Title of Paper: **Adapting Bram Stoker's Dracula As Hypertext Fiction**  
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Abstract:  

Victorian and electronic literature share in common an expression in a wide range of mediums including literature, poetry, and the arts. Both genres are “notoriously difficult to define” and can be disorienting. Hypertext fiction, a popular form of electronic literature, raises many questions about literature that can be examined more carefully through a reader's discourse with the genre. Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* is a novel that is ideal for adaptation to hypertext fiction. It is non-linear, multi-modal, and expressed via a number of forms of literary technology. This article will discuss how Dracula would thrive as a work of hypertext fiction by close reading chapters four to six of the novel and comparing it with Canadian hypertext author Caitlin Fisher's *These Waves Of Girls*.  

Keywords: Dracula, Reader Agency, Feminism, Hypertext Fiction, Victorian, Electronic Literature, Adaptation, Sexuality, Queer, Bram Stoker  

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Perhaps the literary genre electronic literature, digitally born writing that requires computers, shares the most in common with is the Gothic. Like Electronic literature, it is “notoriously difficult to define” the Gothic (Wozniak 1). While both genres are known best for their textual based output, they also share multidisciplinary expression in the arts, poetry, and other forms. Not unlike the prototypical, expansive, Gothic castle, a reader can become lost, confused, and disoriented in impersonal works of hypertext fiction. But, unlike Victorian novels, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, with their hasty, mandatory, tying of loose ends, or the more open modernist novels of the early twentieth century, hypertext fiction often has multiple endings and circular paths which engage differently depending on the path a reader takes.

Hypertext fiction, a popular form of electronic literature, embraces the margins which experimental authors have explored in fresh and avant-garde forms. There is no fixed center or boundaries in hypertext fiction. Readers are empowered through the choice of clicking various links on a page, organizing their own version of the plot as they continue to click forward or backward. Many works of hypertext fiction not only deny closure, but actively embrace the lack of it in their work.

Hypertext fiction raises many questions about literature that can be examined more carefully through a reader's discourse with the genre. An important distinction between print and electronic literature is that electronic literature, the larger genre that encompasses hypertext fiction, is 'digital born' and “usually meant to be read on a computer.” unlike print literature that has been adapted to the computer such as the Project Gutenberg website (Hayles 3). For this discussion, the most suitable definition comes from Matthew Kirschenbaum, an associate professor at the University of Maryland and associate director of the Maryland Institute For Technology In The Humanities, who defines electronic literature as “poetry, fiction, or other literary work that depends on the distinctive behavioral, visual, or material properties of computers, computer networks, and code for its composition, execution, and reception” (What Is Electronic Literature?).

Theorists like George Landow have argued that electronic literature is a direct response to the strengths and weaknesses of the bounded text (2). Since writing and printing was invented, information technology has concentrated on creating unchanged records of language. The rise of Gutenberg allowed multiple copies, multiple readings, to be done by readers. Leaving information in a fixed, linear, format makes information retrieval more difficult. Print has evolved through mechanisms like pagination, bibliographies, and indexes.

In hypertext fiction, the reader has privileged access to the entirety of a work within a few clicks. The lack of coordinated, real time, knowledge in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* impedes readers and the characters of the novel from creating a more fully realized, layered, narrative world. Depending on how a reader engages with a work of hypertext fiction, each visit births a new version of the text. The disruption to typical reading habits can be extremely jarring at first.

*Dracula* itself is already an unruly, nonlinear, novel whose attributes can only be emphasized by hypertext. Its pages are filled with various forms of contemporary media and technology like journals, telegraphs, newspaper clippings, and letters. There are sudden and drastic time shifts which take readers forwards and backwards.
The Victorian through the story. As the narrative progresses, both readers, and characters, will lack access or otherwise have incomplete information to properly assess their current situation.

The primary work of hypertext fiction I will be focusing on explores both literary and theoretical issues that can also be related to Dracula. Canadian author Caitlin Fisher's These Waves of Girls explores feminist, queer, and theoretical concerns by using a fictional memoir of the protagonist's sexual coming of age for readers to read and click through. The already fluid and disorderly world of Dracula can be further examined by looking at Fisher's memoir of lesbian coming of age and sexual evolution, which is told in multiple time periods using a stream of consciousness approach. These Waves of Girls will serve as a means to examine more closely the ways in which studying hypertext fiction can enrich discussion of the bounded text.

