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Home / Archives / Vol. 6 No. 1 (2025)

## Vol. 6 No. 1 (2025)

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### Articles

- A Study of Wyndham Lewis's Hitler (1931) and The Hitler Cult (1939) in the Light of Literary Modernism and Politics**  
 Mohsen Gholami 1-8

[PDF](#)
- The Different Faces of the Trickster: The Psychoanalyst and the Buddhist in Iris Murdoch's A Severed Head and The Sea, The Sea**  
 Soheila Farhani Nejad 9-16

[PDF](#)

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- Book Review: Pan, F. (Ed.). (2024). AI in Language-Teaching, Learning, and Assessment. Pennsylvania: IGI Global**  
 Jacqueline Zammit 17-19

[PDF](#)
- Gender Neutralization in Naomi Midori Nove's Patient: The Struggle of Feminism-Masculinism**  
 Diva Kinanti Kartikaningtyas, Onok Yayang Pamungkas 20-27

[PDF](#)
- MSU-Main as Heterotopia: Perspectives and Memories of Retired Meranaw Employees**  
 Mosa-ab Z. Mangurun 28-38

[PDF](#)
- From Motivation to Engagement in ELT: Evidence-Based Strategies for Transformation**  
 Geopal Prasad Pandey 39-45

[PDF](#)
- Imagination Is the Door to Amazement and Moral Imagination Holds the Key to Unlock It**  
 Dan Manolescu 46-51

[PDF](#)
- The Role of Gender in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun: Societal Influences on Character Development**  
 Samuel O. Idowu 52-57

[PDF](#)
- The Significance of Female Body in Shelley Jackson's Hypertext Fiction My Body - A Wunderkammer: A Feminist Perspective**  
 Patricius Sulistyka Eka Apira Yogayudha, Tatang Iskarna 58-66

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# The Significance of Female Body in Shelley Jackson's Hypertext Fiction *My Body - A Wunderkammer*: A Feminist Perspective

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## Abstract

This research explores Shelley Jackson's *My Body - A Wunderkammer*, analysing how the narrative reflects gender power dynamics and contributes to the discourse on gender equality. Focusing on three main areas—representation of the female body, subversion of conventional narratives through hypertext fiction, and challenges to gender norms in cyber literature—the study employs a feminist theoretical framework combined with close reading and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Jackson's innovative use of hypertext fiction allows for a non-linear and immersive exploration of bodily autonomy, societal expectations, and the complexities of gender identity. This research highlights the significance of interactive and digital literature as powerful tools for feminist expression, promoting a more inclusive understanding of gendered experiences. Furthermore, the study underscores the potential of contemporary digital technologies to enhance feminist narratives, encouraging future explorations and innovations in this field. By situating Jackson's work within the evolving landscape of digital literature, the research demonstrates how interactive narratives can advance feminist discourse.

**Keywords:** Cyber Literature, Hypertext Fiction, Shelley Jackson, Female Body, Feminism

## 1. Introduction

Electronic literature, also referred to as cyber literature, encompasses works that use digital media and technology to create interactive, non-linear narratives (Rosario et al., 2021). These works often incorporate hyperlinks, multimedia elements like images, sounds, and videos, creating dynamic reading experiences where readers actively engage with and influence the text. This interactivity challenges traditional storytelling techniques by allowing readers to explore multiple narrative paths, reflecting themes such as identity, gender, and power dynamics in ways that are distinct from print literature (Hayles, 2007).

Among the various genres of cyber literature, hypertext fiction stands out as a form of ergodic expression that leverages technology to craft non-linear, interactive narratives (Moulthrop, 2021). By employing hyperlinks and multimedia elements, hypertext fiction enables readers to navigate the text at their own pace, fostering new ways of engaging with literature (Grigar & O'Sullivan, 2021). The hyperlink, as a digital reference embedded within the text, facilitates non-linear exploration of interconnected information, enhancing the narrative's complexity and interactivity (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2024). Hypertext

fiction often incorporates graphics, music, and video to create personalised reading experiences, breaking traditional literary conventions and opening avenues for digital literary innovation (Pawlicka, 2014).

