative relationship between different levels of government, industry, and the community it is meant to serve. More meta-research studies need to be undertaken to answer these questions, or studies of how literary academics collaborate and how best to encourage research and infrastructure projects that augment the field of study and provide a sustainable resource.

All of these considerations—the digital medium and the attention span of the reader in an online reading environment, social networks and the turn toward marketing as the purpose of short fiction, a greater focus on genre itself and the contexts of different genres, and the open source or open access movement in general, along with the overall study of collaboration and infrastructure projects, are important in considering the short story at this time. Rather than coming up with a concrete definition of the short story, in order to accommodate the evolution of the form, we as readers, scholars, and writers need to change our approach to studying contemporary fiction so that pre-defined categories are replaced with an acknowledgement that the short story can include born-digital works, which are close to the oral roots from which the short story and storytelling came to life. We need to study the short story as a cultural anthropologist studies the tales of a particular culture: by linking the stories to the group or culture who is telling them rather than a particular person. Contemporary literature and the
digital short story are dynamic areas of research that require a different approach than when studying fiction from other historical periods. Only when models of studying the short story from other historical periods have been adjusted will we be able to understand its new developments and see its evolution fully take place.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Advertisement

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Wanted for a Research Study...

Adults (18 or older) who have participated in online writing/fiction communities.

Participants will be asked to share their experience of being part of an online writing/fiction community by answering a few informal questions.

Participation is at your convenience. Your participation is voluntary and will be kept confidential, and you will have the option to keep your name and/or username anonymous. You may choose to contact me by telephone or to answer questions via email, and you may withdraw at any time. Your participation should not take up more than 10-15 minutes of your time.

The study runs March 1 - June 30, 2009.

To volunteer for this study, please email: s.hesemeier@utoronto.ca.

Susan Hesemeier
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of English
University of Toronto
(416) 978-3190

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Appendix B: Consent Form

Defining Digital Short Fiction and the Short Story Reading Community

Susan Hesemeier, Ph.D. Candidate

Department of English
University of Toronto

Thank-you very much for your interest in this research study.

The overall purpose of this research is to better understand how people are involved in social networks and digital short fiction on the WWW so that we can attain an updated understanding of the short story.

In this study you will be asked to share your experience of publishing/writing short fiction on the WWW or being part of a fiction community, by answering a few informal questions or providing any information you would like to share. This session will take the following form:

1. I will briefly describe the background of this research study and give an overview of the process.

2. After you have read this document, I will respond to any questions or concerns that you may have.

3. After you formally agree to participate, I will ask you a few questions about your experience and interest in short fiction or writing communities.

4. After I have asked you some opening questions, you will have the opportunity to add additional information or to describe your experience with writing or Web communities more generally.

5. After I have finished making notes based on your answers, I will show you a summary of the information you have provided, and you will have the option to change or correct anything in this summary.

When completed, the results of this study will be included as part of my doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto.

The results of your information will be reported without any reference to you specifically if you choose to remain anonymous. All information that you provide will be treated confidentially and your identity will not be revealed in reporting the study results, unless you choose to have your name/username revealed as part of the study. If you choose to remain anonymous, your name will appear only on this sheet and this sheet will be stored separately from any data collected for this study. There are no known risks for participating in this study.

Your participation is voluntary, you may withdraw from participation at any time, and you may decline to answer any question.

I, ________________________________, have read and understood the description of the study, have had all questions answered to my satisfaction, and agree to participate in this study as described above.

Signature: ________________________________ Date: ________________________

Please sign one of the following two statements:

I do not wish to remain anonymous, and I consent to having my name and/or username included in the thesis or any other reports on this research __________________________.

I wish to remain anonymous, and I do not consent to having my name and/or username included in the thesis or any other reports on this research __________________________.
Please fax this form back to me at 416-978-2836 or scan and send via email to s.hesemeier@utoronto.ca

If you prefer, you may also mail this form to me c/o the Department of English, University of Toronto, 170 St. George Street, Toronto, ON  Canada  M5R 2M8

Thank-you very much.
Appendix C: Question Set 1

Defining Digital Short Fiction and the Short Story Reading Community

Susan Hesemeier, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of English
University of Toronto
s.hesemeier@utoronto.ca

Thank-you very much for participating in this study. This research is for my doctoral thesis, and I am hoping to gain a better understanding of short fiction on the WWW, the way in which social networks are connected to short fiction, and how people form communities around an avocation. This research will benefit the study of literature by examining the properties of digital short fiction and the extent to which the medium of the WWW affects the form and content of the short story.

