

Ergodic Literature and Postmodernist Revisionism in Margaret Atwood's Metafictional Short Story Happy Endings

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Abstract

Written in 1983, Margret Atwood's *Happy Endings* has received scant critical attention, compared to the other literary works in her oeuvre. Drawing upon theory of ergodic literature, formulated by Espen J. Aarseth in his *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, the current study is intended to analyze the hypertextual facets of the aforementioned short story, averring that *Happy Endings* is endowed with a multiplicity of parallel alternative scenarios selected by the reader, hence the significant and active role of the reader in determining the outcome of the story. Given that 'the discursive elements' are predetermined by the author rather than being produced by the reader, Atwood's story functions as a hypertext not a cybertext. The second person point of view is meant to represent the active function of the reader as the co-author of the text. Lying at the heart of the short story is the postmodernist revisionist technique, whereby the conventions of the fairy tale genre have been self-consciously and parodically subverted, given that *Happy Endings* displays that the characters will have to face the death, regardless of which scenario the reader chooses, while the genre of fairy tale values the idealistic idea of 'living happily ever after'.

Keywords: Ergodic Literature, Postmodernist Revisionism, Hypertext, Metafictionality, Margaret Atwood, *Happy Endings*