

4 Poetic Machines: From Paper to Pixel

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Abstract

This chapter investigates digital methods of signification in order to examine the impact of the digital medium on poetic expression. Traditional poetry criticism is problematised with reference to its suitability for application to online works in order to develop a comprehensive ePoetry rhetoric that explores not only what is being said, but also crucially how it is being said. Theories of translation are also used as a context in which to analyse the transposition of poetry from analogue to digital. This framework then forms the basis for a study that explores the move from print to pixel by analysing qualitative ePoet interviews as well as their corresponding ePoems. This is done through an examination of the translation process from analogue to digital within the context of [Holmes \(1994\)](#) translation theories. In particular this chapter also looks at the impact that interactivity and the digital environment have on the traditional characteristics of poetry as proposed by [Orr \(1996\)](#), such as story, structure, music, and imagination and how this impacts on poetic expression. This chapter then concludes that as the movement from paper to pixel has expanded the possibility for poetic expression, so too has it expanded the scope for undermining such expression.

Keywords: translation, digital, poetry, flash, signification, interactivity, communication.

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1. Introduction

Currently the pervasiveness of digital technology and access to the Internet means there exists online a wealth of digital poetry or ePoetry, some animated, some static, some interactive, some linear. Landow (2006) tells us that when Bush (1945) conceptualised the Internet in *The Memex* in his seminal paper *As We May Think* he created what are essentially *poetic machines*: machines that work “according to analogy and association, machines that capture and create the anarchic brilliance of human imagination. Bush, we perceive, assumed that science and poetry work in essentially the same way” (Landow, 2006, p. 13). It is at this intersection of science and poetry that this research finds itself and it is these *poetic machines* creating ePoetic works of analogy and association that are the realisation of our electric dreams.

The methods of this chapter are two-fold. Firstly it examines the process of translation of an ePoem from print to pixel. Using Holmes’ (1994) translation theory as a framework, this process allows a comparison of analogue and digital forms which informs us of the true extent of the impact of the digital medium on poetic expression. Secondly this chapter compares and identifies the characteristics of ePoetry in relation to traditional poetry theory using Orr’s (1996) temperaments of poetry as a framework. Traditional poetry criticism is problematised with reference to its suitability for application to online works in order to develop a comprehensive ePoetry rhetoric that explores not only what is being said, but also crucially how it is being said.

However to truly see the relevance of these theories we must look for evidence of them at work in the creation of ePoetry and the best way to do this was to conduct interviews with the creators of some of these ePoems, the ePoets themselves. Consenting ePoet candidates were e-mailed interview questions as a word document which they then filled in and sent back. Out of the seven interviews quoted in this paper, two were not conducted through e-mail. The interview with Dylan Sheehan was conducted through youtube messaging but was otherwise similar to the others. Also the interview with Claire Allan Dinsmore was conducted by Megan Sapnar in July 2002 for the

website *Poems That Go* (Sapnar, 2002). When quoting from the interviews I have listed the candidate's name, the year of the interview and the number relating to the question asked: (Ong, personal communication, 2009, q. 1) refers to Monica Ong's response to question 1 of her interview which was conducted in 2009.

The ePoets whose responses are quoted in this paper:

- Nick Robinson translated [Anderton and Robinson's \(2008\)](#) poem *A Servant. A Hanging. A Paper House.* into a Flash¹ piece.
- Monica Ong translated [Givens and Ong's \(2007\)](#) poem *Fallow* into a highly interactive Flash piece.
- Sam Tootal along with Chris Turner make up the eMedia duo who call themselves SamuelChristopher, Sam Tootal gave responses on the video and audio based eMedia translation of Billy Collins poem *Hunger* ([Collins & SamuelChristopher, 2006](#)).
- Dylan Sheehan made a video and audio based eMedia translation of his own poem *Ten Doors Closing* ([Sheehan, 2006](#)).
- Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries is an eMedia duo made up of Marc Voge and Young-Hae Chang, they responded to questions regarding *The Last Day of Betty Nkomo* ([Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, 2004](#)) a Flash piece they created for International AIDS day.
- Mateo Parilla translated Heather Lee Schroeder's poem *In Praise of an Elevator* into a Flash piece ([Schroeder & Handplant Studio, 2008](#)).
- The Claire Allan Dinsmore interview was conducted by Megan Sapnar in July 2002 for the website *Poems That Go* and it discusses her piece *The Dazzle as Question* ([Dinsmore, n.d.](#)), a Flash ePoem she created herself.
- Bill Dorris was a digital media lecturer in the Department of Communications in Dublin City University, he is a poet and ePoet and created *The Burning* ([Dorris & Kuypers, 2008](#)) in Adobe Flash with the poet Janet Kuypers who wrote the poem and also provided some imagery and audio for the ePoem.

1. Flash or Adobe Flash is a multimedia authoring software used to create a large proportion on interactive online content with a strong visual focus.

2. ePoetic translation – translation as communication

McLuhan (1962) purports that the modern reader is involved in total translation of sight into sounds as they look at the page; in this case McLuhan is referring to a reader translating from print into oral words in the mind. For the purposes of this paper, this can be equally applied to the translation of poems from print into online visuals in the eMedia. This then is translation as communication and it is in this manner that I refer to translation, in a similar sense to Hatim and Mason (1997). They look upon translation “as an act of communication which attempts to relay, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication (which may have been intended for different purposes and different readers/hearers)” (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 1). The ePoet, through the ePoem, is communicating to the creader¹, perhaps the intended communication differs from that actually received but that point is outside my research question. This chapter focuses on the process of creation of the ePoem, the translation of the poem from paper to pixel.

It is important to note that the ePoetry with which this research is concerned starts out as written or print poetry; the poem’s initial form was analogue on printed-paper. It is essential to look at what happens next, the process of translation of the printed text into visual motion graphics with audio and interactivity, in order to understand what ePoetry is. It is comparable to the creation of music videos, where music comes first; so too in ePoetry does the poem come first (Vernallis, 2004, p. x). One exception however is that of generative ePoems: in these instances the computer code generates the poem, each experience is unique based on a series of variables at each instance of play. The code will use variables such as words to generate a poem, so in a

1. With reference to the ePoetry examples I discuss in this research, the term viewer, player, reader, or user no longer adequately encompasses the active role that will need to be played. Though some of the ePoems provide minimal interactivity such as simply a click to play, others allow the freedom to explore the poetic environment to such an extent that the result is an experiential literary experience. This could involve reading, playing, viewing, listening or linking. So we are left searching for a term for an active individual who might perform any one or all of these activities. Also another factor in affirming the inappropriateness of using the term reader for ePoetry is that in computer terminology ‘to read’ means to copy data from one storage medium or device to another. This is different to print terminology when ‘to read’ means to decipher and interpret the letters and signs of a document (Morris, 2006, p. 15). So for the purposes of this research rather than interpose constantly the terms viewer, reader, user, I will use the term creader. This is a combination of the words creator and reader to refer to what Barthes (1970) termed the active reader.

sense a generative ePoem still exists in print first, but not to the same extent as a definite written poem which is later translated into ePoetry.

Similarities can be found in the process of translating a poem from one language to another and the process of translating a poem from print to digital. In order to identify these similarities and/or differences, I will apply poetry translation theory to the process of ePoetry creation using ePoet interview responses as evidence.

Holmes (1994), a poet and a translator of poetry provided what is widely considered the most systematically theoretical map of processes involved in poetic translation¹. We can apply Holmes' (1994) model of translation to ePoetry translation if we interpret language A, the source text, to be a piece in standard textual language and language B, the target text, to be the piece translated into digital multimedia form. The transfer mechanism is then both the ePoet and the software applications of choice (such as Flash) with or without the collaboration of the poet. In this case the translator first decodes the piece to allow for assimilation and interpretation and then recodes the piece into a new mode. Whether this new mode is from one language to another such as for example French to Spanish or analogue to digital it does not affect the model.