A prominent example of hypertext fiction is Shelley Jackson's *My Body - A Wunderkammer* (Jackson, 1997), which represents a significant contribution to digital literature. Jackson's work uses hypertext to present her corporeal story as a Wunderkammer, or "cabinet of curiosity", weaving together themes of identity, the body, and technological interactions (Hayles, 2008). The narrative explores Jackson's physical and emotional encounters with her body, offering a reflective examination of identity through an innovative and dynamic framework. By integrating hypertext techniques, *My Body - A Wunderkammer* challenges traditional literary forms and contributes to feminist discourse on the representation of women's bodies in digital spaces.

Hypertext fiction's portrayal of women's bodies allows for a nuanced exploration of identity, power, and gender within the digital landscape. By depicting women's bodies in fluid and non-linear ways, hypertext fiction enables readers to construct multiple interpretations, challenging stereotypes and societal norms. From a feminist perspective, these representations highlight the intersections of power, sexuality, and gender in contemporary culture while critiquing traditional portrayals of women's bodies (Bullock & Henry-Tierney, 2023). Feminist literary studies provide a critical framework for analysing such depictions, emphasising the importance of inclusive and liberating narratives that transcend conventional gender boundaries (Wolf, 2002).

Building upon this understanding, this research investigates the representation of the female body in Shelley Jackson's *My Body - A Wunderkammer* through a feminist lens. This study explores how Jackson employs hypertext fiction techniques to challenge and subvert traditional gender norms, examines how the narrative engages with themes of identity, power, and embodiment, and analyses how Jackson's work contributes to broader feminist discourse in digital literature.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of hypertext fiction as a medium for feminist expression. By focusing on *My Body - A Wunderkammer*, this research underscores the role of digital literature in reshaping portrayals of women's bodies, challenging societal stereotypes, and advocating for inclusivity and equity. The study highlights how hypertext fiction's non-linear and interactive nature offers a powerful platform for reimagining gender roles and critiquing power dynamics. Ultimately, this research contributes to the fields of feminist literary criticism and digital literature, showcasing the potential of hypertext fiction to foster new perspectives on identity, gender, and representation in contemporary literary discourse.

## 2. Literature Review

Shelley Jackson's *My Body - A Wunderkammer* has sparked diverse scholarly interest, particularly regarding its hypertextual structure, posthumanism themes, and Gothic undertones. Regnauld (Regnauld, 2010), in his study provides an in-depth analysis of Jackson's use of autobiographical forms and subjective identity. He examines Jackson's thematic progression across works such as *Patchwork Girl* published in 1995, *My Body - A Wunderkammer* published in 1997, and *The Doll Games* published in 2001, focusing on how these narratives intertwine intimacy and self-exposure within the digital medium. While Regnauld offers critical insights into Jackson's portrayal of subjectivity, he does not specifically explore the feminist aspects of bodily representation.

Jorge (Jorge, 2015) delves into the grotesque aesthetics of Jackson's digital literature. His analysis emphasizes the intersection of corporeality and digital textuality but adopts a broader view that highlights the grotesque without addressing feminist perspectives or the gendered implications of the female body.

Squeo (Squeo, 2018) investigates the influence of Gothic and posthuman paradigms in Jackson's works. By drawing connections to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Squeo explores the concept of hybrid and fragmented identities within digital culture. Although his research enriches the understanding of Jackson's work in a digital and Gothic context, it lacks a direct feminist critique of bodily representation.

Most recently, Alit (Alit, 2023) highlights the interactive nature of hypertext literature. This study explores how hypertexts facilitate reader engagement, focusing on the dynamic relationship between author and reader in shaping plot and thematic navigation. While Alit addresses the structural and functional elements of Jackson's work, the feminist implications of its embodied content remain unexamined.

Despite these valuable contributions, existing scholarship does not specifically analyse *My Body - A Wunderkammer* through a feminist lens that interrogates the cultural, social, and political significance of the female body. This research aims to fill this gap by critically examining how Jackson's hypertext fiction explores the complexities of female embodiment, autonomy, and identity in the digital age. Even though *My Body - A Wunderkammer* was published in 1997, its relevance persists due to its pioneering role in hypertext fiction and its unique exploration of the female body in digital narratives. Recent research has largely shifted toward theoretical discussions of cyber literature, leaving Jackson's work underexplored in current academic discourse. Consequently, this study revisits her hypertext to address this gap and recontextualize it in contemporary feminist frameworks.

