



Interactive Story

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Final Assignment

ENG374

Prof. Anna Lee-Popham

Process

Revising one of my stories into an interactive format is something I've dabbled in before, but I doubt I had anywhere near as much fun as this time around. The idea to make it all an interactive website, in a sort of cross-disciplinary project making use of my CS, Media Studies and Creative Writing skills was catching lightning in a bottle. I set myself a gargantuan task, but I think I managed to deliver something that I can truly be proud of—something I can claim as my own work.

I think that the interactive format allows for a great deal of expansion in regards to the world that the story inhabits. Via the interactive format I was able to fit in details that might have been considered auxiliary in the traditional format, but were necessary for the cohesiveness of the experience. A great example is the addition of the map and the setting to the interactive version. Within the original story, I only mentioned the state of Hessen (in Germany) in passing, since I noticed that some of the versions of the original story mentioned the area, but to contextualize the life of a troll living in that place and that era I needed to completely realize the space that I was working in—the things that I wanted to maintain historically accurate and the things that I would like to change. Enhanced immersion via worldbuilding and interaction is one of the main opportunities that an interactive story provides.

However, interactive stories can also limit the flow of the narrative, as players can choose their own ways to experience the story. They might be unknowingly delaying the climax, or they might be missing key plot information by simply playing the game as they are allowed to. While an interactive story has unique ways to circumnavigate this issue, such as forcing the player into a certain state within the interactive experience, or making sure they receive key plot information

before they are allowed to progress, it can come at a cost to the players experience. This issue was actually the crux of the issue when it came to implementing stories within video games. I have a digital exhibit on the [co-evolution of narrative and technology within video games](#) that touches on the issue. This clash between freedom of interaction and burden of narrative knowledge has crept up time and again, and even to this day games find it hard to strike the right balance between the two.

Memory is the cornerstone of the interactive version of this story, since the story is centered around the troll reminiscing over the many events of his life. Exploration of the troll's memories is the main way to piece the narrative together, understand the troll's character, and explore the world. Memory is explored through various forms, such as looking through the window, reading some old diary entries and letters, or even looking at wall hangings and maps. Memories of other characters besides the troll are also explored, such as in the historical document of the trolls, and in the other characters that interact with the troll. With this assignment and all of my creative work, I truly live by Malcolm Gladwell's philosophy:

"Though we are incapable of getting all of a person's essence, I do believe we can get at pieces about the person. Profiles need to be more sociological and less psychological.... The individual is a means to examine another world – the world in which that person lives. When we limit ourselves to the individuals' personality, we miss the opportunity to consider larger questions about society and subcultures."

My intention with making this interactive story, writing this original piece, and with any of my other creative pursuits is to offer someone a glimpse into a world, not just a look at a character or a scene of a story. I believe that intricate worlds naturally flow into layered characters and interesting stories,

and vice versa. These three (Story & Narrative, Characters, and World) are what I consider the inseparable pillars of a narrative.

I received plenty of feedback from my peers regarding the autobiography I originally wrote, and I tried incorporating the feedback that made sense in the interactive story to the best of my ability. One of the main concerns was the burden of knowledge required to understand what was going on. The autobiography relies on familiarity with the original Three Billy goats Gruff, and if that wasn't enough, I introduce the concept of Troll history and culture. I think I managed to lessen the issue by making the story consumable in bite-size chunks, which allows the players/readers time to process the different ideas I am playing around with.

Thanks for reading my short story,

Aman Shahid



Introspection

My goal with my writing has been the same since I set out on this path.

There's a world that's been brewing in my head for a number of years, complete with its own characters, its own stories, its own cultures, religions and histories, and especially its own, unique magic. The world has served as an endless source of enjoyment to me, and I spend most of my waking hours daydreaming about it. A few years ago I suddenly grew an inexplicable urge to share this world with other people. I wanted other people to know what characters I think are cool, what crazy plotlines were keeping me up at night and gripping my mind during the day, and what a crazy world it was where all of this was taking place.

Ever since then I've used every opportunity presented to me to prepare myself to tackle that behemoth. That is exactly what I did in ENG374 as well, though admittedly I didn't make that world the focus of any of my assignments this time around. I decided that by practicing writing in different spaces than I usually do, I could broaden my creative repertoire to better deal with every challenge that my world would throw at me. I'm spending ample time practicing prose (and even a bit of poetry) to try and do justice to the myriad wonders that my mind has shown me.

I don't think I'll be able to capture much of that spark, but even a tiny glow to start off would be great. To constantly make that a little brighter with every iteration, with every skill I learn, and with every day I dream—that has always been the goal.



Course Reflection

In many ways, ENG374 was a step in a different direction for me—still a step forward but through different pathways and roads yet untraveled. I wanted to stray from my usual formula of writing something within my world (a trend I started with ENG373 in the summer) and I think it has paid off in spades.

I took the fiction story as an opportunity to write something that is similar to what I write, but that was more of an ease-in for what I think was really the highlight of the course for me, my autobiography and the resulting interactive story. I used to shy away from biographies and autobiographies completely, as I thought they were an absolute snore (I mostly stand by this sentiment) but I realized that, being the one holding the pen, I could make something that I at least thought fun. By giving a fictitious spin to the assignment and speaking from the autobiographical voice of a different character, I was able to discover a different type of narrative and medium.

This was all facilitated by what I think was a lovely weekly focus in terms of the course. Each week gave me some new perspective to take regarding the creative work that I was doing, even beyond ENG374, for other coursework, and beyond that for my own stuff. I want to say that I think that the intertwined slides, weekly presentations, and focused readings really gave me tons to think about, and were directly responsible for my success in the course.

If I have any point of contention regarding the course, it would be that at times I felt like my feedback group was much smaller than the others, for reasons obviously out of your control as the professor (such as many kids needing an absence from a particular group). I think if there was some

form of a contingency plan for such events (and I really have no idea where to start with this one) than it could keep levels of feedback and quality of work consistent throughout the class.

Lastly, I want to thank my peers, and especially you, Prof. Lee-Popham, for a wonderful semester. I feel like I'm walking away from this semester quite rich haha! I definitely learned a ton and can't wait to apply it all to make my stuff even better.

Thanks for being a great prof,
Aman Shahid

