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of English Language and

Literature

A Master's Thesis

Theater in the Age of Technology

A Study of Chosen Hyperdramas

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Dedication

*To my mother, my inspiration and my blessing, and my father,
who always supported me, and also my dear husband, for his tolerance
and understanding.*

Acknowledgement

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Abstract

The thesis examines the rising relationship between theater and technology through examining what is known as ‘hyperdrama’, which is a new form of theater that represents an innovative look towards theater in the new millennium. Hyperdrama is referred to as a ‘hypertext fiction’, as it is written in hypertext language and read on a computer.

Hyperdrama transforms the rules of theater by using digital technology to modify the rules of writing drama, adding certain unfamiliar qualities to a dramatic text. These features have several implications on the notions of a dramatic text, audience, stage, and playwright, turning theater into a rather unique experience.

The new context in which the drama is produced alters several rules attached to theater, as the digital element produces a new kind of drama which is both unusual and innovative as well, and expands the perspective of theater in the contemporary age. The three plays examined in the thesis are *The Bride of Edgefield* (1994), *The Last Song of Violetta Parra* (1996), and *The Seagull Hyperdrama* (2004). Through studying those dramas, subjects related to hyperdrama are tackled, such as hypertext, Electronic literature, and virtual technology. In examining those topics, the thesis uses poststructuralist as well as postmodern theories. Also, the thesis draws on the practices and theories of dramaturgy as pioneered by famous theater practitioners such as Artaud and Brecht.

The Introductory Chapter: *Theater and Technology* provides an introduction to hyperdrama, hypertext and electronic literature. The chapter also shows how hyperdrama is applicable to postmodern and poststructuralist theories. Chapter Two: *Hyperdrama as a New Kind of Dramatic Texts* examines the effect of employing hypertext technology in writing hyperdrama through tracing the modifications which hypertext technology adds to a dramatic text. The chapter mainly uses theories of Derrida, Barthes, and Kristeva. Chapter Three: *Theater as an Interactive Experience* examines the concept of ‘interactivity’ as applied in both the dramatic text as well as in the performances of hyperdrama, and the effect of interactivity on the concepts of playwright and audience. The chapter draws on theories of Postmodern theater, as well as certain ideas by Brecht and Artaud. The last chapter: *Virtuality, Subjectivity, and Time and space in Hyperdrama* analyzes the effects of using virtual technology in hyperdrama and its implications on the concepts of a dramatic text, time, representation, and the concept of the self.

The thesis aims at establishing the role of digital technology in contemporary culture and its importance as a new tool of cultural expression in a society dominated by technology. The thesis would prove that the employment of digital technology might be an addition which expand the concept of theater and expose its capabilities.

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Introductory Chapter

Theater and Technology

“It is reasonable to suppose that the proliferation of information-processing machines is having, and will continue to have, as much of an effect on the circulation of learning” (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*)

1. Literature and Technology

Reading a work of drama on a computer device might seem for the first while unfamiliar. However, with the rising intrusion of technology in literary fields during the past few decades, the notion might seem less bizarre. The present thesis examines the relationship between technology and theater through tracing the effects of employing computer technology in the making of specific dramatic works. The thesis aims at establishing the role of digital technology in contemporary drama and its importance as a new tool of cultural expression in a society dominated by technology.

Culture of the late twentieth century is profoundly affected by technology. This impact has gradually reached a strong phase that it actually became a defining feature of the age, now referred to as the 'Information Age' or the 'Age of the Internet'. Digital technology in particular, which usually refers to electronic or computer technology, has an increasing role in forming contemporary culture. With the rise of the new Millennium, computers have become indispensable devices in all institutions of contemporary society, as the Internet is becoming the main communication tool around the globe and an important source of information. Indeed, we are living in a culture in which "information has got under our skin" (*Culture and Technology* 128).

The impact of digital technology on cultural life has been highlighted by several important Critics, such as the eminent French critic Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007). In his important work *Simulations* or (*Semiotext[e]*) (1980), Baudrillard argues that in twentieth-century capitalist societies, digital technology has reached a stage where it dominates society and its culture. He describes forms of digital technology such as "Cybernetic control, generation from model, differential modulation, feed-back" as "the new operational configuration" in society, and digitality as "its metaphysical principle", referring to the digital nature of computer machines (103). Baudrillard correctly observes how the language of computers has profoundly affected cultural life and dominated all other forms of culture. The French critic Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), has further revealed how the spreading of computers and digital culture came to affect learning as well: "the miniaturization and commercialization of machines is already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available, and exploited" (*The Postmodern Condition* 4). Lyotard observes that gradually, computers were not merely used for scientific purposes, but came to involve other disciplines as well, such as literary fields: "for the last forty years the "leading" sciences and technologies have had to do with language"" (Lyotard 30).