The broader body of literature on gender dynamics and female representation provides a crucial foundation for examining the portrayal of the female body. For instance, Saguni and Baharman (Saguni & Baharman, 2016) shed light on how beauty myths in Indonesian short stories impose societal standards that become new forms of oppression for women. This theme

resonates with Jackson's critique of societal expectations on female bodies, illustrating how cultural narratives shape and limit women's self-perception and autonomy.

In another study, Redouane, (Redouane, 2019) highlights how Moroccan literature uses narratives of female sexuality and body liberation to challenge cultural prohibitions and empower women. This approach echoes Jackson's use of hypertext fiction to disrupt traditional storytelling and underscore bodily autonomy, providing a critical look at how female bodies are depicted within restrictive social norms.

Čermáková and Mahlberg (Čermáková & Mahlberg, 2021) delve into gendered body language in children's literature, uncovering ongoing imbalances that reflect broader societal attitudes. Their findings highlight the importance of addressing how female bodies are portrayed from a young age, which aligns with Jackson's exploration of societal expectations and bodily autonomy.

Zhang (Zhang, 2022) discusses how cultural norms construct and reinforce traditional views of the female body. This research parallels Jackson's work by emphasizing the need for change in how society understands and represents female bodies, stressing the importance of transformative perspectives.

Lubarman et al. (Lubarman et al., 2023) investigate metaphoric representations of the female body in poetry, showing how language can both reflect and challenge societal views. Their analysis aligns with Jackson's use of literary devices to critique and redefine traditional perceptions of the female body.

Lastly, Suhartatik et al. (Suhartatik et al., 2024) use critical discourse analysis to examine the portrayal of women in body lotion advertisements, revealing how marketing and the cosmetics industry perpetuate stereotypes. This complements Jackson's critique of consumerism and the commodification of the female body, offering a comprehensive view of the cultural and political implications of female body representation.

Together, these studies underscore the importance of analysing literary and media portrayals to challenge societal norms about gender and the female body. They provide a rich context for exploring Jackson's innovative approach in *My Body: A Wunderkammer*, highlighting the critical role of feminist literature in redefining female embodiment.

### 3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design to offer an in-depth analysis of Shelley Jackson's hypertext fiction *My Body - A Wunderkammer*. The research begins with a feminist literary analysis to explore how hypertext fiction portrays, understands, and interprets the female body. This includes thoroughly examining feminist themes such as representation, patriarchy, power, and gender identity. Next, the study delves into Shelley Jackson's use of hypertext fiction techniques—like hyperlinks, non-linear structures, and interactivity—to portray the female body. The aim is to shed light on how Jackson utilises these elements to challenge societal norms surrounding the female body. Finally, the study examines the narrative of *My Body - A Wunderkammer* in terms of gender power dynamics and gender equality, providing a detailed exploration of how the narrative reflects power structures, represents women's bodies as powerful subjects, and relates to broader themes of gender equality in literature and society.

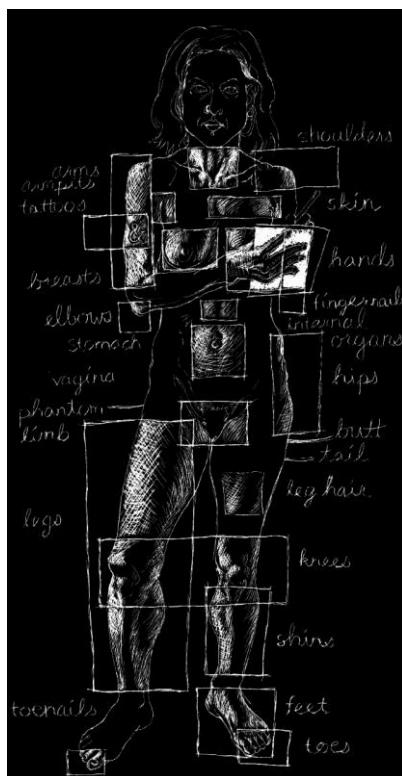
The data collection process involves an extensive review of the hypertext fiction itself, along with relevant secondary sources. Data is systematically organized and categorized based on emerging themes and patterns. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the study closely examines the gender power dynamics and feminist perspectives within the narrative. Interactive analysis techniques are employed to deepen and verify the findings. The results are presented through a structured process of data reduction, simplification, and organization, ensuring a clear and coherent presentation of the insights gained from the study.