The following questions are related to my research interests described above, but please feel free to add any additional information that you think might be helpful—about your experience publishing short fiction online, your involvement in social networks or online writing communities, or your writing in general—in the additional information section at the end of the questions. You can choose not to answer any of the questions, and after you have completed the questions I will send you a summary of the information you have provided, which you will have the opportunity to alter/edit. Please do not hesitate to ask for clarification on any of the questions or to contact me if you would like any additional information.

1. Have you published stories both in print and online?

   1 a) (if answer to #1 = no) If only online or only in print, what influenced your decision to publish in one medium over another? (e.g. story was accepted for publication in a journal or magazine that only publishes online, etc.).

2. Would you prefer to publish a story in a publication that is available online, or a publication that is available in print, or a publication that is available both in print and online? Please explain your choice (even if you do not prefer one over the other).
3. Have you written stories with the specific intention to publish them online? If so, do you notice any differences in how you write for online publication vs. print publication? (e.g. shorter sentences or shorter paragraphs, different themes, shorter length, etc.)

4. Do you only write short stories, or do you also write poetry or longer prose works such as novels?

5. If your stories were reviewed or edited by the publisher after submission, please briefly describe the process (e.g. were drafts exchanged via email? with one individual or with multiple people?). If you have also published stories in print publications, did you notice any difference in the reviewing/editing process?

6. Do you have a group of people (such as a writers’ group) or an individual with whom you share your in-process writing? If so, how do you share your writing? (e.g. in person, via email, etc.)

7. Do you use any online resources to help you with your writing? (e.g. tips on how to publish, writing resource pages with links to publishers, writing advice via email from fellow writers, etc.)
8. Do you participate in online writing communities or social networking sites devoted to writing? (e.g. Facebook groups, sites with members devoted to fiction writing such as http://www.webook.com/, etc.). If yes, please describe/explain.

9. Do you participate in any online communities or social networking sites, even if they are not focused on writing or fiction in particular? (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, etc.). If yes, please describe/explain.

10. Do you have a website or blog? If so, is it devoted to your writing, and do people have the opportunity to contact you about your writing through it? (e.g. by sending an email, posting to or commenting on a blog, etc.)

11. Do you regularly read in-progress or recently published short stories written by other writers, and if so, where do you tend to find these stories? (e.g. in an online journal, in print anthologies, through word-of-mouth from a friend or referral via email, etc.)

Is there any additional information you would like to add, or anything about your writing that might help with my thesis research that was not included in the above questions? If so, please feel free to add anything that you think might be helpful below.

Thank-you very much for your time.
Appendix D: Question Set 2

Defining Digital Short Fiction and the Short Story Reading Community

Susan Hesemeier, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of English
University of Toronto
s.hesemeier@utoronto.ca

Thank-you very much for participating in this study. This research is for my doctoral thesis, and I am hoping to gain a better understanding of short fiction on the WWW, the way in which social networks are connected to short fiction, and how people form communities around an avocation. This research will benefit the study of literature by examining the properties of digital short fiction and the extent to which the medium of the WWW affects the form and content of the short story.

The following questions are related to my research interests described above, but please feel free to add any additional information that you think might be helpful—about your experience publishing short fiction online, your involvement in social networks or online writing communities, or your writing in general—in the additional information section at the end of the questions. You can choose not to answer any of the questions, and after you have completed the questions I will send you a summary of the information you have provided, which you will have the opportunity to alter/edit. Please do not hesitate to ask for clarification on any of the questions or to contact me if you would like any additional information.

1. Have you published short fiction as part of an online community? If yes, please describe/explain.

2. Have you published short fiction in a print publication (such as a magazine or literary anthology), or circulated short fiction you have written among a group that meets in-person? (e.g. peers, writing workshops, etc.) If yes, please describe/explain.
3. If you have published or distributed your short fiction only online or only in print, what influenced your decision to publish in one medium over another? (e.g. story was accepted for publication in a journal or magazine that only publishes in print, story was written for an online writers’ group or fan fiction community, etc.).

4. Would you prefer to publish short fiction in a publication that is available online, or a publication that is available in print, or a publication that is available both in print and online? Please explain your choice (even if you do not prefer one over the other, or if the question is not applicable).

5. Have you written short fiction with the intention to publish in a specific print format (such as a magazine, literature anthology, etc.), or to contribute to a community that writes on a specific theme (such as fan fiction communities, women’s literature, travel literature, etc.)? If so, do you notice any differences in how you write for one online publication venue or community vs. another? (e.g. shorter sentences or shorter paragraphs, different themes, use of images or multimedia, shorter length, etc.)