2.1. Holmes' forms of translation

Holmes (1994) outlines the following four approaches that translators have traditionally come upon as solutions to the problem of form of the metapoem. Firstly there is a *mimetic* form where the original form is kept (most similar to original). This approach tends to have the effect of re-emphasising, "by its strangeness, the strangeness which for the target-language reader is inherent in the semantic message of the original poem" (Holmes, 1994, p. 27). Then there is the *analogical* form; here the translation seeks functionally to parallel the

1. Holmes (1994) is credited with starting the attempt to map translation studies as an academic field of study in his article *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies* (Holmes, 1994, p. 67). Holmes broke the field into two main areas, *pure* and *applied*. The pure deals with the description of translation and the development of corresponding principles to help describe and explain it, this is the main area this research deals with. Applied is more practical and deals with activities such as translator training and developing practical translation aids such as dictionaries and term banks (Baker, 2001, p. 278).

form in the original's poetic tradition. Both of these are "form derivative [...]" determined as they are by the principle of seeking some kind of equivalence in the target language for the outward form of the original poem" (Holmes, 1994, p. 26). There is also the *organic* form or "content derivative", this form starts with the same semantic content but allows it to form its own unique shape rather than the form of the original. And finally there is the *deviant* or *extraneous* form where the metapoem is cast into a form that is in no way implicit in either the form or the content of the original (most dissimilar to original) (France, 2000, p. 31).

Some extracts from the interviews point us to how we should categorise the electronic metapoems. "The words and structure are unaltered from the reading that we received by Billy Collins. We've obviously given it other levels of subjective meaning by virtue of the fact we set it to sound design and images" (Tootal, personal communication, 2009, q. 11). This comment regarding *Hunger* (Collins & SamuelChristopher, 2006) leads us to set it in the category of an organic translation according to Holmes' (1994) theory: the content is similar to the original poem but the form is different. In this case the content of the poem is the same but the form has changed from print text to digital video and audio.

Similarly Sheehan when asked about his piece *Ten Doors Closing* (Sheehan, 2006) answers, "I think the finished product fairly represents the original idea. The poem its self [sic] is essentially unchanged" (Sheehan, personal communication, 2009, q. 8), this would also lead us to categorise the piece according to Holmes' theories as an organic translation. Parilla comments that, "the essence of the poem is the same. Of course, there are new nuances and [sic] others have been diluted" (Parilla, personal communication, 2009, q. 12); this also points us to categorising his ePoem *In praise of an elevator* (Schroeder & Handplant Studio, 2008) as organic. In fact most of the examples of ePoetry examined in this research fall into this category except for *The Last Day of Betty Nkomo* (Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, 2004): although the words were indeed written first, they were in fact written specifically for this piece and still appear as written words although they are now digital written words and the rhythm and audio is new. There is however no added imagery, unlike the other pieces, and

therefore it could be categorised as *analogical*, whereby the translation seeks to functionally parallel the form in the original's poetic tradition.

2.2. The specificity of poetry translation

Holmes (1994) emphasises the innate difference between the translation of prose and poetry due to the ambiguity inherent in poetry as opposed to the more single-minded nature of prose (p. 9). It is this chameleon like quality of poetry that makes its translation such a complex task.

According to Holmes (1994) the basic problem that the poetry translator (who has set out to create a text that is closely related enough to the original to be called a translation and that also displays enough of the basic characteristics in the target language to be called a poem) faces, is the fact that the translator not only has to shift the original poem to another linguistic context but also to another literary intertext and socio-cultural situation (p. 47). The range of choice presented to the translator ranges from the *exoticizing* to the *naturalizing* plane, and the *historicizing* to the *modernizing* plane¹. In these planes a translation can range from being the most different (*exoticizing*) or similar (*naturalizing*) to the source text. Moreover a translation may take a historical (*historicizing*) form or contain historical content as opposed to a modern, contemporary form and/or content (*modernizing*).