### 4. Results and Discussion

This section delves into the intricate analysis of Shelley Jackson's *My Body: A Wunderkammer*, focusing on three primary areas: the representation of the female body, the subversion of conventional narratives through hypertext fiction, and the challenges posed to gender norms within cyber literature. By exploring themes such as bodily autonomy, societal expectations, and innovative digital storytelling techniques, this discussion elucidates how Jackson's work critically engages with and redefines gender power dynamics. Through a comprehensive examination, this section highlights the transformative potential of interactive and immersive narratives in advancing feminist discourse and promoting gender equality in the digital age.

#### 4.1. Representation of the Female Body

In Shelley Jackson's *My Body - A Wunderkammer*, the representation of the female body is intricately woven through a feminist lens, offering a profound critique and reimagining of traditional narratives surrounding bodily experience. This hypertext fiction uses a digital platform to dissect and explore individual body parts like the Hair, Hands, Breasts, Stomach, Butt, Hips, Legs, Skin, and Vagina. Each section is accessible via hyperlinks that guide the reader to narratives dedicated to each part. This fragmented, yet interconnected structure captures the complexity and multiplicity of bodily experiences, emphasizing how the female body defies singular, reductive interpretations. Let's look at how the text is presented by Jackson.



**Figure 1: The Body by Shelley Jackson (Jackson, 1997)**

From the picture above, it shows that Jackson's choice of a hypertext format serves as a metaphor for the fragmented nature of bodily and feminine experience. The work is inherently interactive, requiring readers to navigate through hyperlinks, creating a non-linear journey through the text. By presenting the entirety of the cyber body, the narrative is divided into distinct sections, each of which offers a unique storyline. Readers are afforded the freedom to choose between these sections, enabling them to navigate and engage with the narrative in a non-linear fashion. Each section is imbued with personal, often subversive reflections on embodiment, agency, and identity, encouraging readers to engage with the narrative on their own terms.

For instance, the *Brain* section, which is part of the hidden part of *The Body*, is depicted as a "labyrinthine system" full of dirt and inflammation (Jackson, 1997), illustrating the estrangement individuals—particularly women—can feel from their own bodies. It employs vivid and visceral imagery to explore the complexities of mental and physical anguish, particularly as experienced by women. This fragment serves as a poignant illustration of the oppressive interplay between internal struggles and external societal pressures.

The *Breasts* section reveals an early fascination with Playboy and its "zeppelin breasts" (Jackson, 1997b), highlighting the cultural construction of breasts as objects of sexual desire, shaped by a male-dominated perspective. The narrator's exposure to hypersexualized imagery at a young age illustrates how societal norms and media representations condition individuals, especially girls, to view breasts as symbols of femininity and sexual worth. This narrative exposes the discord between lived experience and cultural ideals, offering a powerful critique of how patriarchal structures shape women's relationships with their own bodies.

In the *Butt* section, the body part is described as "celebrated" and "a gift" (Jackson, 1997), reflecting the external objectification of the body—praised for features that are biologically determined and beyond personal control. This mirrors a central tenet in Naomi Wolf's critique of beauty norms: the tendency to commodify women's bodies, treating them as separate from their agency or achievements.

The *Hands* section portrays the hands as deeply personal yet paradoxically universal. The narrator's childhood calluses, writer's calluses, and broken fingers illustrate how hands bear the marks of lived experience, revealing both their vulnerability and their capacity for adaptation. Hands, described as "naive" and "earnest" (Jackson, 1997), become a locus for recognizing shared humanity, even in those otherwise alienated or vilified. They are also framed as essential tools of artistry, embodying both the narrator's control and the unpredictability of the creative process. The description of drawing hands, with its obsessive detail and discovery of "extraordinary meaningfulness" in accidental lines, mirrors the tension between self-expression and external expectation.