Bram Stoker's recently canonical Victorian novel Dracula, like many other novels of the nineteenth century, is an epistolary novel. It also shares with other Victorian novels an explication through a variety of documents. Stoker's novel is presented to the reader via character diaries, telegrams and letters between various protagonists, and newspaper clippings and other forms of contemporary media like journal entries. Instead of approaching the epistolary novel as his contemporaries often did, Stoker changes the narrative form, creating a more fluid, nonlinear, world.

Dracula offers an interesting narrative premise: there are several first person perspectives and no central narrator. As soon as the reader is comfortable with one perspective, the narrative shifts to another narrator and, often, time or form. This switch can be rather jarring as the novel moves between journals, letters, and telegraphs and moves backwards and forwards through a given set of months. The switching between perspectives also allows for different versions of the same events to rise to the surface of the narrative world. Readers are not stuck with one version of an event because they are seeing in real time what the characters do not. Their lack of access of everyone else’s journals and letters does not allow them to come to conclusions about the horrors which they face until much after the reader most likely has done.

Many of Dracula's protagonists also eagerly embrace technology to record their writing. Dr. Seward uses a phonograph to record his journal entries from the insane asylum. Mina Murray (Harker)'s journal entries and letters to her friend Lucy, and others, are created on a typewriter. So that she can be more “useful” to her fiancé, Jonathan Harker, Mina learns how to use a typewriter and decipher and write shorthand (53). Jonathan writes in shorthand for Mina to translate when she receives his notes and journals. Her own journal is a document of her times with Lucy before their marriage and a chronicle of concerns about her fiancé’s travels.

The shifting forms also change how the novel can be interpreted as readers traverse it. Examining chapters four, five, and six, a bit closer will show how the form of the novel affects how readers interpret it as they try to create a more coherent narrative world in their minds. This will also show readers how Dracula is a precursor to contemporary electronic literature and how it could be adapted to hypertext. In these chapters, readers are given a number of different forms. Chapter four chronicles the finale of Jonathan Harker's journals from his time as a guest of Count Dracula.
Chapter five involves the private letters between Lucy and Mina, where readers discover that something is beginning to change in Lucy. Chapter six returns to the journal form, this time involving Mina instead of her fiancé and Dr. Seward from the insane asylum, who offers similar rationalizations for what he is encountering with Renfield.

Harker's journals of his time in Dracula's castle offer a real time document of his time there. He is recording his experiences without any imagination; his journal allows him to organize his thoughts as he confronts what he is realizing is a prison with no escape. Jonathan's evidence about his situation attempts to counter the strangeness he keeps encountering, as his secular, modern, mind cannot fully fathom Dracula. The castle is a frightening relic of the old world. Jonathan describes it as a "veritable prison" in his journal and, in a rather paranoid tone, comments on the mass of locked and bolted doors which surround him in all parts of the castle (27).

At the beginning of chapter four, after surviving an attack by the Brides Of Dracula, he tries to resolve in his own mind what had happened the night before:

I awoke in my own bed. If it be that I had not dreamt, the Count must have carried me here. I tried to satisfy myself on the subject, but could not arrive at any unquestionable result. To be sure, there were certain small evidences, such as that my clothes were folded and laid by in a manner which was not my habit. (40)

Here, he gives specific details about his situation. If he did not dream, Dracula must have brought him there. He tries to prove this by citing the manner in which his clothes are laid out. Still, he can come to no "unquestionable" conclusion about what had happened the night before (40). A few entries later, Jonathan continues to give little details which contemporary readers, a hundred years past this novel's publication, will pick up on that he is slow to piece together. He describes the Count:

There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half restored. For the white hair and moustache were changed to dark iron-grey. The cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath. The mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran down over the chin and neck. (50)

These crumbs of detail are given to set up later portions of the novel. They also serve to show how the characters look to logic and secular explanations foremost to explain their concerns. Later in the novel, Mina is also guilty when she first sees Dracula's eyes, thinking they are an optical illusion. All of this is delayed until later, but readers should be able to piece together this nightmarish puzzle pretty quickly.