Ong is an example of an ePoet dealing with such problems by situating *Fallow* (Givens & Ong, 2007) in a historical context and specific socio-cultural situation. Evidence to support this can be seen in the response: "When I read *Fallow* (Givens & Ong, 2007), I sense a voice of longing, lingering in a time passed. I ended up visiting many antique shops in the rural part of Hudson Valley where I collected vintage postcards. I think there is something about old correspondences, letters and belongings that evoke that same longing" (Ong, personal communication, 2009, q. 10). In fact in Givens and Ong's (2007) piece we can see graphics of these same vintage photos, postcards and letters

1. Though in my writing I use British spelling when Holmes coined these terms he used American spelling so to remain accurate to his terminology when I use these terms I retain his original spelling and italicise the term in order to note this.

all which contribute towards placing the translation within a specific historical and socio-cultural context. Her response as well as the visuals of the piece itself show us that her ePoetry translation is situated with the socio-cultural situation of Hudson Valley, 1950 or 1960s rural America in the state of New York.

Interestingly the use of Asian traditional music as audio for *The Last Day of Betty Nkomo* (Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, 2004) situates it within a different socio-cultural situation. This is also reflected in the literary intertext as the text is reminiscent of a Japanese haiku, although the linguistic context is modern western English. It seems to be the case in most of the ePoems that the choice of music and/or graphics contribute to placing the piece in a socio-cultural situation and increased poetic impact can be arrived at by the combination of the socio-cultural situation, the linguistic context, and the literary intertext. However, as in the screenshot below (Figure 1) of *A Servant. A Hanging. A Paper House* (Anderton & Robinson, 2008), it is not as obvious in this piece what part the music, graphics, or text have to play regarding the socio-cultural situation, literary intertext, or linguistic context.

Figure 1. A Servant. A Hanging. A Paper House (Anderton & Robinson, 2008)



The choice of song is crackly and old but it is impossible to make out the words. The text is modern English, which give us the literary intertext. The graphics contribute to the same historical feeling by showing some scratches and water damage stains, the visuals show remote rural countryside but more than that is hard to discern.

2.3. Holmes' serial and structural planes

Holmes (1994) also proposes that when a poem is translated it takes place on two planes, a serial plane and a structural plane. The serial plane deals with translating sentence by sentence and the structural plane deals with the overview translation “on which one abstracts a ‘mental conception’ of the original text. This mental conception is then used as a kind of general criterion against which to test each sentence during the formulation of the new translated text” (Holmes, 1994, p. 82), so that when translating a poem it is not enough to translate the individual elements but also the overall sense of the piece.

Likewise there is clear evidence in the ePoet interview responses to link to Holmes' (1994) structural and serial planes. The structural plane deals with the overview translation and nearly all interviewees mention reading the poem in its entirety first and then begin to deal with the poem line by line or couplet by couplet. So we start with the structural plane and then move to the serial plane which Holmes states deals with sentence by sentence or what Chang calls “keyframe by keyframe” (Chang, personal communication, 2009, q. 7) or as the ePoet Dorris suggests “word by word” (Dorris, personal communication, 2011, q. 7).