The *Legs* section narrates the figure's childhood, revealing a tension between observation and self-acceptance. The act of drawing—a supposedly objective representation—transforms her legs and body into exaggerated, monstrous shapes. These disproportionate, alien forms suggest the gap between self-perception and idealized norms. The observation, "*Look too closely... and you will see monsters*" (Jackson, 1997), reflects an early awareness of the subjectivity of realism and the emotional distortion of physical truth, intertwining artistic technique with broad existential insights.

The *Hips* section describes the narrator's hips as "narrow and hard like a boy's" (Jackson, 1997), contrasting with cultural ideals that associate "womanly hips" with fertility and sexual desirability. The narrator's inability to locate or define her hips reflects a disconnect from these societal expectations, emphasizing their constructed nature. Jackson's description of hips as a "straight stretch" subverts this narrative, presenting a perspective where the body exists outside the bounds of commodified desirability. The historical idealization of the human form in Greek sculptures, with their marked bulge over the crest of the hip bone, contrasts with the narrator's struggle to locate that muscle on her own body. This interaction highlights how beauty myths perpetuate unattainable standards by glorifying historical or fictionalized versions of femininity, alienating individuals from their bodies. The narrator's reflection on her hips' cellulite as "beautiful, like the brindle in a tabby cat's coat" (Jackson, 1997), resists reductive societal judgments while acknowledging lingering discomfort. In this way, Jackson dissects the intersection of personal, cultural, and historical narratives, challenging the authority of beauty standards.

The *Skin* section describes the narrator's fascination with static electricity, where the hairs on her arm respond to a plastic chair, exemplifying the skin as a surface highly attuned to its environment. The narrator's summer swim team experience transforms her skin into a record of her activities, with tan lines tracing the outline of her swimsuit (Jackson, 1997). This incidental "artwork" inspires deliberate experimentation: the narrator creates a personalized brand using cloth tape, literalizing the notion of self-expression. However, the process underscores the limitations of skin as a medium: the reversed reflection in the mirror turns her "S" into an "&" by tattooing it, introducing unpredictability in how self-expression is realized and perceived. Jackson portrays the skin as a responsive and mutable surface, both personal and impersonal, revealing the dual role of skin as a barrier and a record of interactions. Through tactile sensations and visual imprints, the narrative explores the skin's capacity for control and unpredictability.

The *Hair* section begins with childhood memories of drawing "magical beauties" (Jackson, 1997) with vibrant hair colours, reflecting a fascination with fantastic aesthetics and imaginative self-expression. This early exploration of hair as a site of possibility bridges childhood aspirations with adult identity. The narrator's obsession with vibrant colours and her experiments with bleaching, cutting, and dyeing her hair assert autonomy over her appearance, reshaping it to align with her inner vision. Hair emerges as a metaphor for agency and control, challenging conventional notions of beauty and identity.

The *Stomach* section begins with a description of the narrator's stomach as "white and completely flat" (Jackson, 1997), juxtaposed with her efforts at belly dancing, which requires fluidity and control. The act of rolling and fluttering her stomach reflects a broader theme of reshaping one's physical limitations through intentional action. The stomach's role in play and experimentation during childhood contrasts with the later imposition of control, reflecting the process of maturation. The stomach, traditionally associated with hunger and desire, also symbolizes the challenges of balancing bodily needs with intellectual pursuits. Jackson weaves themes of discipline, creativity, and self-perception through vivid, surreal images, suggesting that the boundaries we set can be as liberating as they are restrictive.

The *Vagina* section starts with childlike bewilderment about anatomy and explores themes of bodily alienation and curiosity about gender difference (Jackson, 1997). Jackson intertwines the metaphorical potential of the vagina with acts of literary and physical consumption, transforming it into a site of creative transformation. The act of "rewriting" aligns with a feminist reimagining of the vagina as a symbol of power and agency. The narrator's vagina becomes a space of creativity, humour, and transformation, acknowledging the inherent mysteries and limitations of the body.