At this early point in the novel, however, readers may be just as puzzled as the protagonists. Chapter four ends with Jonathan determined that he is about to die at the hands of Dracula. Before readers can see this, in a very cinematic twist, the journal cuts off and suspensefully ends. This leads to chapter five, which chronicles a series of letters between Mina and Lucy. This chapter is a rather sharp contrast to the
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one before it. Their letters focus on domestic and feminine concerns such as their impending marriages and Lucy's gradual change from chaste Victorian girl to a much more highly sexualized creature, foreshadowing later events in the novel.

Another change between the forms of journal and letter is the sort of communication which takes place. Jonathan is documenting his experiences for his own need to rationalize what is taking place in the castle. While he may address the journal to Mina, as he does on May 3rd in a memo to his fiancé asking her to research a recipe, or when he is determined that he is about to die at the end of chapter four, a series of letters are real communication between two people. It is a conversation, presumably, between only Mina and Lucy that is not intended for public consumption.

The character's analysis is always a step behind the narrative, struggling to keep up with the real time progression which the story's arc takes. It isn't until Van Helsing appears to offer answers, which readers have likely concluded long beforehand, that the characters catch up with the narrative's progression. Mina seals Jonathan's journals, “an outward and visible sign” of their trust in each other, which perhaps contain many of the answers they seek and does not open them until much later (103). Her faith in her husband deters her from opening the journals and finding out the truth. She puts her knowledge of shorthand, “which would puzzle the count,” to use and deciphers and transcribes his writing, giving the journals to Van Helsing to verify their contents (33). Until their knowledge catches up to the narrative, the protagonists of Dracula will not be able to defeat him. Despite their access to modern technology like phonographs, telegrams, and trains, none of the characters have the foresight to foresee events like Lucy's vampirism before it is much too late. Their lack of superstition and general impulse towards modernity cause them to not see the truth which is right in front of their eyes.

Chapter five chronicles a short series of letters between Mina and Lucy. These letters show the private thoughts of two Victorian young ladies who discuss domestic and feminine concerns with each other. The delays in information reception continue in this chapter as Mina is slow to write to Lucy, who writes another letter back to Mina in the meantime. In fact, in her May 9th letter, Mina apologizes for the delay in her correspondence. In her letter, Mina writes about herself. She comments again about being useful to Jonathan by learning shorthand. At another point in the letter, she declares that her own journal will be a personal journal that is useful as an “exercise” in tempering her writing skills (53). Her letter reads like a journal entry, commenting on her own experiences, actions, and motives. It isn’t until the endnote where she finally asks about how Lucy is doing, hoping for a reply with the details of her current life.

In the meantime, Lucy writes a letter to Mina where she chides her friend for being a slow correspondent. While Mina writes as an “exercise” to better herself for her husband, Lucy uses these private confessional to discuss relationships and her own sexuality in a frank manner. She mentions Dr. Seward from the insane asylum, who she is confident would make a good husband for Mina if Jonathan wasn’t available. Suddenly, she changes direction and brings up, Arthur, her current love interest. She confesses her love to Mina:
There, it is all out, Mina, we have told all our secrets to each other since we were children. We have slept together and eaten together, and laughed and cried together, and now, though I have spoken, I would like to speak more. Oh, Mina, couldn't you guess? I love him. I am blushing as I write, for although I think he loves me, he has not told me so in words. But, oh, Mina, I love him. I love him! (54)

Lucy does not stop there, however. She admits to an interest in “sitting by the fire undressing” with Mina (54). Her words keep coming, she wants to tear up her confession but she also “do(es) want to tell” Mina everything (55). In the postscript to the letter, she makes sure to remind Mina that this is a secret. Again, readers have privileged information which other characters in the novel do not.