For example, many respondents stress the importance of immersing oneself in the poem at the beginning of the process. Such as “The poet sent me the poem. I read it carefully, out loud, repeatedly” (Ong, personal communication, 2009, q. 4). Also Robinson “The first thing I did was read the poem that was emailed to me and reflect on the overall themes and my own personal interpretations. Then I isolated each two-line segment and read it several times while writing down any imagery that came to mind” (Robinson, personal communication,

2009, q. 7). Despite the majority of respondents stating they were trying to put the poet's interpretation across it is also clear that the majority spent some time developing their own interpretation before beginning work. Samuel Tootal states this explicitly when he tells us "It is entirely our interpretation of the poem" and that he and his partner worked "Line by line" (Tootal, personal communication, 2009, q. 7). This is a particularly evocative piece so perhaps this freedom from worrying about the poet's interpretation liberated them and allowed them to concentrate on evoking their interpretation.

Translation theory can thus be useful when we examine the changing form from print to pixel. Through Holmes' (1994) model of translation it was ascertained that many different aspects of a translation can be studied: process, forms, levels, and planes. Translation theory is thus a useful prism with which to examine and unlock the creation of specific ePoetry examples. However, traditional poetry theory can also be applied to ePoetry examples.

3. Poetry structure - Orr's temperaments

The new poetic experiences of the ePoems – while not derived from text, but rather from eMedia enhancements of text, such as via motion graphics or video – nonetheless conform to the characteristics common to analogue poetry, as discussed, for example, by Orr (1996). Orr (1996), in his paper *Four Temperaments and the Forms of Poetry* proposes four categories or as he calls them *temperaments* to poetry (p. 270) and these are not dissimilar to Aristotle's (1996) analysis of a tragedy¹. These are: Story, Structure, Music, and Imagination. Orr (1996) also suggests that the dynamic tension of a poem is brought about through a marriage of contraries that occurs through the contrast of each of these temperaments and it is this aspect of Orr's (1996) theory in particular that lead me select them as the most appropriate for this research.

1. Aristotle (1996) suggests a structure for the breakdown of poetry to enable analysis. He believed tragedy, like poetry to be imitation. With reference to this research it is interesting to note that the elements which Aristotle lists as comprising a tragedy, are echoed in many theories on what constitutes poetry and as such I believe are relevant to this research. In fact Miller (2004) notes, "Aristotle's remarks on dialogue have stood the test of time, and are as applicable to interactive media as they were to Greek drama" (p. 110). As well as this the "principles discussed in The Poetics have been applied not only to stage plays, but also to movies, TV shows, and, most recently, are finding their way into interactive narratives" (Miller, 2004, p. 75).

It is clear by evidence of ePoet responses that Orr's (1996) poetry criticism theory can not only be applied to traditional analogue poetry, but also to ePoetry. However the question remains to what extent? This section tackles this issue by outlining each of the temperaments and then, using ePoet interview responses and ePoetry examples, illustrating their application to ePoetry. This then allows for a problematising of Orr's (1996) theory in relation to ePoetry and concurrently, a rationale towards a revision of poetry criticism for the digital realm.

3.1. Story

According to Orr (1996), Story is the beginning, middle, and end (pp. 271-277). It is an element which is essential for a human connection, though less imperative for a poem than for a film or novel (Orr, 1996, pp. 271-277). Nonetheless it is still important for a story to be told, conflict must seek a resolution. If not immediately apparent we will always seek the story in a work of art such as a painting or poem. In some of the ePoems considered in this research, story does not exist in the traditional sense, such as a clear beginning, middle and end. In these cases the authors have made an effort either graphically or otherwise to situate their piece in a recognisable location or space. In Arnall's (2002) sense an ePoem is "an open, explorable environment" rather than a narrative. The reader's response can then be to create their own narratives by associating their own personal experiences of such an environment to the ePoem and so too will they begin to associate emotions, leading to an evocative piece.