Lyotard's prediction is well fulfilled now, one might say, as digital technology is gradually altering literature. During the late seventies and early eighties in particular, authors started to employ computer technology in literary fields. This employment gradually altered the elements which traditionally constituted literature, such as reading and writing, which became challenged by the new capacities that the new technology offers, as Ann Mangen, one of the specialists in digital writing, notices: "The ways we read are constantly being molded by whatever technological innovations, devices and platforms come around" (Mangen 2008). Professor George Landow, one of the pioneers in the

criticism of hypertext, a form of writing which is produced using computer technology, explains that "The next great change in information technology_and that which most concerns us_came with the development of digital information technology. For the first time, writing, which had always been physical marks on a physical surface, instead takes the form of electronic codes" (Landow 34). Landow refers to the fact that digital technology altered the concept of writing and opened new horizons for innovative techniques. As a result, new forms of literature were produced, creating new genres which employ computer technology in their creation.

2. Theater and Technology

Theater has responded to the impact of digital technology on culture, where digital technologies were integrated into both the dramatic text and theatrical productions. Kerstin Schmidt, one of the critics of postmodern theater, notes that: "The significance and impact of media technologies on contemporary culture at large and on theater and drama in particular can hardly be overestimated. It has shaped contemporary dramatic writing and performance..." (*The Theater of Transformation* 77). Media is a term referring all forms which employ electronic or digital technology. During the past few decades, several contemporary playwrights started to employ computer technology in the making of dramatic works. The notion is not very new, as for the past forty years, digital technology has been used in theater, but mostly as an unseen tool which partly contributes to the general production. However, since the eighties in specific, computers were used as a basis for the creation of works of drama. As unfamiliar as it sounds, these new forms of theater gradually began to gain popularity during the past few decades, with the rising employment of computer

in literary fields. This employment had an influence on concepts such as a dramatic text, audience, playwright, and stage. Such topics are among those examined in the thesis.

Contemporary researches on theater have shown that by employing computer technology, the rules which govern theater are given a new definition, as they are provided with a new nature. Researchers have agreed that the advances in computer machines have brought forth new unfamiliar changes in theater and performance, which "led to a reconsideration of how theater happens in mediated and virtual environments " (Causey 150). Unlike traditional theatrical plays which are usually written using print technology, works which use computer as a basis for their creation are produced in the digital environment of a computer device, in the zone of computer electronic circuits, which provides these works with a different nature than that of classical plays. Such nature is examined in the thesis, as it traces how the employment of computer as a basis for theatrical production alters the elements which form a drama and consequently transforms the theatrical experience. This is achieved through analyzing certain plays of a new form of theater known as 'hyperdrama'.

2.1. Hyperdrama

Hyperdrama is a new form of theater which refers to dramas created on a computer device; these plays are created using computer technology and readers read them on their computers. As unusual as it sounds, these works introduce theater in a new innovative form and are important_one might add_as an example of theater in a "technologized culture" (Causey 2006). Charles Deemer, the author of the three works at hand, explains that "Hyperdrama challenges Single Vision. This new kind of theater, generated from scripts written in hypertext, challenges the notion of theater as a performance that is watched by

an immobile audience sitting in a dark theater in chairs that are bolted to the floor" (Deemer, "The New Hyperdrama"). Indeed, Hyperdrama challenges notions of traditional theater, as the nature of the medium in which it is created is much different from a print medium. The production of the plays on a computer device alters the nature of many elements which traditionally form a dramatic play.

Hyperdrama introduces an unfamiliar work of drama. The drama is situated within the digital context of a computer device and read on the internet, readers from around the globe are able to get access to the work through its website on the vast expanding World Wide Web (WWW), the place where all the cultures around the world meet. In this context, the elements which traditionally form a drama are modified or even lost, as digital technology provides the work with new unfamiliar features that break down the concept of a traditional Aristotelian play. For example, the specific nature of computer technology modifies the nature of the dramatic script and introduces a set of untraditional techniques, most notably, audience direct interaction with the dramatic work, the ability of the dramatic text to transform, and other clever modifications of traditional literary devices. A work of hyperdrama has no main or sub-plot, no major or minor characters, and audience members are active participants in the work. Such features not only affect the dramatic text, but also alter the nature of performances as well.

Hyperdramas are difficult to create; the employment of digital technology as a basis for creating the drama sophisticates the production process, Deemer writes that "hyperdramas are not easy to produce, I still vividly remember the paralysis that met me when I began my first hyperdrama" ("How Do I number the Pages" 276). One of the obstacles he faced for example was how to number the pages of such digital dramas, which have no linear coherent structure or a narrative sequence. Nevertheless, he established himself as a