The other hidden sections, such as *Tail*, *Tie-in products*, and *Erogenous, gen*, add layers of complexity and hidden narratives that enrich the overall text. These parts can only be accessed through specific hyperlinks within other body parts, emphasizing the interconnectedness and depth of the narrative. The *Brain* section, with its labyrinthine imagery, delves into mental and physical anguish. The *Tail* section explores themes of bodily difference and self-acceptance. The *Tie-in products* critique consumerism and commodification of the body, while *Erogenous, gen* delves into the nuances of sexual pleasure and identity. These hidden narratives encourage readers to delve deeper, uncovering the multifaceted nature of bodily experience and the intricate web of meanings that Jackson weaves throughout her work.

The *Tail* section starts with the tail as a joyful appendage, integral to the narrator's childhood. However, this acceptance turns into "furious shame" as she becomes aware of its "otherness" (Jackson, 1997). Repressive actions symbolize self-denial and conformity. The tail's eventual resurgence signifies a reclamation of autonomy and individuality, though it brings discomfort as it explores her body at night. The climax with her college friend redefines the tail as an instrument of shared pleasure and self-acceptance, symbolizing sexual awakening and broader acceptance of her unique identity. The tail serves as a complex symbol, representing bodily difference and untamed desire, while also highlighting the narrator's journey toward self-acceptance and the realization that her uniqueness is integral to her identity.

In *Tie-in Products*, Jackson subverts the commodification of art, the body, and the self, presenting a darkly humorous critique of consumerism and the fetishization of bodily materials. Imagining bodily fluids as collectable commodities, Jackson underscores the absurd lengths to which consumer culture will go to assign value to physical remnants of human life. The narrator's sales pitch, emphasizing scarcity and exclusivity, mirrors the art world's practice of assigning value to unique works. This satire highlights the fetishization of intimacy and the "authentic" presence of the artist, provoking discomfort and laughter. The emphasis on "female ejaculate" (Jackson, 1997) introduces a gendered dimension, critiquing the commodification of the female body and its reproductive and sexual capacities.

In *Erogenous, gen* (Jackson, 1997), Jackson explores the interplay between physical pleasure, bodily autonomy, and the potential for the human body and mind to adapt and discover. The narrator's project to derive sexual pleasure from any part of their body challenges the reductionist view of localized sexual gratification. Redirecting pleasure to unconventional zones

asserts the body's latent potential as an uncharted landscape of sensation. The narrator's initial abandonment of the experiment reflects the difficulty of sustaining such a radical project within cultural norms. However, this failure is accompanied by admiration for their younger self's dedication and a renewed desire to revisit the project. This cyclical structure mirrors personal growth and discovery, celebrating the body as a site of endless possibility and challenging reductive views of sexuality and pleasure.

In Jackson's *My Body - A Wunderkammer*, the hypertext format intricately mirrors the fragmented nature of bodily and feminine experiences, offering a profound feminist critique of traditional narratives. The representation of the female body in this work is both complex and multifaceted, challenging singular, reductive interpretations. For instance, the *Breasts* section critiques societal sexualization, while *Hips* juxtaposes beauty standards with personal reality. Sections like *Hair* and *Skin* emphasize personal expression through physical transformation, reflecting themes of self-identity and autonomy. *Stomach* and *Vagina* explore the tensions between physical desire and intellectual pursuits, illustrating the complex interplay of bodily needs and societal expectations. Hidden sections such as *Brain*, *Tail*, *Tie-in Products*, and *Erogenous, gen* add layers of depth, addressing themes of mental anguish, bodily difference, consumerism, and limitless sensual potential. By using hypertext, Jackson decentralizes traditional linear storytelling, embodying the fragmented, often contradictory experiences of living in a female body. This format not only reflects the feminist perspective that values individual agency and the dismantling of rigid categorizations but also positions the female body as a site of exploration, reclamation, and resistance against patriarchal norms.

#### 4.2. Subverting Conventions through Hypertext Fiction

In 1997, Shelley Jackson's *My Body: A Wunderkammer* broke new ground by employing hypertext fiction to challenge and upend conventional narratives and stereotypes about the female body. Utilizing the emerging capabilities of HTML, Jackson crafted a dynamic, interactive narrative that defies traditional linear storytelling, encouraging readers to engage with her work in a wholly unique way.