A number of the interviewees commented on just such a process in relation to their own ePoems. Ong in discussing her ePoem *Fallow* (Givens & Ong, 2007) mentions that she "brought a visual space to the words, a sort of setting in terms of landscape – not a literal one but perhaps one that taps into the reader's landscape of memory" (Ong, personal communication, 2009, q. 3). She also speaks of the "emotional space" (Ong, 2009, q. 11) of her ePoem and states that she likes "creating a poetic space that is just as engaging or transformative as a book" (Ong, 2009, q. 1). In both *Fallow* (Givens & Ong, 2007) and *Hunger*

(Collins & SamuelChristopher, 2006) media elements are used to suggest spaces that people would recognise and therefore relate to in a subtle way. The “stills we used are urban compositions we’re interested in in general, the kind of thing you glance at whilst travelling around a town or city” (Tootal, personal communication, 2009, q. 9). This is the equivalent of setting it within a story or context that people can connect and identify with. Similarly Sheehan talks of using the London Underground as a setting that is an “instantly recognisable and everyday place to most Londoners I wanted to inject an element of ‘myth’ to something so taken for granted” (Sheehan, personal communication, 2009, q. 5). This recognisable place allows the reader to become a character in the story of the poem and so allows for a greater emotional connection, personal interpretation, identification and emotional evocation.

3.2. Structure

Orr’s (1996) temperament of Structure is the pattern of the poem, the element most often (but not always) recognisable in poetry (pp. 271-277). In fact sometimes it is even the lack of a structure compared to prose that makes poetry recognisable as what it is.

Interestingly, structure seems to be an area left most often unchanged in the ePoetry pieces by the translators. With reference to *Hunger* (Collins & SamuelChristopher, 2006) Tootal states that the “words and structure are unaltered from the reading that we received by Billy Collins” (Tootal, personal communication, 2009, q. 11), thus they did not alter or change the words or structure of the original poem written by Collins that they translated into eMedia. Parilla also reports, “I respect the original groups [sic] of lines” and “aspects that must be respect [sic] are the reading, order, the rhythm” (Parilla, personal communication, 2009, q. 16). This is echoed by Ong’s opinion that “the media art needs [sic] come from the poetic content and be carefully considered. Artist Ben Shahn always emphasized that ‘form is the shape of content’” (Ong, personal communication, 2009, q. 16). Similarly Dinsmore tells us that “form is an extension of content” (Sapnar, 2002). Robinson explains that when he was communicating with the poet Anderton

she told him “the ‘meaning’ of the poem is reflected in the shape of the poem” and as a result Robinson tried to maintain as much as possible the original structure of the poem by working line by line, “I treated each line as a ‘frame’ that I wanted to stand on its own as an appealing visual” (Robinson, personal communication, 2009, q. 7).

3.3. Music

The next temperament, Music, is the interaction of syllables, syntax and sounds inherent in reading or reciting which create the poem’s aural and rhythmical structure (Orr, 1996, pp. 271-277). This is the sound of the words that contribute to a rhythm in the poem.

Orr’s (1996) temperament of music does not refer to music as in songs or soundtracks when applied to traditional analogue poetry, but in eMedia translations the concept can expand to include not only this, but anything (such as motion graphics) which contributed to the rhythm of a piece, including of course the original interaction of syllables, syntax, intonation, etc. from the original poem. The music of a piece seems in the ePoetry examples I have so far looked at to be essential, the omission of such leads to a dull, flat and unengaging piece. To support this view there is much to be found in the interviews.

Tootal for example states that he and his partner Turner are “very interested in creating depth and texture to our work and when it is moving image you suddenly have the world of audio to delve into. Sound is so important to us, to any moving image creators and filmmakers. Work can live or die on the audio content and for us with *Hunger* it needed that added depth, a sense of mystery. Audio is the character of the environment” (Tootal, personal communication, 2009, q. 8). Tootal in this instance is describing how audio or sound is afforded as much weight as an actor in a play. Sheehan also uses audio in his piece, “many of the sounds are the normal workings of the Underground, we block them out in day-to-day travels. The screeching of metal wheels on metal tracks and the mechanical rhythm of the escalators and the announcements over the

public address system” (Sheehan, personal communication, 2009, q. 6). These comments from ePoets outline the extensive expressive and communicative potential of audio in ePoetry.