6. Do you only write short fiction, or do you also write poetry, screenplays, or longer prose works such as novels?

7. If your stories were reviewed or edited by a publisher after submission, or by members of a writers’ group, please briefly describe the process (e.g. were drafts exchanged via email? with one individual or with multiple people?). If you have also published stories in print publications, did you notice any difference in the reviewing/editing process?
8. Do you have a group of people (such as a writers’ group) or an individual with whom you share your in-process writing? If so, how do you share your writing? (e.g. in person, via email, etc.)

9. Do you use any online resources to help you with your writing? (e.g. tips on how to publish, writing resource sites, writing advice via email from fellow writers, etc.)

10. Do you participate in online writing communities or social networking sites devoted to writing? (e.g. Facebook groups, sites with members devoted to fiction writing such as http://www.webook.com/, etc.). If yes, please describe/explain.

11. Do you participate in any online communities or social networking sites, even if they are not focused on writing or fiction in particular? (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, etc.). If yes, please describe/explain.

12. Do you have a website or blog? If yes, is it devoted to your writing, and do people have the opportunity to contact you about your writing through it? (e.g. by sending an email, posting to or commenting on a blog, etc.)
13. Would you say that you use the WWW to advertise your name or your writing? Please explain.

14. If the Internet did not exist, do you think the type of writing you do would be different? (e.g. writing different types of fiction, writing for a different publication venue, etc.)

15. Do you regularly read in-progress or recently published stories written by other writers, and if so, where do you tend to find these stories? (e.g. in an online journal, in print anthologies, through word-of-mouth from a friend or referral via email, etc.)

Is there any additional information you would like to add, or anything about your writing that might help with my thesis research that was not included in the above questions? If so, please feel free to add anything below that you think might be helpful.

Thank-you very much for your time.
Appendix E: Glossary

affordance: “the affordance of anything is a specific combination of the properties of its substance and its surfaces taken with reference to an animal” (Gibson 67). What Gibson means is that for any object or thing, we encounter it in terms of its functionality and purpose: “If a substance is fairly rigid instead of flat; if its surface is nearly horizontal instead of slanted; if the latter is relatively flat instead of convex or concave; and if it is sufficiently extended, that is, large enough, then it affords support…. The next example is more particular. If an object that rests on the ground has a surface that is itself sufficiently rigid, level, flat, and extended, and if this surface is raised approximately at the height of the knees of the human biped, then it affords sitting on” (Gibson 68, emphasis in original).

beta-reader: a beta reader (or betareader, or beta) is a person who reads a work of fiction with a critical eye, with the aim of improving grammar, spelling, characterization, and general style of a story prior to its release to the general public (“Beta Readers”).

canon: a literary canon, as the term is ordinarily used, is “‘an authoritative list, as of the works of an author.’ Yet the sense of… ‘standard, criterion’… is also strongly implied as the means by which individual works find their way into the literary canon” (Stockton). Canon takes on a slightly different meaning in the context of fan fiction: it is “all of the events which *expressly* happen in the fandom. Meaning, everything, person, event, statement, that happens in the show, movie, or book is canon. For example, Megabyte's real name being Marmaduke is canon because it expressly says in Origin Story that it is. Everything that happens in the show is canon. This is sort of used like a law for fan fiction. alternate universes are where an author deliberately ignores, goes against, or stop [sic] paying attention to canon in order to create their own canon” (Freeman). See also fanon.

digital native: a "digital native" refers to a person who is born after 1984 and uses computers. As opposed to a "digital immigrant" --one who had to learn their way around the Internet-- digital natives have always been surrounded by the culture of online technology (“digital native”).

epitext: the epitext “denotes elements ‘outside’ the bound volume—public or private elements such as interviews, reviews, correspondence, diaries, etc.—although… ‘in principle, every context serves as a paratext’ (8)” (Genette qtd. in Koenig-Woodyard). The epitext is part of the
algorithm Genette formulated that “governs the whole of Paratexts: Paratext = peritext + epitext” (Koenig-Woodyard). The peritext includes elements “‘inside’ the confines of a bound volume—everything between and on the covers, as it were” (Koenig-Woodyard 5). See also paratext and peritext.

fan fiction: fiction, usually fantasy or science fiction, written by a fan rather than a professional author, esp. that based on already-existing characters from a television series, book, film, etc.; (also) a piece of such writing (OED, *fan fiction* n.2).

fanon: “Things that are not strictly canon, but do not contradict it and are widely accepted by most fans. For instance if most fans just accept that Megabyte's middle name is Archibald, even though it is not expressly canon, it becomes fanon” (Freeman). See also canon.