The hypertext format invites readers to navigate a non-linear path through different body parts—*Hair*, *Hands*, *Breasts*, *Stomach*, *Butt*, *Hips*, *Legs*, *Skin*, and *Vagina*—mirroring the fragmented and multifaceted experiences of living in a female body. Each click allows for a personalized journey through the text, showcasing the interconnectedness and fluidity of bodily experiences. For example, moving from *Hands* to *Skeleton* or *Legs* highlights how each part is interrelated, resisting the patriarchal tendency to compartmentalize and control women's bodies. This structure reflects the feminist ethos of valuing individual agency who discusses the interactive nature of hypertext literature and its potential for engaging reader autonomy (Alit, 2023).

Jackson's use of hypertext decentralizes the narrative, transforming readers from passive consumers into active participants. This interactive element aligns with feminist principles that emphasize individual agency and the breaking down of rigid categories. The HTML-based structure of the hypertext, innovative for its time in 1997, supports a forward-thinking feminist exploration. By breaking away from hierarchical storytelling, Jackson presents the female body as a complex and holistic entity. This approach contrasts with traditional linear narratives that often impose a singular perspective.

The subtle inclusion of multimedia elements, such as images and ambient sounds, adds layers of sensory experience that traditional texts cannot offer. These components enhance the narrative, aligning with the feminist goal of representing the full spectrum of women's bodily experiences. Jackson's multidimensional approach invites readers to engage more deeply, moving beyond reductive and singular portrayals of the female body.

Hidden sections—like *Brain*, *Tail*, *Tie-in products*, and *Erogenous, gen*—accessible through specific hyperlinks, enrich the narrative with additional layers of meaning. These sections delve into themes such as mental anguish, bodily differences, consumerism, and limitless sensual potential. By embedding hidden content, Jackson challenges readers to explore the text more thoroughly, reflecting the fragmented and often contradictory nature of identity and bodily experience.

Regnauld (Regnauld, 2010) describes navigating Jackson's electronic works as a process that leaves *invisible traces* of the reading experience within the computer's memory, even after navigation history is cleared. Hyperlinks in *My Body - A Wunderkammer* creates a unique reading journey for each user, leaving behind a ghostly remainder of paths not taken, underscoring the persistent undecidability inherent in hypertext. This aligns with Regnauld's idea that hyperlinks both bind and separate, creating visible windows while preserving unseen possibilities. Jackson's work mirrors the fragmented, often contradictory experiences of living in a female body, transforming the narrative into an embodied experience. This method not only challenges patriarchal norms but also invites readers to participate in redefining bodily narratives. By creating a personalized exploration through the text, Jackson empowers readers to reclaim their understanding of the female body, reflecting feminist values of individual agency and the dismantling of rigid categorizations. This interactive engagement shows the dynamic relationship between author and reader in shaping plot and thematic navigation, revealing how hypertext provides an open yet controlled space within the author's framework.

Shelley Jackson's *My Body - A Wunderkammer* ingeniously uses hypertext fiction to subvert conventional narratives and stereotypes about the female body. The interactive, non-linear capabilities of HTML allow Jackson to create a dynamic narrative that decentralizes traditional storytelling, encourages active engagement, and reflects the fragmented, multifaceted nature of bodily experience. This approach underscores a feminist perspective that values individual agency and challenges societal norms, positioning the female body as a site of exploration, reclamation, and resistance.



#### 4.3. Challenging Gender Norms in Cyber Literature

Shelley Jackson's *My Body - A Wunderkammer* uses hypertext fiction to explore and reflect on gender power dynamics, making it a significant work in the context of gender equality. The narrative delves into themes of bodily autonomy, societal expectations, and the reclamation of the female body, highlighting the influence of patriarchal structures.

