

Poetry Games as Tools for Inclusive Writing Classrooms

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INTRODUCTION

The interest in games creation – and its use as a pedagogical tool – has extended beyond traditional game development or media studies classrooms. Creative writing students, for instance, now gravitate towards careers in videogame narrative design, rather than film or other mediums (Dubbelman 2021). Similarly, high school educators have begun to experiment with the use of videogame creation as a teaching tool for literary/English classrooms (Colby 2016; de Paula et al. 2018).

While these developments may be exciting, they also embolden issues of economic, technological and cultural accessibility that teachers and students must grapple with when introducing games to their classroom (Herold 2017). These issues of accessibility are ones all too familiar to many educators. A lack of funding may not equip them with the resources to teach a class on games engines such as Unity (Unity Technologies 2022), Unreal Engine (Epic Games 2022), while students with other language, dialect or cultural backgrounds may often be excluded from many writing and literary classes that privilege a specific approach to the English language (Ruston & Dutton 2020).

To approach these issues, this paper explores the potential of the “poetry game” as a tool within the classroom. Poetry and games have many different entanglements (Stone 2021), which can be leveraged in the classroom for introducing non-programming students to game development, as well as a tool to allow students to take ownership of and adapt literary works.

Part of a larger project, this paper does not seek to solve all these problems, but is instead presented as a careful, introductory step towards them. The paper interrogates poetry/game entanglements through the discourse around these two media forms. This paper advocates for the potential of the “poetry game” – that is, games constructed to tell, re-tell or generate poetry – as a potential tool for both teaching games and eroding linguistic barriers within literary classrooms. This approach aligns the poetry game with existing literary traditions such as concrete poetry (Beloufa 2021) and Kathy Acker’s approach to the cut-up method (1998). Although the lower barriers of entry to poetry game construction is something this paper champions, it also acknowledges the exclusionary history of Interactive Fiction (Porpentine 2012) as something that must be navigated by educators wishing to introduce poetry games to their classrooms.

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The paper makes no lofty claims that the poetry game will solve the complex problems of inclusivity within any educational paradigm. Nor does it suggest that the medium is only useful for writing or literary classrooms. Indeed, the poetry game may offer many of the same benefits to videogame educators themselves. This paper acts as an entry point towards further investigations, experiments and applications of the poetry game in the classroom.

Please note: This paper is part of a larger project, part of which is set for publication in an edited collection on creative writing pedagogy practices in 2023. As the project is still in its early stages, there are many entanglements between this chapter and this paper. However, this paper is distinct from that chapter in that it focuses on aligning poetic methods with videogame creation, as opposed to the chapter's focus on an ethnographic approach and classroom exercises. The cut-up method discussed in this paper is not present in the chapter. While both the chapter and paper include a similar literary review, the chapter is geared towards a creative writing audience, while this paper is instead written with the game studies community in mind.

BIO

Cameron Edmond is a lecturer in game development at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, with a focus on Teaching Leadership. As a researcher, he is interested in the intersections between creative writing and programming, and the consequences for teaching both. He has explored this intersection by studying videogame narrative design, AI written literature, as well as data storytelling. He maintains a creative practice as a game developer and experimental poet under the name Uncanny Machines.

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