fanzine (zine): a magazine for fans, esp. those of science fiction (OED, *fanzine*).

genre: A particular style or category of works of art; esp. a type of literary work characterized by a particular form, style, or purpose (OED, *genre* 1.b. spec.).

hypertext: Text which does not form a single sequence and which may be read in various orders; *spec.* text and graphics (usu. in machine-readable form) which are interconnected in such a way that a reader of the material (as displayed at a computer terminal, etc.) can discontinue reading one document at certain points in order to consult other related matter (OED, *hypertext*, n.).

interactive fiction: A work of interactive fiction is a program that simulates a world, understands natural-language text input from an interactor and provides a textual reply based on events in the world. This definition includes everything that is commonly held by IF authors and interactors to be IF, excludes new media artifacts that are similar but not commonly held to be IF, and sheds light on the elements that are truly essential to the form: Simulation of a world, Natural-language understanding, Natural-language generation (Montfort, “Interactive Fiction”)

netizen: a person who uses the Internet, esp. habitually (OED, *netizen*).

new media: new means of mass communication considered collectively; *spec.* electronic means such as the Internet, CD-ROMs, etc. (OED, *new media*).
paratext: “any textual accompaniment exterior to the text proper and yet intrinsically bound to it (prefaces, prologues, prolegomena, forewords, codas, authorial appendices, marginal notes)” (“Poetics of the Paratext”). See also epitext and peritext.

peritext: “texts that actually accompany the text in the same bound volume” (Jones 7). In other words, the peritext includes “‘peripheral’ features such as the cover, titlepage, table of contents, chapter titles, epigraphs, postface, and above all illustrations” (Higonnet).

podcast: a digital recording of a broadcast, made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or personal audio player (OED, podcast).

posting: a message sent over the Internet to a newsgroup, online community, or other forum (Macmillan). Some authors consider their short stories as being posted rather than published when they are distributed online.

postmodern: the state, condition, or period subsequent to that which is modern; spec. in architecture, the arts, literature, politics, etc., any of various styles, concepts, or points of view involving a conscious departure from modernism, esp. when characterized by a rejection of ideology and theory in favour of a plurality of values and techniques (OED, postmodern).

produsage: a term coined by Bruns to describe the increase in the extent to which a writer’s work is written as part of a publication or community, or the shift from passive usage to its concurrent production. He calls this “produsage,” a combination of the terms production and usage (23).

semiotic mode: Astrid Ensslin refers to semiotic modes when describing the way in which narrative has spread “‘across media’, i.e. beyond the book” to include “still pictures, moving pictures, music and, in particular, the digital media, thus including a wide range of different semiotic modes, whose role changes in alignment with the medium in which they appear” (Ensslin 47). This term is particularly effective at categorizing the many other terms that surround discussions of digital literature, such as form, format, genre, and medium.

serial literature: literature connected by a theme and chronologically-ordered events distributed in a series of non-physically-connected parts (42).
short story: a prose work of fiction, differing from a novel by being shorter and less elaborate; a novelette (OED, *short* 8.b.).

slash fiction: Slash Fiction is the portrayal of a perceived homosexual relationship between two lead characters in a popular continuity. It is for this reason that Slash Fiction is ambiguous with Kirk/Spock, Tidus/Auron, or Cloud/Sephiroth fiction. It is suspected that this is called "slash" fiction because it sexually mutilates the entire framework of the continuity ("Urban Dictionary: slash fiction").

Short Message Service (SMS) stories: stories written to fit the 160-character limit of cell-phone text messages (69).

social network: a system of social interactions and relationships; a group of people who are socially connected to one another; (now also) a social networking website; the users of such a website collectively (OED, *social network* adj. and n.)

Web 2.0: the name for the next-generation of Web and Internet applications circa 2005, it refers to the second, more social generation of the Internet ("Web 2.0").

weblog (blog): a frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary (OED, *weblog* 2.).

wiki: a type of web page designed so that its content can be edited by anyone who accesses it, using a simplified markup language (OED, *wiki*).

wikinovel: a type of collaborative fiction written in the form of a wiki. How much this is actually a novel has been debated, however:

Our research has shown that "A Million Penguins" is something other than a novel and, thereby, opened up new questions and avenues for exploration. It has treated the final product not as a variation of a printed novel or something which could be turned into one, but as type of performance. The contributors did not form a community, rather they spontaneously organised themselves into a diverse, riotous assembly. (Mason & Thomas)
WIPS: Works in Progress

worldbuilding: creating the characters, setting, and other aspects that are normally part of a work of fiction.