Though I have been applying Orr’s (1996) temperament of music to audio in ePoetry, in its original interpretation it relates to the rhythm of a poem. Dinsmore stresses the importance of rhythm in poetry both traditional and eMedia and the changing of such can impact the meaning of the piece. When discussing her piece *The Dazzle as Question* (Dinsmore, n.d.), she observes, “setting up a rhythm was one of the most important things for me. The meaning inferred by that rhythm, placing emphasis in time. When reading a poem for instance, the meaning can be construed very differently depending upon how the work is read – where the emphasis is placed, lull – each nuance of elocution lending meaning to the distinct content of each particular word, and thus to the work as a whole. I wanted to further the levels upon which this piece functioned by lending the ‘reading’ a voice beyond how the words would tell if the piece were, say, straight prose” (Sapnar, 2002).

3.4. Imagination

Orr’s (1996) final temperament, that of Imagination, deals with the themes or metaphors of a piece, the ideas, and thoughts. Much from the respondents’ answers on this topic can be extracted. The temperament of Imagination is the ideas and thought process of the poet, the metaphors and imagery at use, the flow of image-to-image or thought-to-thought (Orr, 1996, pp. 271-277).

Robinson reveals that he was being careful not to pigeonhole reader’s interpretation but believed the poem to be about languish (Robinson, personal communication, 2009, qq. 12-13). This mirrors the original poet’s intentions as Robinson cites communication with her in which she (the poet) states, “the images, hopefully, enfold the reader in a world of feeling and atmosphere that is not literal. This is not a ‘literal’ poem, it is a poem that opens doors within, and I cannot control what doors it opens for each reader (I am a big believer in not trying to write for other peoples [sic] interpretations” (Robinson, personal

communication, 2009). While the eMedia translator is aware of the themes of a piece they are also anxious to be careful to allow space for the readers to form their own interpretations of the themes of the piece.

3.5. A marriage of contraries – rationale for using Orr

Orr (1996) suggests that these four temperaments together form a marriage of contraries and that while each of these temperaments is capable of creating the unity we call a poem, he believes that “for a poem to have the stability and dynamic tension that comes of a marriage of contraries it must fuse a limiting impulse with an impulse that resists limitation” (p. 270). This reflects Barthes’s (1970) analysis of culture and his concept of *trope*, by referring to literary texts using this concept he emphasized the importance of difference in the creation of meaning¹. Gottdiener (1995) posits that according to Barthes both metaphorical² and metonymical³ tropes rely on contrasts or difference and that this is how meaning arises (p. 27). Similarly Orr’s (1996) dynamic tension, which is brought about through the contrasts or difference of conflicting temperaments allows the true emotional meaning of poem to be evoked.

Orr’s (1996) marriage of contraries however can refer not only to the conflict of temperaments but it can also refer to what I feel is most apparent in the ePoems and that is the emotional impact or dynamic tension that comes from a marriage of contraries of the visuals and the audio (p. 270). Often jarring audio is combined with beautiful graphics (or vice versa), which accentuates the impact of the piece. For example in *The Last Day of Betty Nkomo* (Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, 2004) the audio of the piece is some quite intricate music and yet the visuals are simple black and white Monaco font. The opposition of these two elements gives a unique style and emotional impact to the ePoem.

1. According to Barthes (1970) a trope is a figure of speech in relation to the system of signification in the field of semiotics (mentioned in Gottdiener, 1995, p. 27).

2. Associative.

3. Juxtapositional or contiguous.

3.6. eTemperaments – Orr’s theory revised

While it is clear that Orr’s (1996) temperaments still come into play much as they did in analogue poetry, nonetheless it is also clear that there is considerably more potential for variation within these when dealing with ePoems. This is due to the fact that in the electronic medium the ePoet is afforded a greater range of tools to use than in print. To adequately communicate the varying nuances and the potential for expanded possibilities of temperaments in the electronic realm as opposed to print, I will refer to them as *eTemperaments*, that is, Orr’s (1996) temperaments expanded in electronic form.