As Lucy begins to become more sexualized, Mina’s letter arrives. She writes another letter to her friend, thanking her for finally corresponding. There is still no interaction; even the reader does not see how Mina reacts to Lucy’s increased sexuality at this point in the novel. Lucy is changing, confessing to having received three marriage proposals in the same day, the final of which comes from Arthur, which she accepts. Curiously, she commands Mina to keep the amorous approaches of these men from everyone except for Jonathan:

You will tell him, because I would, if I were in your place, certainly tell Arthur. A woman ought to tell her husband everything. Don't you think so, dear? And I must be fair. Men like women, certainly their wives, to be quite as fair as they are. And women, I am afraid, are not always quite as fair as they should be. (55)

Lucy is practically begging Mina to inform her fiancé about how she is changing. By now, careful readers should be concerned about what is going on here. What is wrong with Lucy? The line women, I am afraid, are not always quite as fair as they should be, reads like a red alarm warning that something is awry. Why is she telling Mina to keep things a secret in one letter, but then pleading almost for her to inform Jonathan in another? Her next confession to Mina, that women should be able to marry as many men as they desire, foreshadows her role as a hypersexualized vampire later in the novel. She stands in sharp contrast to Mina, a more plain and pure young woman whose lack of access to all the information she requires continues to keep her in the dark about what is really happening in the novel.

Chapter six begins with the first excerpts from Mina Murray’s journal. Whereas Jonathan’s journal is more concerned with empirical “facts” and documentation of his time in Dracula’s castle, his fiancée’s journal is significantly different. Mina’s journal shows a young woman who is independent, a hard worker, and eager to learn new things like shorthand and typewriting to aid her future husband. However, she is also chaste and innocent, as seen by her lack of understanding of the real reason for Lucy’s vampirism until it is much too late.

Her journal is as serious as she previously stated it would be in her May 9th letter to Lucy. In the same letter, she decides that the contents won’t be that
interesting to anyone else, “but it is not intended for them.” (53) At the beginning of
the journal there is another time shift, this time to the end of July. Readers will be
wondering what has happened since May 25th and are left in suspense as Mina
casually documents her reunion with Lucy in Whitby. Like her fiancé, Mina is
interested in documenting her experiences. On August 1st, after Lucy charms her
father, she notes her desire to document the “sort of sermon” he goes off about (63).
Again, with both readers and Mina herself left out of the loop as to Jonathan’s fate,
she comments in the same entry that there is still no letter from him.

The narrative then briefly switches to Dr. Seward’s diary from the insane
asylum. In it he chronicles the case of a man named Renfield, who is growing
stranger by the day. Seward’s diary takes place a month before, in June, and
documents experiences in a similar manner to Jonathan’s journals. On July 19th, he
documents Renfield’s sparrows, flies, and spiders that he has been collecting. The
next morning, his journal takes on a similar approach to Jonathan’s as he tries to
rationalize away the disappearance of the birds, noting the remaining feathers and
drops of blood on the man’s pillow.

After Renfield’s journal catches up to Mina’s, the narrative returns to her on
July 26th where she is happy to report a letter from Count Dracula, but deeply
concerned that it is not written in his style. She is beginning to be more troubled and,
conveniently, also mentions that Lucy is now taking up an old habit: sleep walking.
This continues on and off, recorded again on August 6th. Mina is left in suspense,
although getting more curious about the situation, in suspense. The reader, with more
knowledge, continues to be a step ahead of the protagonists. She is behind because
she does not have complete access to all of the empirical data readers have been given
so far in the novel.

Careful readers will have figured out a lot of what is going on in the novel,
especially one hundred years hence, but even the best close reader cannot create a
fully realized, coherent, narrative world to emerge from their reading. The
restrictions of the bounded text limit readers to a self contained reading which cannot
encompass the entire world of the novel. Unless a reader is willing to plot out the
narrative in both chronological order using empirical information, a print copy of
Dracula cannot suffice. As the characters in the novel are held back by their lack of
coordinated real time information, the bounded text version of it also restricts readers.
A more fully realized hypertext adaptation allows a more subtle, layered, narrative
world to emerge. By adapting Stoker’s novel to hypertext, the contents of his Gothic
world can fully thrive and come alive.