Jackson portrays the female body as both oppressed and liberated. The hypertext format allows readers to explore various body parts, each section critiquing societal norms. For instance, the *Breasts* section examines the sexualization and commodification of female bodies through media and societal expectations. This underscores the struggle for bodily autonomy and the need to reclaim one's body from societal control. The narrative empowers readers by inviting active engagement, reflecting principles of agency and self-determination. This interactive engagement mirrors the process of reclaiming bodily narratives and resisting societal pressures, emphasizing the importance of individual agency in the fight for gender equality.

Jackson's work highlights how individual experiences are shaped by broader societal forces. The *Hips* section, for example, juxtaposes personal insecurities with historical and cultural ideals of femininity. By examining the tension between self-perception and societal standards, Jackson shows how gender power dynamics influence personal identity and body image.

The text resists patriarchal norms by presenting the female body as multifaceted and complex, rejecting reductive stereotypes. The *Vagina* section, for example, intertwines acts of literary and physical consumption to transform the body into a site of creative transformation and resistance. This challenges traditional narratives that seek to control and define women's bodies, promoting a more inclusive and empowering perspective.

In the *Tie-in Products* section, Jackson satirizes the commodification of the body and art by imagining bodily fluids as collectible commodities. This darkly humorous critique highlights the absurd lengths to which consumer culture will go to assign value to physical remnants of human life. By presenting bodily fluids in the language of high-end marketing, Jackson critiques the fetishization of intimacy and the "authentic" presence of the artist, emphasizing the need for a more respectful approach to bodily autonomy.

The *Erogenous, gen* section explores the boundless potential of the human body and mind to adapt, transform, and discover. The narrator's project to derive sexual pleasure from any part of their body challenges reductionist views of sexuality and pleasure. By redirecting pleasure to unconventional zones, Jackson asserts the body's potential as an uncharted landscape of sensation. This aligns with ideals of bodily autonomy and the rejection of socially sanctioned "hot spots," promoting a more inclusive understanding of sexual gratification and bodily experience. This exploration highlights how hypertext as a format can be a powerful tool for feminist critique, enabling a non-linear exploration of the body that defies traditional storytelling.

The hypertext format is a powerful tool for feminist critique, enabling a non-linear exploration of the body that defies traditional storytelling. This approach effectively reflects the fragmented and often contradictory experiences of living in a female body, emphasising the need for diverse and multifaceted approaches to gender equality. Jackson's use of HTML in the 1990s was pioneering, but today's digital technologies and programming languages offer even greater possibilities for cyber literature. Tools like JavaScript, CSS, and frameworks such as React and Angular can create more interactive and immersive narratives. These technologies allow for richer, more dynamic storytelling that can further explore and challenge societal norms.

Modern programming languages enable authors to craft intricate digital narratives that subvert traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Cyber literature provides a unique platform for feminist expression through its interactive and multimedia capabilities. Authors can design narratives that invite readers to engage with themes of bodily autonomy, gender power dynamics, and societal expectations (Faisol et al., 2024). While hypertext is foundational for creating interactive narratives, newer technologies can enhance feminist critiques in digital literature. Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI) can offer novel ways to experience and interact with narratives, making the exploration of gender power dynamics more immersive and impactful (Rosario et al., 2021). Embracing these technologies allows the next generation of digital creators to push the boundaries of what cyber literature can achieve. Encouraging innovation expands storytelling possibilities and ensures diverse voices and perspectives are represented. This is crucial for advancing gender equality and promoting a more inclusive literary landscape.

## 5. Conclusion

This discussion of Shelley Jackson's *My Body - A Wunderkammer* reveals how the narrative actively engages with and challenges gender power dynamics. Through the portrayal of the female body, Jackson uses hypertext fiction to disrupt traditional storytelling, highlighting themes of bodily autonomy, societal expectations, and the complexities of gender identity. This exploration showcases the power of interactive and immersive digital literature as a medium for feminist expression, promoting gender equality by empowering readers to engage critically with these themes.

While Jackson's innovative use of hypertext fiction is commendable, future research could explore how new digital technologies might further enhance feminist digital literature. Additionally, there is a pressing need for more diverse voices and perspectives within cyber literature to ensure a more inclusive approach to gender equality. By embracing these advancements and encouraging creativity, digital literature can continue to push boundaries, offering a dynamic platform for feminist critique and expression.

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