For example, story or narrative in the digital medium have changed as there are now multiple levels and sequencing possibilities, especially in relation to implicit narratives, driven by the content and sequencing of visual displays with or without reference to text. Rhyme is now demoted, as visual and repetition and tensions become dominant, and the focus is no longer on the text read as a linear narrative. Intonation is potentially expanded as multiple readings or voices are possible simultaneously or sequentially, and other audio aural effects can be incorporated. All these factors when brought into play in a studied, practised and balanced manner can contribute to a far more immediate, semiotically and experientially richer poetic experience for the creader than would have originally been possible in print form. However as there is potential for an enhanced experience so too is there the risk of a greatly inferior poetic experience if the ePoem is translated without consideration of the overall experience.

It is important to note is that in the original analogue poems the dynamic tension in the text could not be undermined by any eTemperaments, yet in the ePoem this is imminently possible. For example in the ePoem *I didn’t know infants in arms until* (Petrosino & Weychert, 2006) the dynamic tension of the piece is undermined by the use of interactivity which requires the creader to click after every line and so jars the rhythm of the ePoetic experience.

In general it can be argued that the role of eTemperaments has become much more complex with the additional individual possibilities for enhancing or diminishing

any particular element contributing to even one of these temperaments. For example in relation to music, Orr's (1996) traditional contributing elements (such as the interaction of syllables, syntax, and sounds inherent in the reading or reciting of the poem which create its aural and rhythmical structure) now have been greatly augmented by the addition of eMedia elements such as sound effects and audio as well as the rhythm contributions created by the use of video, motion graphics and interactivity. The ways in which these individual elements may interact with each other to enhance or diminish the poetic experience are obviously immense and will no doubt provide the basis for years of further ePoetic evolution to come.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the move from analogue to digital poetry has expanded the possibility for poetic expression. However, it has also expanded the scope for undermining such expression, resulting in the possibility of a lack of dynamic tension.

For example it is clear that interactivity can be a double-edged sword and ought not come at the cost of the music or overall meaning of the ePoem¹. However it is also clear that allowing the readers to construct their own experience using the ePoetic machine allows for a more personalised and therefore more memorable, affective and engaging piece. An exploratory ePoetic environment similar to that of *Fallow* (Givens & Ong, 2007) allows readers to construct their own ePoetic experience through the piece. Considering also the scope for expanded reader interaction that is now available through the use of haptic screens and gesture technologies such as respectively the *iPhone* or the *Nintendo Wii*, much more complex and rewarding reader interaction can potentially be provided.

Essentially technology can and will change, but the use of this technology to create new literary experiences is something that ePoets can and will become more expert in. The interdisciplinary use of cultural theory to study emerging

1. The interaction of syllables, syntax, and sounds inherent in the reading or reciting of the poem, which creates its aural and rhythmical structure (Orr, 1996, p. 274).

forms allows us to create a contemporary hybrid framework more appropriate for analysis of emerging cultural and technological forms. Just because things have changed does not mean we completely disregard what has gone before, in fact what emerges now builds on previous models. As [Branston and Stafford \(2010\)](#) state, “‘old’ approaches to different sets of power still produce valuable ways of exploring media forms for use in these times” (p. 3). Similarly [Buzzetti and McGann \(n.d.\)](#) tell us “present work and future developments in digital scholarship evolve from critical models that we have inherited”. However that is not to say that these critical models do not merit revisiting and reviewing in light of recent cultural and technological developments. Nonetheless this chapter has shown that there is merit in using traditional translation and poetry theory as a framework to analyse the process of creation of ePoetry. This process unlocks the ePoems for our use and contributes to a deeper understanding of the impact of the digital medium on literary expression.

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