The question probably asked most often by readers not familiar with electronic
literature involves the role of linear reading. How can a reader of These Waves of
Girls know when they are “finished” with the work? A version of this question is
also asked to educators in pedagogical situations as well. How does a professor teach
Fisher’s work if they cannot be certain every student read the same material for
homework the previous evening? Wouldn’t there be chaos as students attempt to
engage in discourse about a lexia others may or may not have read?

Beyond the very important pragmatic concerns about pedagogy, it is the
wrong question to really be asking of electronic literature. A more interesting and
expansive question asks readers to think critically about how the fluid, nonlinear,
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reading electronic literature entails, whether a student or citizen has read “everything,” changes how we view texts specifically and more generally. Technology, like hypertext fiction, gives readers agency to further investigate texts and peel away more of their layers.

The nonlinear shifts of voice in *Dracula* are a good reminder of the partiality of representation stories offer, no matter the character or novel. The shifts in form in chapters four, five, and six of *Dracula* affect how readers will create a coherent narrative world in their minds. The illusion of a coherency is, in actuality, only a glimpse at the layers of a narrative world. With this line of thinking in mind, readers should carefully reconsider how they interpret and imagine characters and world in their own minds in a more fluid, reconfigurable, manner. The fragmentation of hypertext, defamiliarizing the linear reading methods we are accustomed to, offers further opportunity for tearing down the curtain standing before coherent, linear, worlds. Private journals and confessional letters give readers the same glimpse inside what is really happening in a narrative. The view is, however, brief and incomplete no matter how tempered a reader's skills. The protagonists of the novel do not have privileged access which contemporary readers have to the private worlds which hold clues to what is happening around them.

In hypertext fiction, all of this privileged information is only a few clicks away. If Dracula were a hypertext novel, readers curious about Jonathan, after reading Mina's letters, could return to his portions of the text with a few clicks of the mouse. After engaging with that section to their own satisfaction, a number of options would arise leading them back to Mina or perhaps another part of the novel. The layers of the text are further peeled away to eradicate the facade of fully realized worlds. A text, any text, can always be explored in further detail. There is always another layer to peel away.

A text like *Dracula* is ripe for exploring these concerns and highly adaptable to a hypertext edition. Adapting Stoker's novel would allow readers to address these concerns with a work they are probably familiar with in some form. To adapt *Dracula* for a hypertext edition, Canadian author Caitlin Fisher's *These Waves Of Girls* would be a good template for how to proceed.¹ *These Waves Of Girls* is a work of lesbian fiction which chronicles the sexual evolution of, Tracey, the narrator. It is written as a memoir, taking place in multiple time periods as her sexual evolution takes place. Unlike *Dracula*, with its precise letters and journal entries, Fisher's hypertext novel is a stream of conscious confessional. Despite these differences, formally there are similarities in how the works of Stoker and Fisher have been created that can be used to emphasize the already fluid, disorderly, nature of *Dracula*.

After a graphical splash screen, *These Waves Of Girls* opens on the screen in a table of contents filled with boxed phrases wove together. The clickable phrases “kissing girls,” “school tales,” “I want her,” “city,” “country,” “she was warned,” “dare,” and “her collections,” open brief excerpts from the opening of that portion of *These Waves Of Girls* when toggled over with the cursor. Under, for example, “I want her” reads:

I'm in bed with Jennie Winchester and I realize she wants me to undo her pants. She needs to be home by 11 O’clock and needs to leave my
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place by 10:45. I'm kissing her but opening my eyes at intervals to catch the clock. At exactly 10:43 I unbutton her Levis and shove my hand inside, barely undoing the zipper. (navigate.html)

*Dracula* could be organized in a similar manner. The table of contents would include the various forms included in the novel: journals, letters, diaries, and other miscellaneous forms that don't fall under those headings. Further, the contents of the novel could be broken down by character. Under, hypothetically, a “journal” heading “I want her,” Jonathan Harker's journal would be linked alongside Mina Murray. Hyper linking between different lexias could be done in a number of interesting ways, but using the organization of these links to engage with the fluidity of Stoker's already nonlinear novel. The way in which a novel can be a partial representation of a larger world, with separate links to different versions or time frames of a specific event, can bring the discontinuity of the novel to the surface for further examination by a reader or classroom. In Mina Murray's journal, the entry for August 6th begins:

> Another three days and no news. This suspense is getting dreadful. If I only knew where to write to or where to go to, I should feel easier; but no one has heard a word of Jonathan since that last letter, I must only pray to God for patience. Lucy is more excitable than ever, but is otherwise well. (71)

This brief portion of a larger lexia is ripe for linking. In a hypertext adaptation of *Dracula*, “heard a word” would link to the letter only three days, but some twenty pages, later from Sister Agatha to Mina updating her on his condition (97). The words “last letter” could link back to Jonathan's previous letter from Transylvania. Steering the reader in a different direction, “Lucy is more excitable” could direct readers a little further in Mina's journal to her entry from August 11th, where she documents Lucy's night walking and fits (89).

These hypertextual divergences, when highlighted, make the reader's agency more foregrounded in how they approach close reading. Readers choose which information to engage with on their own terms. Their personal vision of what the coherent world of the narrative takes on becomes their own via the choices they make when clicking on links. In a classroom setting, multiple close readings coming from multiple paths can easily coexist because no reading exists without the potential for the others to exist. The coherent narrative world of a novel like *Dracula* is already fluid and, unless the reader is willing to flip back and forth or somehow document the time changes on their own, more readable when the reader is permitted to make their own choices and forge their own path through the text.

In a bounded text like *Dracula*, ultimately, despite the interesting choice of structure and form which Stoker uses, the novel form, for the narrative, is very disappointing because the ordering and form does not assist readers in envisioning it fully. If anything, it deters readers because of being chained to the bounded text. However, considering the agency given to readers of hypertext fiction, a coherent world forms as readers click and choose which lexia to proceed to next in their mind's
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eye. In These Waves Of Girls, after clicking on a link in the table of contents, the
reader is brought to a multiframe page with text, links, and a sidebar of links to other
parts of the work. Readers clicking on “I want her” are given the previously cited
paragraph plus one more, with hyperlinks sending them in other directions entirely.
On the sidebar, a number of links are included: “Butterfly,” “tell,” “watching,”
“camp,” “Barbie,” and Vanessa,” which direct the reader to lexias with similar topical
writing about the narrator's attraction to a number of different females during her
sexual development (want.htm). Clicking on “Barbie” leads to another lexia which
reads, in part:

My Barbies were hedonists. Possessors of vast wardrobes, they
preferred to live naked. Together. In a big Barbie townhouse, along
with the naked Planet of the Apes dolls. The Barbies were non-
monogamous…and supple. (barbie.htm)

Clicking on the hyperlinked “Barbie was a bad girl, but she wasn't punished unless
she wanted to be” further down the screen leads back to “school,” which includes
some of the links from the table of contents, and a number of links built into the
sidebar within that frame, including some of those from the previous sidebar
(school.htm). By linking within a frame to another sidebar filled with links from
another frame, Fisher is giving her readers the agency needed to engage with These
Waves Of Girls in order to form a coherent world in their minds in a much more
sophisticated manner than works like The Unknown or Patchwork Girl.

Dracula could be adapted in a similar manner. The previously mentioned
“Lucy is more excitable,” linking to Mina's journal entry from August 11th, could
have a sidebar frame of links to further examples of Lucy's ever growing stranger
behavior. A few examples of this could be Lucy's letter to Mina from May 24th,
where she discusses the three proposals, and Lucy's journal from September 29th,
where she mentions the flowers in her room and references a similar scene involving
Ophelia from Hamlet. That lexia could then link to a new sidebar within the frame
that would bring the reader back to the larger text, and perhaps a link to criticism
connecting the novel to the play, and onto other matters in the novel.

This is the kind of close reading which can be done with electronic literature.
Readers are given more agency to interact with a narrative world which is never the
same for any two readers. The idea that the words in a bounded novel form some sort
of coherent world is a hindering facade that disallows the evolution of reader
responses to literature. The deterrence a reader familiar with electronic literature may
feel from the structure of Dracula goes away when the novel is envisioned as a work
of hypertext fiction. The bounded text version becomes hostile to close reading of the
text, something not to be trusted as it is, but this can be torn apart and reconstructed in
a manner that makes Stoker's novel come alive and truly thrive.
Works Cited


